

CHAPTER 2: CHURCH SITUATION, JANUARY 1996

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The role that the Afrikaans Churches play in reconciliation in South Africa cannot be viewed in a vacuum. South Africa is a nation consisting of many different faith communities of which the Christian churches and especially the Afrikaans churches form a very important part.

The year 1996 marked an important year in the history of the “new” South Africa. Not only was it the second year of democracy in the country but it was also the year in which the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) would officially begin with its work. The question that needs to be answered in this chapter is: What was the situation in the Afrikaans Churches under discussion, with respect to their policies on Apartheid and reconciliation at the start of the work of the TRC?

Different Christian churches are letting their witness be felt in South Africa. There are actually five “streams” of Christianity, namely, The Orthodox, The Roman Catholic, the mainline churches, the Pentecostal/ Charismatic and the African Independent Churches. It lies outside the scope of this study to pay attention to these churches or other faith communities and even the role played by them. However, because of the ecumenical links that exist between the Christian churches, it is important to look briefly at the influence of one such ecumenical body in South Africa to which many of the English churches belong, namely the South African Council of Churches (SACC).

2.1.1 The South African Council of Churches (SACC)

As more and more churches were founded in South Africa there arose an increasing urge for ecumenical relationships between them. Any bilateral negotiations have been recorded through the church history in South Africa. The first attempt made to gather all the Christians in the country to join hands took place in 1860 in Worcester when the DRC took the initiative to organise an inter-church conference of approximately 400 delegates from seven church families and denominations. The result of this conference

was that many more mission and general conferences were held throughout the country. (Crafford, & Gous, 1993: 205).

In his book, *The Church Struggle in South Africa (1979)*, John W. de Gruchy discussed the tension that was evident on the church scene in South Africa during the years of Apartheid at length. It suffices for our study in this section to pay attention to the preparation of the way and the details of institution of the SACC.

In 1936 the Christian Council of South Africa was formed with membership from churches and mission organisations. Members of the DRC played leading roles in its development, but because of the nationalist aspirations of the Afrikaner and the racial issue, the DRC eventually withdrew from any participation in the Christian Council. One of the important factors that led to this withdrawal was that the DRC was as yet not a united church. That would only happen in 1962 when all the different DRC synods united to form the General Synod.

Since 1942 the Christian Council of South Africa organised several conferences in the country to discuss the task of the churches. Initially there was optimism, but by 1948 it was an acknowledged fact that Apartheid was the policy of the new Nationalist Government. Individual denominations started to criticise the new government policy. As time went on the Christian Council of South Africa became an ineffective body. It was no longer prepared for the work that needed to be done and it was virtually unknown to the public. As the Christian Council was not able to execute any more obligations, the newly found Christian Institute (CI) took on itself many of these responsibilities during the early 1960's. The founding of the CI in 1963 by Rev. Beyers Naudé was one of the results of the Cottesloe Consultation of 1960. (De Gruchy, 1979: 28, 39, 55, 115, 116)

One of the recommendations of Cottesloe was the founding of a South African Council of Churches (SACC) which could be affiliated to the World Council of Churches (WCC). At this stage the Christian Council of South Africa's head office was in Cape Town. It moved to Johannesburg under the leadership of Bishop Bill Burnett and in 1968 it

changed its name to the South African Council of Churches (SACC). By 1975 there were already 29 denominations and organisations registered as members, representing about 15 million Christians in South Africa. In spite of repeated invitations, the Afrikaans Churches refused to become members of the SACC (Lückhoff, 1978: 168).

In the SACC constitution its goal is stated as “to co-ordinate the work and witness of Churches and Missionary Societies and other Christian Organisations in South Africa in order to more effectively carry out the Church’s mission in the world” (Quoted by de Gruchy, 1979:117). During the 1970’s the SACC became renowned due to the racial policies of the state and because of programs like the Program to Combat Racism (PCR), but the general public did not actually know much about the other work the SACC were doing. For example, the Division of Inter Church Aid had been deeply involved in developmental- and community projects throughout the country. Amongst other projects undertaken was the study of the problem of migratory labour, scholarship programs for black students and caring for dependants of political prisoners. But one of its most important ecumenical tasks was “to study programs, communications and assistance in the total search for union of the churches in life and witness” (De Gruchy, 1979:117).

During their meeting in 1968 the SACC published one of its most influential statements namely *The Message to the People of South Africa*. This ushered in a new phase in the growing conflict with the state and it attacked the then current political scene at its roots. De Gruchy (1979), Geldenhuys (1982) and De Gruchy and Villa-Vicencio (Eds. 1983) highlighted some of the aspects of *The Message*. It consisted of five paragraphs touching on: What the Christian gospel says; Our Concern; The gospel’s claim; our task; we must obey God rather than men (De Gruchy & Villa-Vicencio (Eds.) 1983: 154-159). One of the statements on what the gospel says made it clear that:

The gospel of Jesus Christ declares that, by this work of Christ, men are being reconciled to God and to each other, and that the excluding barriers of ancestry, race, nationality, language and culture have no rightful place in the inclusive brotherhood of Christian disciples...

There are alarming signs that this doctrine of separation has become, for many, a false faith, a novel gospel which offers happiness and peace for the

community and for the individual. It holds out to men a security built not on Christ but on the theory of separation and the preservation of their racial identity. It presents separate development of our race-groups as a way for the people of South Africa to save themselves. Such a claim inevitably conflicts with the Christian gospel, which offers salvation, both social and individual, through faith in Christ alone... (De Gruchy & Villa-Vicencio (eds.), 1983: 154, 155).

There were more issues addressed in *The Message*, which had some serious consequences. Issues such as: a person's citizenship was dependant on race classification; the system of racial separation hampered the normal experience of Christian brotherhood; A Christian's highest allegiance had to be to God, a threatening situation for many in South African society; etc. It also made dialogue between the English-speaking churches and the Afrikaans Churches extremely difficult, for in effect the statement of the SACC was condemning those who were prepared to justify separate development (Apartheid) on theological grounds (Geldenhuys, O'Brien 1982:107; De Gruchy, 1979: 122).

Regarding its finances, the SACC received most of its support during the late 1970's from outside the country – especially after a Government Commission of investigation, the Schlebusch Commission, into the finances of “affected organisations” investigated the organisation. In 1981 another commission, the Eloff Commission, investigated the financial status of the SACC again because of fraud by its then CEO Mr John Rees.

During the latter years the SACC changed from an institution under white leadership to one that became more representative of the South African society, by having more black leadership. Bishop Desmond Tutu became its first General Secretary in March 1978. He was succeeded in 1985 by the then unbanned Rev. Beyers Naudé and he was succeeded in 1987/8 by Rev. Frank Chikane.

Suffice to mention that after the speech of President F W de Klerk on 2 February 1990, when organisations like ANC, PAC, etc. were unbanned, the political climate in South Africa changed dramatically. Mention is made that the SACC was present at the Rustenburg Consultation in 1990 and it was also actively involved in the Peace Consultation during 1991 in which Rev. Frank Chikane played an important role. (Crafford, & Gous, 1983:213-219) (For more on the SACC see paragraph 2.3.2)

2.2 SITUATION IN THE AFRIKAANS CHURCHES IN THE COUNTRY AND THE ROLE THEY PLAYED IN SOCIETY

The questions to be answered are: What happened in the different Afrikaans Churches during the years prior to the official constitution of the TRC? What was the situation in respect to their policies on Apartheid when the TRC started its work in 1996?

In the rest of this chapter attention will be paid to some of the major events that had an effect on the leadership and members of the different Afrikaans Churches. It was a long road that had to be travelled – to a large extent a bumpy, not so easy road. In retrospect one can see how the road should have been travelled, but, while on the road, the different churches and faith groups travelled according to the light they had at the time.

Sometimes there were clearly marked turnoffs, but because of the momentum and the heavy weight of the vehicle it was not possible to turn, and sometimes the drivers thought it would be best to carry on down the familiar road.

This researcher believes there are no excuses for big mistakes that were made through the government policy of Apartheid. Once on the road, there were prophetic voices which came from the different churches, but these were ignored or silenced

2.2.1 Dutch Reformed Church (Ned Geref Kerk) (DRC)

After the Second World War, race relations in South Africa became the most important problem in the South African society and the Council of Churches (Raad van Kerke) of the DRC would spend most of its time, in the latter 15 years of its existence, on this problem. (The Council of Churches was the precursor of the current General Synod). In South Africa the coming to power of the National Party in 1948 resulted in race relations becoming part and parcel of party politics (Grobler 1983: 290).

Since it is outside the aim of this study to look in detail at the political development of Apartheid during the years around 1948, only a few remarks will be made on developments in the DRC:

- In 1947 a commission of the Council of Churches presented a report to the Council, written by Prof. E P Groenewald, on *Apartheid of Nations and their calling to each other*. In this report attention was paid to race and national Apartheid as well as ‘Guardianship’ (Voogdyskap) in Scripture.
- When this issue was debated at the Transvaal Synod of the DRC, there was a notable dissent regarding the Scriptural basis for the church’s race policy and the issue was referred back for discussion. When the follow up report was given, the synod said it was its conviction that the policy of Apartheid was not only born out of circumstances, but was grounded in Scripture (Grobler 1983:294).
- It is important to realise that some theologians from the DRC kept to their view that there are no Biblical grounds to support Apartheid, but they were willing to accept it as a practical order ruling. The most important figures were Professors Ben Marais and Bennie Keet.
- After 1948, the DRC urged the National Party government to apply the policy of Apartheid and numerous bills were passed in parliament with the consent of the church.

A mere twelve years after the National Party became the government of South Africa, the proverbial power keg exploded. The notorious Passbook Law was the trigger for the explosion. In Sharpeville, a Black Township outside the town of Vereeniging, about 80km south of Johannesburg, demonstrators marched against this law to the police station in the Township. In the upheaval that followed, shots were fired and the airforce sent Harvard bombers to circle the area (maybe to instil fear?). On that day, 21 March 1960, the official statistics said that 69 people died and 187 were wounded. These riots spilled over to other areas and townships in South Africa. As a result not only the political

world, but also the church world, turned their backs on South Africa. Because of this, a time of struggle had begun in the DRC.

The following are just some benchmarks on the road of the DRC for the years after 1960.

2.2.1.1 1960 Cottesloe

As a result of what happened at Sharpeville and the rest of the country, the World Council of Churches (WCC) offered to help arrange a consultation on Christian race relations and social problems in South Africa.

The consultation was held during 7 – 14 December 1960 in a Johannesburg suburb, Cottesloe, because the University of the Witwatersrand's student residence in Cottesloe was the only venue available to stage an interracial conference of its kind in the heyday of apartheid (Gous, 1993:253).

At that stage the WCC wanted to know from its eight member churches in South Africa what they had done to normalise the explosive racial situation in South Africa. Dr F E O'Brien Geldenhuys of the Transvaal DRC was one of the delegates and he remembered the proceedings:

Each of the member churches had to draw up a memorandum about five main themes for discussion by the Consultation: The factual situation in South Africa; The Christian interpretation of the gospel as regards race relationships; The interpretation of the contemporary history from a Christian perspective; The meaning of the current state of emergency in the country; The testimony of the church with respect to justice, mission and co-operation. The memoranda would have been circulated to the others and then it would be discussed by the delegates in small groups. At the end of each day all the delegates came together for a plenary meeting in which the secretary of each group would report about his group's discussion. A drafting committee would then formulate the consensus decisions to be brought before the joint meeting in the end (Geldenhuys, O'Brien 1982: 48, 49).

It was decided that the issues that were accepted with 80% of the vote would be published in the final report. Of the seventeen decisions that were given to the press, four caused problems. These were:

Joint worship:

No one who believes in Jesus Christ may be excluded from any church on the grounds of his colour and race. The spiritual unity amongst all men who are in Christ must find visible expression in acts of common worship and witness, and in fellowship and consultation on matters of common concern.

Mixed marriages:

There are Scriptural grounds for the prohibition of mixed marriages. The well-being of the community and pastoral responsibility require, however, that due consideration should be given to certain factors which may make such marriages inadvisable.

Land ownership:

It is our conviction that the right to own land wherever a person is domiciled, and to partake in the government of his country, is part of the dignity of the adult-man, and for this reason a policy which permanently denies to non-white people the right of collaboration in the government of the country of which they are citizens cannot be justified. (sic)

Coloured representation in Parliament:

- (a) It is our conviction that there can be no objection in principle to the direct representation of coloured people in Parliament.
- (b) We express the hope that consideration will be given to the application of this principle in the foreseeable future (Geldenhuys, O'Brien, 1982:52,53; De Gruchy & Villa-Vicencio 1982:150,151; Lückhoff, 1978:84-88).

In the postscript of his book, *Cottesloe* (1978), Dr AH Lückhoff asked the question, what had happened to the decisions that were taken at Cottesloe? He made the observation that, to a certain extent, the four decisions (cited above) that caused so much trouble, were still actual, although with less emotions. Not much had come from the practical applications of the decisions (Lückhoff, 1978: 170).

The DRC Cape and Transvaal Synods' delegations were at the centre of things, and whereas the NHK rejected the final statement out of hand, the DRC delegates were virtually unanimous in supporting it (De Gruchy 1979: 62-66). The delegates knew, of course, that whatever they had decided still required the ratification of their respective churches. But because they were among the most important leaders of the churches, they had good reason to anticipate that there will be agreement. To the English-speaking churches, there was nothing in the resolutions that were new or unacceptable. The NHK

delegation had rejected the resolutions. And the DRC? What would the Synods do? The response that came was unexpected. As was the source from which it came.

In his 1961 New Year's message to the nation, Prime Minister Dr H F Verwoerd dismissed the decisions as the opinions of individuals. He drove a wedge between the official representatives of the Afrikaans churches and the rest of the church by indicating that the synods still have to ratify the delegates' decisions. The DRC delegates were thus reprimanded by Verwoerd for allowing themselves to be manipulated by the WCC, and told to recant. Most of the DRC delegates did, thus paving the way for the DRC synods of Transvaal and the Cape Province to reject the Cottesloe decisions in 1961 and to resign from the WCC (Lückhoff, 1978:116; Gous 1993:255; Gilliomoe 2003: 528). This placed the DRC irrevocably on its way to isolation. Consultation as a problem-solving method or as a means to effect the change thus fell out of favour – partly as a result of the DRC's reaction to Cottesloe. Confrontation thus replaced consultation as the preferred methodology to bring about change.

But the consultation was memorable in many ways. During the meeting the miracle occurred that the fiery Anglican archbishop and anti-Apartheid campaigner Joost de Blank and the DRC delegates were *reconciled* to one another. Archbishop De Blank had kept the organising of the conference in jeopardy for a while with his threats to pull the Anglican Church out of the meeting. But on the last day of the consultation in front of the whole assembly, De Blank confessed his guilt and asked the DRC for forgiveness for his unfriendly attitude towards them as well as for things that he said. Now that he had the chance to be with them as Christians for a week, he realised that he “didn't do right to condemn them. He does not necessarily agree with their standpoint, but he is sorry that he condemned them in the past” (Ryan, 1990:61; Geldenhuys, 1982:51).

One of the delegates of the DRC at Cottesloe was Dr CF Beyers Naudé, who at that time was the acting moderator of the synod in Transvaal. His vision eventually gave rise to the Christian Institute of Southern Africa, an ecumenical organisation for promoting dialogue between Afrikaans- and English-speaking Christians and for witnessing to justice and *reconciliation* between the races in South Africa. It also led to his being deprived of his

ministerial status by his church, and eventually to his banning by the state (Heaney, 2004:60f). During his banning-period of seven years, Rev. Beyers Naudé had enough time to read, reflect, counsel others, etc. He made this observation with respect to the Afrikaner people:

I reflected more deeply than ever before on the rise and the crisis of the Afrikaner people: On their sense of joy and satisfaction at having attained their political ideals, but also on the tragedy *that they were now inflicting – in many ways the same injustices on the black community as the British had inflicted on them.* Time and again I asked myself: When will the moment arrive when our people will discover that God’s justice would not allow injustice to sustain a system of oppression such as the Afrikaner had instituted and was now desperately trying to uphold? (Ryan, 1990: 202). (Researcher’s Italics)

This reflection of Naudé complements what Mandela said in his inauguration message.

Kinghorn also draws attention to some of the other statements from the “Consultation Statement”

- Our discussions have revealed that there is no sufficient consultation and communication between the various racial groups, which make up our population.
- There are no Scriptural grounds for the prohibition of mixed marriages.
- We call attention once again to the disintegrating effects of migrant labour on African life.
- It is now widely recognised that the wages received by the vast majority of the non-white people oblige them to exist well below the generally accepted minimum standard for healthy living.
- It is our conviction that the right to own land wherever a person is domiciled, and to participate in the government of his country, is part of the dignity of the adult man. (sic)
- It is our conviction that there can be no objection in principle to the direct representation of Coloured people in Parliament (Kinghorn, 1986:119).

He made the comment that in spite of statements like these, it is not possible to interpret the decisions as an effort to bring about integration. At the basis lies “natural” segregation, but that was not the policy of the day.

The next thirty years of South African church history was a period of confrontation, isolation and struggle. The backlash of Cottesloe represented an ecumenical break for the

churches in South Africa. To a large extent the path of isolation for the DRC started at Cottesloe (Heaney, 2004: par. 3.1.2).

2.2.1.2 1968 A Plea for Understanding

In June 1967, a letter and statement of the Reformed Church in America, was received in which the church expressed its dismay over three policies of the Republic of South Africa. These policies, which were inter-related, were:

1. The official policy of Apartheid
2. The policy of Exploitation
3. The policy of Oppression

The General Synod of the Reformed Church in America asked for a response on these matters and went on to say:

Perhaps you desire to share information, which may not be known to us and to make known your concerns and convictions in the relationships of race and in the witness of the Church of Jesus Christ in the state and the world.

In the accompanying statement, which was adopted by the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, it was said that they had good relations with the Reformed Churches in South Africa because of its concern for all people. Therefore the Reformed Church in America

...continues to appeal to the consciences of the Christians in South Africa, calling upon them to reverse the patterns of racism and injustice. And because the time is short, we need to call upon the United Nations to take steps necessary to ensure justice for the oppressed and to aid victims of oppression. We need also to appeal to American businesses and industries to stop investing in South Africa ...for business and profits, as usual, mean a subsidising of injustice...

The letter went on to make some recommendations in regard to the situation in South Africa

- (a) That the Reformed Church in America registers its disapproval through the Stated Clerk of General Synod to the reformed Churches of South Africa on the policies within South Africa which deny basic rights and freedoms to the vast majority of people in that country.

- (b) That the members of our churches be urged to write to our government leaders calling for them to work through the United Nations and diplomatic channels to seek remedies for the iniquities in South Africa (Landman, 1968: 11-15).

The task of answering the Reformed Church in America, was given to Rev. W A Landman, Director of the Information Bureau of the Dutch Reformed Church in the Cape. For many years he had studied the situation in South Africa and was said to be the best equipped for this task. His reply was published as a booklet: *A Plea for Understanding: A reply to the Reformed Church in America* (NG Kerk-Uitgewers). In the Foreword, the then Moderator Synodi of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa (Cape), Dr JS Gericke, said:

... we welcome the opportunity of presenting our point of view and attitude. There may be other Churches and Christians elsewhere holding similar views and asking for clarification. This lack of understanding often leads to uncharitable judgements, condemnation and even ostracism.

He went on to say that the publication of the reply will help other Christians to understand the desire of the DRC to come to the knowledge of Jesus Christ as regards the tensions in a multi-racial and multi-national country and continent. As the DRC confesses its allegiance solely to Jesus Christ as Head of the Church he asked for a more sympathetic understanding of the situation in South Africa (Landman, 1968: Foreword).

In his answer to the Reformed Church in America, Dr Landman stated that his aim is to supply the Church with study material about the situation in South Africa. This material was inserted as an Annexure at the end of the booklet. He then went on to testify that he is the last one to claim that the policies and the general situation in South Africa are perfect. He is conscious of the existence of vital problems in the sphere of race and human relations, of the need to find the means suited to practical circumstances regarding human rights, etc. He said that we need criticism and even stricture from brothers in Christ, when such is necessary and justified. But before all this can happen, it is important to understand the situation in South Africa (Landman 1968:21, 22).

He also pointed out the fact that commentators from outside, who have obtained a proper perspective, especially upon visiting South Africa and upon considering the question of

alternatives, have in increasing measure tended to comment favourably, with or without criticism on particular points of detail (Landman 1968:30).

The letter concluded with a few intriguing questions to the Reformed Churches of America regarding their role in the field of human rights in America and elsewhere as a basis for future correspondence. Later the Broad Moderation of the DRC invited Reformed Churches of America to send a delegation to South Africa to assess the situation, but in 1982 they decided to suspend further dialogue with the DRC until it renounced Apartheid (Crafford & Gous, 1993: 357).

2.2.1.3 1974 *Human Relations in view of Scriptures*

At the General Synod of the DRC in 1974, the official policy of the DRC on race relations was approved. It became known as *Human Relations and the South African scene in the light of the Scripture {HRS}*. (This is the English translation of: *Ras, Volk en Nasie en Volkere Verhoudinge in die lig van die Skrif {RVN}*)

This document was to a certain extent the outflow and seal of the earlier work of the so-called Landman Commission, who worked on the report for a number of years and of which the booklet discussed above, *A Plea for Understanding*, was actually the forerunner.

In the introduction to the booklet, HRS, some explanation was given about the policy document:

“The report represented here is the result of careful consideration and reflection. It represents convictions existing in the DRC with regard to the problem of relationships in a multinational country, as seen from the point of view of the eternal and immutable norms of the Word of God. It is the result of the collaboration between professors of theology, teaching staff at our theological institutions and leading figures in the ministry and mission fields.

It was submitted to the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church during its session in Cape Town, from 16 to 25 October 1974. The Synod dealt with certain propositions and arrived at certain conclusions for those propositions.

The report is presented here in its final processed form in the hope that it may contribute to a better understanding of the DRC and serve as a

profitable basis for discussion in the Church as well as for discussion with other Churches and Christians within and beyond the borders of our country” (RVN 1975: 3, 4; Serfontein, 1982:225).

In his treatise on *The Church struggle in South Africa (1979,1986)*, John W de Gruchy made the observation that Christians of all traditions would agree with much of what is stated in HRS. The report discusses the role of the church and state in society, the questions of social justice, human rights and social change and it deals with many specifics such as migrant labour and racially mixed marriages. In the assessment of the report, *the one thing that actually stood out was the distinction that was made between the fact that the DRC rejects racial injustice and discrimination in principle, but accepts the policy of separate development.* For the outsider this appeared to be a major contradiction because Apartheid and separate development are usually regarded as synonymous. Failure to understand this distinction drawn by the DRC, has led to considerable confusion in assessing the position of the church. In the last paragraph, no 66, of HRS, the position of the church is stated:

The Dutch Reformed Church is only too well aware of the serious problem in respect to inter-people, inter-racial and inter-human relationships in South Africa. It seeks to achieve the same ideals of social justice, human rights and self determination of peoples and individuals, based on God’s Word, as do other Christian Churches. It is also convinced that it is imperative for the church to fulfil its prophetic calling, to be sympathetic, to give guidance according to Scripture and to intercede on behalf of man. If the DRC does differ from other churches, the difference is not due to a different view of moral concepts and values or of Christian ethics, but to a different view of the situation in South Africa and the teachings of God’s Word in this regard. There is no difference in ideals and objectives, but merely disagreement on the best methods of achieving these ideals. (RVN 1975: 102; de Gruchy 1986:73)

There were also other observations made about HRS. Serfontein pointed out some of these:

Although the report does not directly say that Apartheid is the only Christian solution in SA, it is presented in such a way as to create that impression. It discusses only a policy of ‘autogenous separate development’. No other system is discussed, analysed, debated or investigated...

Throughout, the phrases used are similar to those found in political terminology explaining Apartheid or separate development: ‘peoples, group, population relationships’ etc...

The specific political situation is dealt with. It is based entirely on the present Apartheid system, taking the Apartheid structure as given... Totally accepting the structure and political terminology it discusses in succession 'Bantu homelands' (par 52 ff.), 'development of Bantu homelands', 'Bantu in white areas' (a highly controversial statement), and 'migrant labour'. *For the Africans the DRC fully accepts the government structure of a non-African political bloc.*

The statement on the coloured people (par 56) is significant. It is said that the cursory nature of this section of the report was due to the fact that a government commission, the Theron-Commission, was still investigating the position of the coloured people. Therefore 'it would be advisable for the church to await the publication of this report'. *Clearly the DRC wanted to see what line the government would follow, in case it caused embarrassment by issuing a conflicting report.*

Thus with the acceptance of *Human Relations in view of Scripture*, the official policy of the DRC in practice means:

- a. *Full support for the government policy of political Apartheid.*
- b. *Racially separated churches, with no black able to become a member of the white DRC.*
- c. Mixed services are only allowed 'on occasion', they are the exception and not the rule and a formal decision of approval by the church council is necessary (Serfontein, 1982:67-69).

(Researcher's Italics)

By the acceptance of this report the DRC made two things clear, namely, that its own policy was dependent on the policy of the government and secondly that it let a great opportunity slip through the fingers to break loose from the stranglehold that Apartheid had on the church and to let its prophetic voice be heard.

In 1975, Dr FE O'Brien Geldenhuys, Chief Executive Officer and Director of Ecumenical Relations in the DRC, went to Europe to hand over the report HRS to the protestant churches in England, Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland with the appeal that the churches must make a study of the report, because it was the view of the DRC as regards the situation in South Africa. (Ned Geref Kerk 1997: 25)

History tells us what happened during the following years regarding the relationships between the DRC and the other Reformed Churches in the world. It deteriorated to such an extent that the DRC was actually placed in a separate corner on the ecumenical floor.

In 1982, the Broad Moderature of the DRC recommended that HRS must be revised fundamentally. This recommendation was accepted and this has led to the acceptance of *Church and Society* by the General Synod of 1986 as the official policy of the DRC. (Ned Geref Kerk 1997:26)

2.2.1.4 1980 Reformation Day Witness

On October 31, 1980, the so-called “Reformation Day Statement” was published. It was issued by eight theologians from the Theological Seminaries of the Universities of Pretoria and Stellenbosch namely CFA Borchardt, JH Combrink, AB du Toit, WP Esterhuysen, JA Heysns, WD Jonker, BA Müller and HW Rossouw.

This witness states that group differences need not lead to friction and they plead for the church to carry out the commands of Christ as found in Scripture so that “through the power of God’s renewing grace” Christians may “uphold each other in the one body of Christ”. The following are some of the points they mentioned in their Witness:

1. Together with genuine gratitude for what has been done and achieved in the church sphere, we wish to express our deep concern about the apparent *powerlessness of the institutionalised church in South Africa*
 - a. to carry out its divine calling of *reconciliation* on a meaningful and credible basis in a situation of increasing tension and polarisation between the various population groups in our country;
 - b. to give spiritual leadership to the authorities and community by means of a clear and consistent witness to the promises and demands of God’s kingdom as far as social reality is concerned;
 - c. to resist mutual estrangement and exclusivity amongst Christians and so *to work against the divisions of the church which shame the communion of saints*.

2. In all humility, we plead as members of the NGK with all our fellow Christians and office bearers charged with oversight of church policy and action, to reason together and to strive for:
 - a. the elimination of loveless and racist attitudes and actions which cause hurtful incidents and not the message of God’s reconciling grace of its power;
 - b. to demonstrate the solidarity of Christian love with all those who are placed in positions of helpless suffering and need, by social practice, economic oppression and political policy;
 - c. a *form of church unity* in which the oneness of believers adhering to the same confession can take visible form.

3. We are convinced that the DRC can, together with other churches, through these channels, make a God-honouring contribution towards:
 - a. the advance of mutual trust and acceptance amongst the different population groups of our country, the indispensable foundation of a peaceful community;
 - b. a deeper consciousness of the demands of God's word under which both the authorities and their subjects are called to reform the present order, so that every individual can be given the scope to realise their potential as the bearer of the image of God;
 - c. a concrete witness that existing group differences between people need not be a source of friction because of prejudice, self-interest and defensiveness, but can, through the power of God's renewing grace, be *developed into something that provides for mutual enrichment and the upholding of each other in the one body of Christ* (Hofmeyr, 1991: 303; Serfontein, 1982: 270).
(Researcher's Italics)

The "Witness" caused a storm in the DRC, which lasted for a couple of months. The Afrikaans newspapers and the official paper of the DRC, Die Kerkbode, were flooded with letters, statements, counter-statements and explanations. It was said that the "Witness", for the first time since Cottesloe, brought the DRC to a place where it had to have a serious look at the whole issue of race relationships in South Africa and the concept of reconciliation in the midst of the contemplation of the church. To a certain extent that discussion is still going on today.

For theologians and members of the daughter churches of the DRC family, the "Witness" was not a big, "ground moving" issue. The whole idea of "too little, too late" came through in the remarks from that corner.

In the DRC there was very strong reaction from the more conservative faction. It culminated in a big meeting in March 1981 in the Transvaal, where approximately 600 ministers of the DRC came together at a meeting and the swords really came out. For the first time (?) since Cottesloe, there was an open struggle between the "pros" and the "cons". One of the fiercest pieces of critiques came from one of the office bearers of the Broad Moderation of the DRC. Dr Dirk Fourie said: "The eight theologians had no Biblical grounds for their statement. The church had *no duty of reconciliation towards other race groups...*" Prof. Hennie Rossouw, one of the eight, challenged Dr Fourie in a

letter in *Beeld* on April 4, 1981. He could not believe that Dr Fourie had actually said what was reported. As a leader he projected a certain image of the church, and he should thus correct the report. Three days later, Dr Fourie reacted to this by giving an evasive reply; neither denying nor confirming what he had actually said (Serfontein, 1982: 156). This meeting of clergy of the DRC to discuss such an issue was the precursor of other such meetings that followed, in order to calm the emotions of the more conservative group of members, and clergy, in the church.

According to Willie Jonker there was not such a degree of tension in the Cape. A meeting was held under the auspices of the Presbytery of Stellenbosch, but it was held in very good spirits. He went on to say that the whole issue was “at least a sign that the reflection on the views of the church within itself was of utmost importance” (Jonker, Willie 1997:158,159).

This, not so loud, prophetic voice in the midst of the dark clouds of church ignorance was a clear sign that a Kairos moment had arrived, both for the DRC and the inhabitants of South Africa. As has been said earlier, the golden opportunities to break loose from the stranglehold of Apartheid were either ignored or the ‘prophets’ were suspected of being against the government or being quasi-communists. Most of the time it came from ranks of the churches itself. There is one thing that happened so often during the history of the Afrikaner: if somebody did not agree with the majority’s view, a cloud of suspicion was cast on that person’s bona fides.

2.2.1.5 1981 *Stormkompas*

This book was published by the end of 1981 under the editorship of Prof. Nico Smith, Dr F E O’Brien Geldenhuys and Dr Piet Meiring and consists of twenty-four essays by different theologians, ministers and other members of the church. The contributions held different views about the problems of the moment facing South Africa and the church, especially the DRC. At the end of the book, 44 statements were made reflecting the main points raised by the contributors. And it was these statements which produced another

rocking of the DRC boat. Amongst these statements, the following were those which brought the most controversy:

St 34. The societal system resulting from an enforced political policy of segregation of people means that the human worth of everyone involved is affected. And since one population group – the white people – are advantaged by this system, it does not fulfil the demand of the gospel that justice must be done to all. Hence the church cannot identify itself with such a policy, much less justify, motivate or defend it.

St 35. It is time that the DRC says clearly that the policy of Apartheid in South Africa has many harmful consequences, in spite of the good intentions of the authorities about allowing population groups to develop separately. The church needs to state clearly that the Christian cannot support this policy without question.

St 36. The dealings of the South African government in race relations over the past 33 years must, to a great extent, be attributed to the Afrikaner and his church. The DRC has failed in this respect, to proclaim the full consequences of the Christian message with reference to, amongst other things, the hurtful consequences of the Group Areas Act. It was often other churches in South Africa which gave a lead on this point by raising a prophetic voice on behalf of God's justice.

St 38. *The DRC must prepare its members for the fact that the white man clearly cannot forever exercise control in South Africa.* Thus, it will have to teach them in a Christian way, how they should live and act as Christians in a minority situation. The church will have to make its members realise that even as a minority group, they have an extremely important contribution to make, not only in South Africa, but in Africa as a whole (Ned Gerf Kerk 1997:31). (Researcher's Italics)

By these statements the contributors let a prophetic voice be heard. In retrospect it is obvious that the large majority of DRC members, and also members of other Afrikaans Churches, were not prepared for what was to happen in the years to come.

The DRC leadership reacted strongly. On 24 November 1981, the executive of the Broad Moderature issued a special statement. It was published in *Die Kerkbode* of 2 December 1981: *"The executive urgently call up the members of the Church to remain calm in these difficult times when so many onslaughts are launched against the Dutch Reformed Church."*

In hindsight it is clear that the DRC let another good opportunity slip through its fingers for sitting around a table and thresh out the whole problem of Apartheid and the role of the church.

As was the case in the past, this matter was soon to be overshadowed by a much more controversial issue.

2.2.1.6 1982 *Open letter by 123 theologians and ministers*

On 8 June 1982, a statement in the form of an open letter was made by 123 white ministers and theologians of the DRC family. In this letter they criticised Apartheid legislation, such as that leading to forced removals, while acknowledging that they were part of the white society that accepted the evils of Apartheid. They pledged themselves to work and pray for a just society. In the covering letter, they said that they hope that this open letter will serve the debate within the family of Dutch Reformed Churches. The letter touched on (1) giving a more explicit expression to *reconciliation and the unity of the church* and (2) by exercising its prophetic calling in respect of society.

The contributors expressed their conviction that the greatest need in the Church and also in the country is *the need for true reconciliation in Christ between individuals*. They went on to say that they believe that the Church in South Africa has a very important contribution to make. It is not possible to remain silent about the discriminatory laws and symbols of the Apartheid system.

The following points from the letter should be stressed:

1. As regards *reconciliation* and the *unity* of the church
 - 1.1 We are convinced that the primary task of the church in our country is the ministry of *reconciliation in Christ*.
 - 1.1.1 ...this means that it is the inalienable privilege of the church to proclaim the message of *reconciliation between God and man*. Without this aspect of *reconciliation* the issue at point will lose its deepest meaning and significance.
 - 1.1.2 It is likewise the inalienable privilege of the church to proclaim *simultaneously the message of reconciliation between people – even between those who had formerly been enemies* – and to bear witness that for believers, Christ has put an end to human enmity and has united us by creating “in Himself one new man” (Ephesians 2:15,16)
2. As regards the prophetic calling of the church
 - 2.1 We are convinced that the calling of the church extends beyond the ministry of *reconciliation within the four walls of the church*....

2.1.1 *Reconciliation* includes a prophetic witness in relation to the entire life of society and therefore the church dare not remain silent on those matters of moral decay, family disintegration and discrimination.

2.1.2 The church will always bear witness that an arrangement of society based on the fundamental *irreconcilability* of individuals and groups cannot be accepted as a basic point of departure for the ordering of society.

The then DRC establishment was staggered by the Open Letter; their reaction followed the same pattern as in previous situations. “*According to church policy the letter could not be received...* “

The public’s reaction on the Open Letter was surprising. Nearly every day there were letters in the press. Prominence was given on the radio and TV to the issues mentioned in the Letter. As a result of the reactions caused by the letter, a book, *Perspektief op die Ope Brief*, (Bosch, König, Nicol (eds)) was published in 1982.

The letter was received well abroad, as is reflected by Dr Paul Schrottenboer, General Secretary of Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES), who was regarded by the DRC leadership as “a friend”, when he said that he felt very much encouraged by this event. To him it is indicative of an increasing concern amongst DRC leaders that the whole political and theological position of the DRC must be reviewed. He was convinced that this could contribute to ending the often-lonely ecumenical path of the DRC (Serfontein, 1982:188).

There was a solid wall of opposition from the DRC, an indication of the overwhelming sentiments of the church at that point in time. But in spite of this, there was a movement towards a more open society although it would still take some courage to convince synods of the futility of the church keeping on supporting the political scene of the day.

For those who were lifting their voices against the hierarchy of the church, the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer became true: reconciliation is not cheap – also for those who want change. In 1985 David Bosch would remind the church of the same during the National Initiative for Reconciliation conference in Pietermaritzburg. (See Chapter 5)

2.2.1.6.1 *The suspension of DRC membership of The World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) 1982*

One of the events that led to another blow on the DRC was the suspension of the church by the WARC (World Alliance of Reformed Churches) during their meeting in August 1982 in Ottawa, Canada. The WARC, under the leadership of Dr Allan Boesak, decided to declare Apartheid a heresy and followed it up by suspending the DRC and the NHK as members. This decision received widespread coverage in the media as well as provoking intense debate in church and political circles. (De Gruchy J, Villa-Vicencio C (eds.) 1983: xv)

The statement adopted by the General Council under section II read as follows:

2. The General Council expresses its profound disappointment that, despite earlier appeals by the WARC General Councils, and despite continued dialogue between several Reformed Churches and the white Dutch Reformed Churches over twenty years the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk and the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika have still not found the courage to realise that Apartheid ('separate development') contradicts the very nature of the Church and obscures the gospel from the world; the Council therefore pleads afresh with these Churches to respond to the promises and demands of the gospel....

4. Therefore, the General Council, reluctantly and painfully, is compelled to suspend the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk and the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika from the privileges of the membership in the WARC (i.e. sending delegates to General Councils and holding membership in departmental committees and commissions), until such time as the WARC Executive Committee has determined that these two Churches in their utterances and practice have given evidence of a change of heart. They will be warmly welcomed once more only when the following changes have taken place:
 - (a) Black Christians are no longer excluded from church services, especially Holy Communion;
 - (b) Concrete support in word and deed is given to those who suffer under the system of Apartheid ('separate development');
 - (c) Unequivocal synod resolutions are made which reject Apartheid and commit the Church to dismantling this system in both Church and politics (Hofmeyr, et al 1991: 336,337).

In the twenty years that separate Ottawa from Cottesloe, more and more churches decided to terminate all dialogue with the DRC until it rejected Apartheid. In South Africa itself the same trend could be seen. Therefore it came as no shock when the decision at Ottawa was taken. The conversation developed in such a way over the years that a confrontation, like the one in Ottawa, was unavoidable (De Villiers, 1986: 144). The critique of some of the brown and black delegates from South Africa reached a high pitch when eleven of them boycotted the Holy Communion service because they didn't want to sit at the Lord's Table with white South Africans. (Die Kerkbode, 25 August 1982). There was a fear that this action of Dr A Boesak and other delegates could lead to more stressful relationships between the "mother and daughter" churches. It became clear that the DRC should look seriously at its own position.

During the meeting of the General Synod of the DRC during October 1982, it was decided that the DRC must not resign from the WARC, but rather stay on as a suspended member.

The Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika decided to withdraw from the WARC and thus entered into almost total isolation.

2.2.1.6.2 1982 Status Confessionis of NGSK and Confession of Belhar

Yet another blow hit the DRC before the end of 1982, when the NGSK declared that it could do nothing else but accuse the DRC of heresy and idolatry because of the legitimising of Apartheid on the basis of Scripture. A *Status Confessionis* had arrived. In the book, *'n Oomblik van Waarheid*, Dr DJ Smit, defines a *Status Confessionis* to mean that " *a Christian, a group of Christians, a church or a group of churches, come to the conclusion that a situation has arisen, that a moment of truth has dawned, when nothing else but the gospel itself, the most basic witness to the Christian gospel, comes into play, so that they have the obligation to witness and act against it*" (Cloete & Smit, eds 1984: 22). (Researcher's translation)

A *Status Confessionis* is the acknowledgement that the hour has come that something must be said (Cloete & Smit, eds 1984: 25).

The announcement of a *Status Confessionis* was a “cry out of the heart to call fellow Christians, brothers and sisters in the Lord, back from this deceiving way ...” (p36) i.e. from the road of giving a Scriptural basis for Apartheid. Together with this, a concept confession was drafted and during the General Synod of the NGSK in 1986, it was officially accepted by the DRMC a fourth Confession, the *Confession of Belhar*.

In the cover letter to the Synod, it is stated that:

This confession is not a document for theological discussion or a new summary of all the faith baggage. It is a ‘cry from the heart’ ... We utter this confession against a heretical dogma, against an ideological distortion that threatens the gospel even in our church and country.” In the letter there is also a plea for reconciliation “the reconciliation that follows salvation and the change of attitudes” ... (Die Kerkbode 13 October 1982: 3)

What was the reaction to this whole issue? Dr Willie Jonker wrote:

This brought the DRC to an unavoidable situation... This was a touching confession. It spelt out the *Biblical ethos of love, reconciliation and justice* in flaming letters... It calls for *church unity, reconciliation between believers over all boundaries and the willingness to carry each other’s burdens*. It asks the church to stand where God stands: in the corner of those who experience injustice and those who suffer in any way... I was convinced the DRC was put in a position where it has to take a serious decision. It brought the differences between the churches to the only level where it has to be sorted out: the level of confession... It would bring the DRC to the moment of truth. Not only because of the truth of unity of the church, but also because of the truth of the gospel. *I had no doubt in my mind that the DRC has arrived at one of the most important hours in its history* (Jonker, W 1998:162f). (Researcher’s Italics)

In an article ‘Belhar – krisispunt vir die NG Kerke’ (Belhar – a crisis moment for the DR Churches) in *’n Oomblik van Waarheid*, JJF Durand made the following remarks on the reaction of the DRC on the *Status Confessionis* and the draft Confession known as the *Confession of Belhar*.

The DRC underestimated the seriousness and the emotion from which the critical voices through the years had come... The DRC could not really hear, feel and comprehend what the black churches went through under the system of Apartheid. The first reaction of the DRC as voiced by the General Synod in October 1982, gave the impression that there is no other alternative than a split of ways between the churches (Cloete & Smit (eds.), 1984: 125-127).

Looking back on this whole epoch making situation for the DRC and the DRMC, the question that arises was: Why did the DRC wait so long before they reacted to all the issues raised by the DRMC? On 4 April 1984, the official answer of the Broad Moderature of the DRC was published in the official newspaper of the DRC, Die Kerkbode. Was it such a difficult issue to handle or was Durand right when he remarked:

(It seems) that there is a repetition of the past to really understand the seriousness of the situation. ...A more moderate opinion would be that the DRC was in a theological sense not capable to handle the situation. The sterility of the kind of “Creation Theology” with which the DRC had kept itself active in the midst of all the problems over race relations, made the DRC powerless to react meaningfully... (Cloete & Smit (eds.), 1984: 127).

The DRC let slip through the fingers another opportunity of setting the record straight between the DRC and the DRMC.

2.2.1.7 1986 Church and Society (*Kerk en Samelewing*)

During the meeting of the General Synod of the DRC in October 1982, a decision was made that the official DRC policy booklet, *Human Relations and the South African scene in light of the Scripture (Ras, Volk en Nasie)*, must be thoroughly revised *in the light of Scripture* and that the revision will be discussed at the Meeting of General Synod in 1986. A commission was appointed to start with this momentous work. There were suggestions from different delegates that there must be collaboration with some of the other family members of the DRC in this regard, but these were unacceptable for the majority of delegates. Synod decided to:

...officially declare in *Die Kerkbode* that anybody – which means also members of our own church as well as other churches – will have the opportunity to, within a certain period of time, make contributions to the Broad Moderature for discussion by the appointed study commission... (Thus) it is possible that important contributions from outside will be considered. It is, however, important to note that this study is primarily an initiative of the DRC to test its own standing with relation to Scripture...In front of the church lies a momentous and important piece of work. The whole church will wait with great anticipation for the end result (*Die Kerkbode*, 27 October 1982, Editorial: 6).

The *Church and Society* (CS) document was published as the culmination of a long study on the task of the DRC in South Africa. At the meeting of the General Synod in October 1986, this was laid on the table for discussion and finalising, as the new policy document of the DRC on race relations in South Africa. Socio-political concerns were discussed and the religious scene in South Africa was examined. This was followed by a presentation of basic Scriptural principles regarding the Bible as the “yardstick” of the church and its focus on the Kingdom of God. The nature and calling of the church was discussed in the light of Scripture. The prophetic task of the church in the world was described in detail. The role of the church in group relationships led to an ethical discussion on Christian behaviour. The document ends with a description of the practical implications of what it means to be a member of the DRC in South Africa today (Hofmeyr, et al 1991:378).

As the newly elected Moderator of the General Synod, Prof. Johan Heyns, had on his shoulders the immense task of defending *Church and Society* (CS). During a media conference the same day, Heyns told the press that Synod rejected the Scriptural grounds for Apartheid and that he hoped that it will bring new attitudes in the hearts of people. He went on to say that the question regarding open doors was not a new issue but that it was now *de facto* said by the Synod. (The Star; 23 October 1986:1 as quoted by Williams, 2006)

The usual Pastoral Letter that was sent to all DRC congregations after the Synod meeting was used to put the whole CS in perspective, because of the unrest amongst members. In the Letter, Synod made an appeal to church councils and members to make an intensive study of the policy document and not to react to what they read in the press.

Heyns defended CS because he was so much involved in the birth of it and because, as Moderator, he was also morally obliged to do it. According to him it was “very difficult to realise that his colleagues on the Moderature turned back by saying that nothing has changed. Or put differently: Don’t make such a fuss about it. We will change it at the next synod with your help. Then the church will revoke CS again (Meiring, 1994: 180). The reason for this was that they did not want to defend CS, because they wanted to calm members with grievances (Williams, 2006: 217f).

During the weeks following the publication, there was an upheaval of emotions within the DRC. Voices were heard for and against the way the church is heading now. As in the past, it called again for meetings where members of the Broad Moderature had to explain what was meant by the decisions taken about race relations and the DRC. The secular press received numerous letters, mostly from angered church members. In the official publication of the DRC, *Die Kerkbode*, letters for and against the synod's decisions were published. One such letter, signed by twenty theologians and ministers, voiced the meaning that synod didn't go far enough - the proverbial "too little too late" (*Die Kerkbode*, 5 November 1986: 11).

Red lights started to flash as regards a possible church split, because of the course the DRC was now taking. A meeting, of ± 2500 members of the DRC, took place on 28 November 1986 in Pretoria. It was decided that a committee would go into the "possible founding of a new church." Despite all the efforts from the DRC to prevent this, a new church was founded in 1987, the Afrikaanse Protestantse Kerk (Afrikaans Protestant Church) (APK), a church for white Afrikaners only. In the end the AP Church got ± 30000 members from the DRC and other Afrikaans churches as well as ±100 ministers who resigned from the DRC to join them (*Ned Geref Kerk*, 1997: 44, 45).

2.2.1.8 1989 Vereeniging Consultation

During a meeting in May-June 1988 of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES) in Harare, it was decided that a consultation must be held in the DRC family within South Africa. The Interim committee of the RES would chair the meeting. At the RES meeting, it became clear that there were differences of opinions in the DRC family on Apartheid, sanctions against South Africa and church unity amongst the member churches of the DRC church family. This consultation was held in March 1989 in Vereeniging. Present at this meeting were ten churches, including the four from the DRC family in South Africa, and six from outside the country.

The Vereeniging consultation could not help to bridge the gap between the DRC and the other members of the DRC family on matters such as Apartheid and church unity. At the end of the consultation a draft testimony was drawn up by the delegates.

The day after the draft testimony was read, the delegates from the DRC could not identify with what was being said and issued a short statement, of which the first point reads as follows: “*The delegates of the DRC explicitly reject the system of discriminatory Apartheid. They pledged themselves to entreat the government to dismantle measures and laws which are offensive and destructive to human dignity.*”

This statement brought uneasiness amongst the delegates, especially regarding the words ‘discriminatory Apartheid’ ... (Acta Synodi 1990: 45) The delegates of the DRC could not identify with the testimony, and issued their own testimony.

The consultation said the following on Apartheid:

We say clearly and unequivocally that *we regard Apartheid in all its forms as a sin*, as contrary to and irreconcilable with the gospel of Jesus Christ. We agree that Apartheid in all its forms cannot be reformed, but must be *totally eradicated from the life of the South African nation and church*. In the light of this, we commit ourselves to work together towards the dismantling of Apartheid... (Acta Synodi 1990: 46). (Researcher’s Italics)

As in many times in the past, the DRC delegation again issued their own testimony. Their point on Apartheid, read as follows:

We declare that, since any ideology speaks decisively above and alongside the truth of the Bible, the ideology of Apartheid is a political and social system whereby human dignity is adversely affected, and whereby one particular ethnic group is detrimentally oppressed by another, and cannot be accepted on Christian ethical grounds, because it contravenes the very essence of reconciliation, neighbourly love, and righteousness, the unity of the church and inevitably the human dignity, of all involved and is therefore a sin. Any teaching of the church that would defend this ideology would have to be regarded as heretical, that is, in conflict with the teaching of Scripture (Acta Synodi 1990: 47).

When this statement is analysed in view of the statement of the consultation, it is clear that the delegates of the DRC didn’t see their way open to once and for all get rid of the heavy yoke of Apartheid by calling it what it was – heresy.

2.2.1.9 *The General Synod of 1990*

The General Synod of the DRC had its meeting in Bloemfontein from 16 – 25 October 1990. In the history of the DRC this meeting will be known for its dramatic decisions on Apartheid in South Africa. It was the culmination of a process that started in 1978 with the adoption of the document *Human Relations in light of Scripture (HRS)*. This was revised and in 1986 the document *Church and Society (CS)* was adopted as the official policy of the DRC. The Synod of 1986 opened the way for discussions of *Church and Society* and asked members to send their grievances and objections as well as “better formulations” so that it could be reviewed and presented to Synod in 1990.

In his opening speech, the outgoing Moderator, Prof. Johan Heyns read from John 12:20-26 and said, inter alia:

As General Synod we are meeting at a time when South Africa has come face to face with one of the biggest and most far-reaching changes in its entire history. ...

Without fear of contradiction, we can state that this meeting is taking place during one of the most difficult and challenging times in the history of the Republic of South Africa. ...

In a broader sense the time to end an exclusive white domination of more than three centuries has come. In a narrower sense the Afrikaner, and especially members of the DRC, will have to share their political responsibilities with people of other cultures, other religions or even people with no religion. The irreversibility of this process is, however, not acceptable for a large number of Afrikaners and again many members of the DRC are in this group.

You ask me: What is our task in the changing South Africa? My answer is to live out the contents of *Church and Society* in a practical way (Acta Synodi; 1990:720).

During the synod changes were made to formulations and certain aspects of *Church and Society* and it was adopted as the official decision on race relations of the DRC and clarified for everybody who wants to know what the DRC is saying about Apartheid. A very comprehensive decision was taken (par 276 – 288).

It was stated very clearly that political models should not only be evaluated theoretically but also the practical implications thereof and how it would affect an entire society (par. 276).

Regarding the question of Apartheid, there are strong, emotional difficulties. For some, the white people, it is part of protection of their own identity; there are other groups who perceive it as blatant racism and a way to protect the white minority. Throughout the world, Apartheid is condemned by states and churches (par. 278).

The Dutch Reformed Church realises that there is a long history behind the policy of Apartheid and wanted to state that not everything can be branded as wrong and inhuman in the policy. One cannot deny that positive developments were also achieved during this time. The church acknowledges the right and freedom of peoples to promote their own cultural and other values but then the rights of others must not be affected thereby (par. 279-281).

Synod then declared the following:

282. The Dutch Reformed Church, however, *acknowledges that for too long it has adjudged the policy of Apartheid on the above named grounds too abstractly and theoretically, and therefore too uncritically.* The Dutch Reformed Church had insufficiently perceived that Apartheid as a system had, inter alia, in its struggle against integration also received an ideological and ethnocentric basis. The right and freedom to remain true to one's own cultural heritage, was extended to become a political ideology of Apartheid as a system for the protection of the white minority's own interests to the detriment of others. Love for one's own often took the shape of racism and was expressed in legal and structural terms.

283. While the Dutch Reformed Church, over the years, seriously and persistently sought the will of God and his Word for our society, the *church made the error of allowing forced separation and division of peoples in its own circle, to be considered a biblical imperative. The Dutch Reformed Church should have distanced itself much earlier from this view and admits and confesses its neglect.*

284. Gradually it became clear to the Dutch Reformed Church that the policy of Apartheid as a political system in practice went further than the acknowledgement of the right and freedom of all peoples and cultural groups to stay true to their own values. Apartheid began to function in such a way that the largest part of the population of the country experienced it as an oppressive system which, through the forced separation of peoples, was in reality favouring one group wrongfully above the others. In this way the

human dignity of one's fellowman became adversely affected and was in conflict with the principles of love and righteousness.

285. Any system which in practice functions in this way *is unacceptable in the light of Scripture and the Christian conscience and must be rejected as sinful. Any attempt by a church to try to defend such a system biblically and ethically, must be seen as a serious fallacy, that is to say it is in conflict with the Bible.*

286. *The Dutch Reformed Church wants to state clearly that it condemns all forms of discrimination and the suppression of peoples and wholeheartedly desires that all will be free to share in the privileges of the fatherland and will receive reasonable and equal opportunities to acquire prosperity and riches.*

287. The church has above all, compassion for the poverty and suffering of large numbers of people in our country and declares that it is prepared to co-operate in an ecclesiastical way, in attempts to relieve the present need and to make it possible for all people in our country to have a better future.

288. The church, however, is convinced that a satisfactory political solution is necessary for the social problems which exist at present, and therefore urges all political leaders to co-operate in a responsible way to find a political dispensation which will ensure freedom, justice and a decent existence for all (Church and Society 1990: 38-40). (Researcher's Italics)

The process that Bosch pleaded for in 1985 has started to gain momentum. Here was truly an occasion where Synod could say that to confess and repent could not be imposed by anybody but it was truly a gift of the Holy Spirit. As the Apostles declared at the Jerusalem Conference in Acts 15 "the Holy Spirit and we have decided".

2.2.1.10 1990 Rustenburg Conference

This conference of Church leaders in South Africa was the outflow of an initiative by State President F W de Klerk. In his Christmas message to South Africa in December 1989, he made an appeal to the church in South Africa to formulate a strategy conducive to negotiation, reconciliation and change for the situation in South Africa. During a meeting in June 1990, a motion from the South African Council of Churches (SACC) called on Dr Louw Alberts to chair a steering committee of church leaders to organise a conference of church leaders from across the spectrum of Christian churches in South

Africa to “rediscover its calling and to unite Christian witness in a changing South Africa” (Alberts & Chikane (eds.), 1991: 15). This conference was held in November 1990 when approximately 230 church leaders from 80 denominations and para-church organisations met in Rustenburg.

Of special interest for this study, is the address by Prof. Willie Jonker. He addressed the conference on the topic: *Understanding the Church Situation and Obstacles to Christian Witness in South Africa*. After a preamble he concentrated on four main issues: The isolation between Christians of different races; Differences concerning the rejection of Apartheid; Differences concerning the task of the church in a polarised society; Differences on the understanding of the church’s role in politics. During the course of presenting his second point he made the confession that resounded throughout the world within hours. He said:

I confess before you and before the Lord, not only my own sin and guilt, and my personal responsibility for the political, social, economical and structural wrongs that have been done to many of you, and the results of which you and our whole country are still suffering from, but vicariously I dare also to do that in the name of the DRC of which I am a member, and for the Afrikaans people as a whole. I have the liberty to do just that, because the DRC at its latest synod has declared Apartheid a sin and confessed its own guilt of negligence in not warning against it and distancing itself from it long ago (Alberts & Chikane (Eds.), 1991: 92). (Researcher’s Italics)

After Jonker’s address, Archbishop Desmond Tutu thanked him by saying:

Prof. Jonker made a statement that certainly touched me and I think touched others of us when he made a public confession and asked to be forgiven. I believe that I certainly stand under pressure of God’s Holy Spirit to say that, as I said in my sermon that when confession is made, then those of us who have been wronged must say ‘We forgive you’, so that together we may move to the reconstruction of our land. That confession is not cheaply made and the response is not cheaply given (Alberts & Chikane (Eds.), 1991: 99).

When there is confession and repentance the Christian way is to give forgiveness. This was done in a most wonderful way by Jonker and Tutu, but this solemn moment would again be sullied by what happened next.

From all over South Africa messages and telegrams were received. Most of it was to thank Jonker, but there were also those filled with anger. Many from the last group asked the question: “who gave him the right to confess on behalf of them and the Afrikaner people?” These allegations were also reflected in the press and especially in Die Kerkbode. Even the previous State President Mr P W Botha, phoned Prof. Pieter Potgieter at the conference to object to the confession (Jonker, W 1998:206). The next morning Prof. Potgieter asked to make a statement on this issue. He started by saying that *there are delegates who doubt if the confession was really genuine with respect to the position of the DRC. He said:*

The delegates of the DRC want to state unambiguously that we fully identify ourselves with the statements made by Prof. Jonker on the position of this church. He has in fact precisely reiterated the decision made by our General Synod in Bloemfontein recently. We would like to see this decision of the Synod as the basis of reconciliation with all people and all Churches (Jonker, W 1998:207).

At the end of the conference a declaration, the Rustenburg Declaration, was issued, and as in the past, the DRC delegates were not satisfied with the formulation, and so they again issued their own declaration. This was seen by many at the conference as the pattern which always came to the fore from the DRC: “that they talk together in order to get the most favourable decisions from the DRC view, and then they back off so as not to shock the Afrikaners too much.” And so, in the words of Willie Jonker, “*we left Rustenburg under a cloud in spite of all the wonderful things that happened there*” (Jonker 1998:208). (Researcher’s Italics)

2.2.1.11 1994 ANC Government: Mr Mandela State President

On 2 February 1990, State president F W de Klerk announced in a dramatic fashion the lifting of the bans on the African National Congress (ANC), the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), the South African Communist Party and other illegal organisations; the freeing of political prisoners incarcerated for non-violent activities; the suspension of capital punishment; and the lifting of various restrictions imposed by the State of Emergency.

On 9 February 1990, Mr. Nelson Mandela was informed that he would be released on 11 February from the Victor Verster Prison. After twenty-seven years in prison, he became a free man.

From the balcony of the City Hall on the Grand parade in Cape Town, Mr. Mandela addressed the “boundless sea of cheering people, holding flags and banners, clapping and laughing...” He said:

Friends, comrades and fellow South Africans. I greet you all in the name of peace, democracy and freedom for all! I stand here before you not as a prophet but as a humble servant of you, the people. Your tireless and heroic sacrifices have made it possible for me to be here today. I therefore place the remaining years of my life in your hands...

The sight of freedom looming on the horizon should encourage us to redouble our efforts... Today I wish to report to you that my discussions with the government have been aimed at normalising the political situation in the country. I wish to stress that I myself have at no time entered into negotiations about the future of our country except to insist on a meeting between the ANC and the government... (Mandela, 1994: 676,677)

For many white people the release of Mandela created a fear that there will be an explosion of hatred against them. At a press conference Mandela, however, made it clear that he harboured no hatred against white people. In prison his anger towards white people decreased, but there was a growing hatred for the system. He wanted South Africa to see that he loved his enemies while hated the system that turned people against each other (Mandela, 1994: 680).

During the weeks, months and three years that followed his release, negotiations went on between the government and the ANC to come to a peaceful solution for the situation in South Africa. On 27 April 1994 all the negotiations culminated in the first ever fully democratic election in South Africa. The ANC won the election and on 10 May 1994, Mr. Mandela was inaugurated as the first democratically elected President of the Republic of South Africa. He pledged to obey and uphold the constitution and to devote himself to the wellbeing of the Republic and its people. In his speech he said, inter alia:

Today, all of us do, by our presence here...confer glory and hope to new-born liberty. Out of the experience of an extraordinary human disaster that lasted too long, must be born a society of which all humanity will be proud. ...We who were outlaws not so long ago, have today been given the rare privilege to be host to the nations of the world on our own soil. We thank all of our distinguished international guests for having come to take possession with the people of our country of what is, after all, a common victory for justice, for peace, for human dignity. We have, at last, achieved our political emancipation. We pledge ourselves to liberate all our people from the continuing bondage of poverty, deprivation, suffering, gender and other discrimination. Never, never, and never again shall it be that this beautiful land will again experience the oppression of one by another. ... The sun shall never set on so glorious a human achievement. Let freedom reign. God bless Africa! (Mandela, 1994:746).

In an article in *Die Kerkbode* on 13 May 1994, three days after the inauguration of Mr. Mandela as President, Dr Adelbert Scholtz asked the question: *Will the voice of the church still be heard in a new South Africa?* He discussed the fact that during the rule of the previous government, the different churches in South Africa actually supported different political parties. As examples he used the Anglican Church which supported British Imperialism, the SACC which supported the ANC, the APK which supported the right wing political ideas and the DRC which supported the Apartheid policy of the National Party. How is the church going to conduct itself in the new dispensation? He argued that the new government would not listen to the DRC with the same sympathy as the old government. What is the church going to do in the future?

A very interesting response came to the above-mentioned article. A correspondent sent a letter to *Die Kerkbode* with the title: *Why does the DRC want to talk now?* In his letter he said that he is a coloured male from Prince Albert. He said he wondered why the DRC wants to let its voice be heard in this new era while it was quiet like a cat with slippers on when the National Party government put legislation through parliament: The Act on Mixed marriages; The Immorality Act; The Group Areas Act. Why does the DRC want to talk now? (*Die Kerkbode*, June 1994:15)

2.2.1.12 1994 *The Synod of Reconciliation*

The DRC held their General Synod in Pretoria from 11 – 20 October 1994. This synod would later be known as the "Reconciliation Synod". What made this synod so remarkable was that it was the first time that a head of government made a speech at a General Synod of the DRC. By doing this, Mr Mandela stretched out a hand of reconciliation and said that the DRC has a special role to play in the upbuilding of a just and peaceful society.

In his speech he mentioned *inter alia* the following:

Since my release from prison in 1990, I already had intensive discussions on two occasions with the Moderature of the DRC. Every time I was impressed by their serious search for peaceful and just solutions for the problems of our country. I realised that I have to deal with Afrikaners of high integrity. At these sessions my message to them was that I am not asking the church to be a follower of any political party or political philosophy. The opposite is true because the history of the DRC's support of Apartheid showed how wrong such an approach can be, not only for the country but also for the church itself. I am convinced that the DRC does not only have the right but also a special plight to actively partake in the building up of a just and peaceful society.... I want to speak straightforward to you.

Apartheid was a scorched-earth policy against the majority of people in our country. It was one of the most horrible offences and denials of the worthiness of human beings in the history of the world. Apartheid was fundamentally wrong and a sin.

I don't say these things to rub salt into the wounds, because I'm aware of the struggle in the DRC with Apartheid and the anguish of soul so many members of the DRC experienced. *Church and Society* was a beacon, but that was not the starting point of the long road that brought you here at this synod, nor is it the end point, because the search for light and truth is never ending.... Through the years there were prophets from the DRC who warned against racism and Apartheid. I think of great South Africans like Prof. BB Keet, Dr Ben Marais and Dr Beyers Naudé. I hope that you will give them the acknowledgement they deserve....

The last few years of Apartheid were characterised by unknown corruption and mismanagement, which contributed to poverty and dire living conditions for most South Africans. With my inauguration as President here in Pretoria, I have committed the government of National Unity to trustworthiness and transparency. It is of the utmost importance that the church will actively support the government in its endeavours to fight against corruption.

Legislation for the institution of a truth Commission is at the moment in the process of preparation by the minister of Justice, Mr. Dullah Omar. Commentary by the church will be very helpful. One of the important tasks of this commission will be to ensure that government will acknowledge the human dignity of victims of suffering and human rights violations. I want to invite the DRC to help government in its task to advance Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa (Acta Synodi 1994: 536-537).

At the end of his speech, Mr. Mandela received a standing ovation and the meeting sang the song, 'Laat Heer U seën op hom daal.' (May the Lord bless you and keep you) The public was surprised by the appearance of Mr Mandela at the Synod, because it had never happened in the past that a State President visited such a meeting. For many Afrikaner Christians and churches his presence in the Synod was unacceptable, because there was the ever-present idea that he is not a Christian. But many don't know that when he was seven, his mother converted to Christianity and he went to a mission school. Although he is not outspoken about his Christianity, his attitude and personal testimony in his autobiography is that he is a Christian and has always been a Christian show that his actions and words flow from his conviction (De Klerk, 2003: 322). In his thesis on Prof. Johan Heyns, H H Williams quoted Heyns as saying that Mr Mandela referred to the role that Rev A M Scheffler of the DRC had played in his life during the years of imprisonment. He knew Mandela was a member of the Methodist Church and that he took Holy Communion in the church (William, 2006:366n).

That synod also stretched out a hand of reconciliation to Prof. Ben Marais and Dr Beyers Naudé who were both present at the meeting. Synod also acknowledged that through the years there were members and officials (and even church meetings) who had a clear prophetic voice concerning Apartheid and church decisions. The General Synod acknowledged and confessed that in the past these people were not handled with grace and love (Die Kerkbode 28 October 1994:1).

Looking back over the years since 1960, to what conclusion can one come regarding the role of the DRC in our country? The DRC is singled out, because, until at least 1990, most of the white Afrikaans-speaking people were members of this denomination. Was there a change of mind in the lives of the members of the DRC during these years of

conflict and turmoil? There is one sentence that flows like a silver thread through these years when it came to conflict situations in the church, namely “*The executive urgently call up the members of the Church to remain calm in these difficult times when so many onslaughts are launched against the Dutch Reformed Church.*” To me this statement actually confirms that the members of the church have been kept in a type of bondage resulting in the fact that people couldn’t really think for themselves but always had to ask what our “dominee” says. And most of the time the poor dominee’s (ministers) didn’t have an answer and referred back to the official channels which were actually the breeding ground for the original uncertainty.

This researcher agrees with Alexander Venter when he reflects on the events since 1990. Since the release of Mr Mandela after being in prison 27 years, he became an international icon of moral authority, but his generous attitude of forgiveness and reconciliation has not transformed our country. Laws have changed, but have our hearts changed? In hindsight most of the white people now condemn Apartheid as having been a bad thing. But what are they presently doing to help shape a new country and a new future? Very few white people have been through a process of reconciliation and transformation of their racial beliefs, attitudes and actions. (See Chapter 6) In the main they have still not experienced what history and life was, and is still ignorant of what life is like in the black townships and rural areas. They still have their prejudices intact and growing. They must now, together with the rest of the nation, take responsibility to redress the Apartheid situation. Instead it is found that many people’s racial attitudes are hardening.

The Afrikaans Churches are amongst those who heard the challenges of the TRC (Chapter 5) to the faith communities. God has given the church as the primary instrument in the world, to heal the deep wounds of racial hurt and inferiority of a great percentage of our country’s population. One of the great dangers in South Africa is outward socio-political and economic change without any meaningful inner, personal spiritual transformation. People experience all the outward changes in society but remain the same in their hearts and minds. Who better to address the spiritual transformation of people and communities than the church? (Venter, 2004: 110-113).

It seems that the prophetic words of Bosch in 1985 are so true when he made the statement that in ordinary inter-human communication, people are usually more aware of the sin of others than their own sins. This is seen and heard all around in communication with a large percentage of Afrikaners. (See Chapter 5)

2.2.2 Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika (NHK)

As already shown in Chapter 1 the two churches NHK and DRC decided to unite in 1885 as one church, the Nederduits Hervormde of Gereformeerde Kerk (NH of G Kerk) but this union was short lived.

Shortly after the unification a growing number of members of the NHK were not satisfied with the union. Some of the reasons included that the NH of G Kerk (the United Church) promotes mission work, the possibility of equalisation between white and black, the possibility that there will be better relationships with the British. The fear also existed that the NH of G Kerk was actually the continuation of the DRC because of the few ministers of the NHK who were part of the united church. So since 1892 the two churches were again separated as the NHK and NH of G Kerk (Hofmeyr, 2002: 150).

Through the years the NHK, which in 1970 had only 6% of the white population of South Africa as members, was known as a Volkskerk (People's Church), meaning the Church of the Afrikaner people, and has accepted as members only white people. In their Constitution was the infamous Article III, which made it impossible for people of colour to become members of the church.

The NHK, however, went through some episodes that shook its foundations as is shown in the following paragraphs, because it, too, had to face the problems of the expectations of people of colour.

2.2.2.1 *Cottesloe*

The NHK was a member of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and also of the South African Council of Churches (SACC). When the *Cottesloe Consultation* got underway in 1960, the NHK had ten delegates at the meeting. Already in the preparation meetings for the consultation it was clear that the NHK had problems with the aims and procedures of the consultation (Lückhoff, 1978:53). On the last day of the consultation and in the days that followed, the NHK caused great confusion amongst the Afrikaans speaking church members. An hour before the adjournment of the consultation, the delegates of the NHK handed out a declaration in which they distanced them totally from the decisions of the consultation and committed themselves fully to the policy of the government. The church asked that its declaration must be handed to the press, together with the statements of the consultation. The delegates of the NHK endorsed their conviction that separate development was the only just solution for the race problems of South Africa and that they rejected integration in all its forms. This led to polarisation between the two Afrikaans churches, the NHK and the DRC.

Five days after the consultation, Dr W A Visser't Hooft, General Secretary of the WCC, published his report on the consultation in Geneva. In one of the sub-paragraphs he stated the following about the NHK:

They hold the Apartheid doctrine as an ideology, which quite often seems to take the place of Holy Scripture. For them Apartheid is an absolute principle and as soon as at any point Apartheid is broken through, they shout that this leads to integration, which in their mind is something like the reign of Satan. They have, therefore, voted against almost every new constructive move, which was being proposed.

Now the really serious thing about this is that, as their actions, in the days following the Consultation have proved, they are really saying to the Government and the Afrikaans people: We are the real defenders of Afrikanerdom and the Transvaal- and Cape Dutch Reformed Churches have become traitors.

There is no doubt that in this way they hope to get a large number of die-hard laymen in the Cape and Transvaal Churches to join the Hervormde Kerk. The Cape and Transvaal leaders see this clearly and are terribly worried about it. It is, therefore, all the more to their credit that they have been ready to accept the common statement (Lückhoff 1978: 97-113).

As a result of what had taken place at the Cottesloe Consultation, the NHK decided to withdraw from the World Council of Churches (WCC). The DRC synods of the Transvaal and Cape also resigned from the WCC.

Within the NHK there were also voices which were raised before and after Cottesloe. One such voice was that of Rev. MJJ Redelinghuys, who in an article in *Die Hervormer* of September 1960 and October 1960 asked the question: *Are we without guilt?* (Is ons sonder skuld?)

In the article, he wrote about separate development (Apartheid) and said that it would be good to keep in mind that it is a matter of human relations. Then he pointed out a few interesting facts:

1. We were not honest with the policy of Apartheid because it didn't really centre on the development of the Bantu, but it was more about white domination and elections had been won on this idea.
2. The Bantu had never been consulted about the principle or the application of separate development.
3. Discrimination against others has to do with the fact that one reserves things for oneself without letting others have the same.
4. Because of the Apartheid's laws and bylaws, many instances of unrighteousness and discrimination occurred especially against the Coloured and Indian communities.
5. It is horrible to think that we (the white people) are directly responsible for the poverty of the black people and throughout Scripture we see that God is more concerned about the poor than the rich.
6. The fact that government can decide who may or may not worship in a certain church is an attack on the well-being of the church and thus the church of Jesus Christ can do nothing but to protest against it.
7. Another issue for concern is the discrepancy in salaries of black ministers and teachers against their white co-workers – even if they have the same qualifications.
8. A last point is made and it concerns the situation of the coloured people and Indians. They are not handled in the same way as the black people because it was not made clear to them where they ought to stay and what will happen to them when they are staying amongst us. The only thing that concerns them is that they are suppressed and that is also unjust race discrimination.

The author concluded his article by saying that the church of Christ must always be aware of the danger of the lack of self-criticism, the danger of being one with the world without being open to critique.

In a conversation with Mr Marius Redelinghuys, son of the late Rev. MJJ Redelinghuys, he told the researcher about the suffering that they as family underwent after Rev. Redelinghuys was suspended by the NHK for his views. He had to find a job on one of the mines on the West Rand during the late 1960's and their family was actually ignored by former members of the father's congregation.

Another voice was that of Prof. A S Geysler, who, together with fellow scholar Prof. Van Selms, were also targeted because of their enlightened views on Apartheid and the path the NHK were taking.

2.2.2.2 The church trial of Prof. A S Geysler

Albert Geysler was a New Testament scholar of the NHK section of the Theological Faculty at the University of Pretoria from 1946 to 1962. He began his academic career as a loyal nationalist but was an outspoken critic of Apartheid theology. He became involved in the Apartheid debate in the 1950's after the NHK was challenged by the WCC to provide Biblical justification for its race policy. Geysler was a New Testament expert and an excellent linguist and was thus appointed by the NHK's two-man commission to find such justification. Both theologians came to the conclusion that Scriptures did not provide justification for Apartheid. The church leadership was infuriated and they regarded this as betrayal. Geysler's attacks on Apartheid theology steadily increased until he moved into open confrontation with the church leadership.

In 1961 three of his students lodged a charge of heresy against him. He was charged with heresy with respect to his teachings about Christology, Ecclesiology, Anthropology, Pneumatology and persistent resistance against the ordinations of the NHK. The complainants' accusations against him were not based on publications, but on his class

lectures. At the end of an *in camera* hearing before the governing body of the NHK, he was found innocent of the Pneumatology and Ecclesiology but guilty of the Christological heresy – and he was deposed. He was determined to fight back and took his case to the Supreme Court in Pretoria. He was, however, convinced that the Afrikaner Broederbond (AB) had engineered the charges against him. He shared his views with a life-long friend, Beyers Naudé, who also at that stage had problems regarding his being a member of the AB himself. The outcome of this was that Naudé gave some secret AB documents to Geyser and this eventually leaked to the press. The disclosures shook the country and Naudé was marked in The AB circles as a traitor to the Afrikaners.

During May 1963, the appeal against Geyser's defrocking had reached the Supreme Court. The trial attracted a great deal of publicity and was becoming a major embarrassment to the NHK. The church, however, reached an agreement outside court with Geyser and offered to pay all the costs. The detail of the agreement was kept quiet and did nothing to restore his stature in the Afrikaner community. He had no chance of ever teaching again at an Afrikaans University and for the rest of his working life, he taught at the University of the Witwatersrand. He finally left the NHK when the church's general synod refused to review his case.

In the prosecution and final dismissal of Geyser, the socio-political and socio-religious dimension played a great role even if it was never admitted. The charge was laid against him on 23 September 1961, four months after South Africa became a Republic and nine months after Cottesloe. Geyser was an outspoken critic of Apartheid and of Article III of the church's constitution. He rejected the idea of a *volkskerk*. The original charge included the accusations that: (i) Geyser obstinately resisted Article III and Apartheid. (ii) He emphasised that Apartheid could not be justified Scripturally. (iii) His use of the Bible and his exegesis was problematic. (iv) He claimed that in spirit and intent he continued the traditional Reformed approach and (v) said that he did his exegesis as commissioned by his church and the Word of God. The official verdict of the Commission was that Geyser was arrogant and used derogatory words and had a provocative attitude.

It became apparent that with this verdict the NHK shifted to the right margin of its traditionally declared middle-orthodox position and settled for a formalistic confessionalism.

In hindsight it appears at that time that the NHK found itself at the lowest ebb in the history of the church. Never did it stand closer to the brink of the abyss of isolation from both the larger community of faith and the larger community of the academy (Krüger, 2003:461-466; Ryan, 1990:87-89)

2.2.2.3 *The NHK and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches*

Together with the DRC, the DRMC and the DRCA, the NHK was also member of the WARC until 1982 when it was, together with DRC, suspended because of its support of the government's Apartheid policy (See also p. 80). In an article in *Die Hervormer*, October 1982, two of the delegates of the NHK to the WARC in Ottawa, Rev. C L van den Berg and Dr J H Koekemoer, shared some of the reasons why they think the NHK needed to resign from the WARC.

They felt that there was a neatly organised plan to isolate, intimidate and in the end to suspend the two Afrikaans Churches from the Alliance. From the outset of the meeting it was clear that, especially from the white delegates of European churches, there was hostility against the delegates of the two Afrikaans Churches. Some of the coloured delegates from South Africa didn't even greet the delegates of the NHK. During the meeting, some delegates addresses which clearly showed the influence of the Theology of Revolution. When he gave his address, Dr J H Koekemoer said, inter alia:

The church proclaims and practices the Word of God, which does not disrupt lives in a revolutionary manner, but renews creatively. The resolution expects from our church to suddenly change the life of our community. I am afraid this will cause disruption...

In the South African situation our church will, as in the past, continue to fulfil its prophetic task towards the government, but you cannot expect from us to do something which we are not convinced of ...I am afraid that this resolution opens the way to a heresy chase, the end of which is not foreseeable (Die Hervormer, October 1982:14).

On 17 September 1982, the NHK decided to resign from the WARC. A commission of the General Assembly of the NHK studied the implications of the decisions made by the WARC and issued its own statement on the matter. The statement said, *inter alia*

The Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk cannot comply with the requirements set by the World Alliance and it, therefore, has no other choice but to withdraw. This church will continue to determine its course in response to an earnest investigation of the Holy Spirit and in consideration of its experience through the ages, both with regard to its own internal politics and also with regard to South African politics....

We thus hereby inform the WARC and everyone who may be concerned with this decision that we have terminated our membership of the Alliance... As regards the future, we are still prepared to engage in dialogue concerning our communal task and calling with Christians and fellow believers both in our country and throughout the world
(Hofmeyr, 1991:340)

These negative experiences with ecumenical bodies resulted in the fact that the NHK decided to limit ecumenical relations with churches outside the country but to have bilateral relationships with individual churches. During the past few years the church has decided to start corresponding again with the WCC and WARC (Botha, 2002:67).

During the month of June 2006, delegates from the WARC met with leaders of the NHK to find out whether the NHK can be re-admitted as a member of the WARC in light of the changes in South Africa. There were dramatic changes in the NHK during the last few years: In 1997 the “notorious Article III” which prohibited anybody except white people from becoming members of the NHK was changed. At the General Synod in 2001, the NHK admitted that sin and injustice were committed in the name of Apartheid. These two decisions opened up the doors for the NHK to re-apply for membership of the WARC. A final decision will be taken during the meeting of the executive of the WARC in October 2007 (Die Kerkbode, 23 June 2006:4).

2.2.3 The Reformed Churches in South Africa (RCSA)

The following question was asked of Prof. Amie van Wyk during an interview: *Were there in the Reformed church “voices” that were heard and did things happen that were*

traumatic for the members in the preamble to the 1994 elections and the work of the TRC in 1996? (Example: In the DRC there were things like the Open letter, Stormkompas, Rustenburg Conference, etc.)

He responded by saying that since the 1950's race relations were on the table of the Reformed Church. The Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES) was a great help protecting the RCSA from becoming one-sided. Already in the 1980's the Synod accepted a resolution that the ideology of Apartheid is sin and added that there was no theological justification for it. He was not sure of how that resolution was realised in all the congregations.

He went on by saying that the RCSA made decisions from time to time about racial issues because they accepted the advice of the RES. On two occasions there had been some "stirrings" in the RCSA. In 1976 the Afrikaanse Calvinistiese Beweging (ACB) (The Afrikaans Calvinistic Movement) held a conference on *Justice in South Africa* in Potchefstroom and they had made some critical statements which caused some uneasiness amongst the people. Another came in 1977 when the so-called "*Koinonia Declaration*" was signed by a group of ministers of the church. (See Addendum 3)

In an article in *Die Kerkblad*, October 2003, Prof. Amie van Wyk reflected on the relationship in the family of the Reformed Churches in South Africa (RCSA) as it gives a good picture of what happened in the churches during the time of Apartheid. During the years of Apartheid, discussions were going on as regards unification between the Synods of Potchefstroom, Soutpansberg and Middellande. The results of these discussions never reached the ears of the ordinary members of the RCSA.

Missionary work of the RCSA created congregations, but most of the time these congregations existed on their own without any linkage to the "mother church". During the middle of the 1900's a beginning was made to hold conferences to which these young churches could send delegations. These conferences functioned until 1961.

The good exegesis done by Prof. WJ Snyman enabled the RCSA to come to the conclusion that the relationship between churches must transcend cultural boundaries. Thus the RCSA decided in 1964 to call together one General Synod consisting of the four National Synods Potchefstroom (white), Soutpansberg (black), Middellande (black) and Suidland (coloured). This decision was based on the presupposition that there must be separate synodical meetings for the different culture groups (Acta RCSA, 1964: 268; Acta RCSA 1967:188 as quoted by Van Wyk 2003:13-15).

During 1962 discussions were held between the different groups and the first national synods of Suidland (coloured people), Middellande and Soutpansberg (black people) were held in 1963. By 2003 only the synod of Soutpansberg was still meeting on a regular basis, Middellande met sporadically and Suidland stopped their meetings in 1990.

Of great importance for the RCSA were the meetings of the General Synod during the time of Apartheid. The first meeting was in 1965 in Ikageng. Believers could meet each other across cultural boundaries as brothers in the Lord and take decisions together about the extension of the Kingdom of God. From this date on the General Synod met another five times, in 1975, 1980, 1984, 1988 and 1992. Seen against the background of the difficult political circumstances the existence of the General Synod of the RCSA was of utmost importance for the church, but it was an experiment that was not successful. From the young churches there was critique about the constitution of the General Synod, especially because of the role of ethnicity. They stated that the General Synod had too many characteristics of a national church (volkskerk) and that unity cannot start at the “top” but it must start at ground level amongst local congregations. From the Middellande synod had come the most severe critique against church-Apartheid.

To relieve the tension between the “mother church” and young churches, a meeting was held in 1986 where delegates of all four national synods were present. At the end of this conference consensus by all the delegates was reached which was communicated to all four synods. In this consensus the focus fell on church unity, also with respect to church meetings. In spite of the fact that three national synods accepted the results, the synod of

Potchefstroom decided to distance itself from this decision. This decision of Potchefstroom has resulted in a lack of trust between the younger and older churches of the RCSA.

The critique of the younger churches received support in 1989 from the Christian Reformed Church in North America, which suspended its relationship with the RCSA. Also from the Reformed Ecumenical Synod there was critique against the RCSA. In 1988 the RCSA withdrew from the RES. Although there is still tension amongst the different synods, there is light at the end of the tunnel. In 1995 unity as regards theological training was reached. The RCSA were the first of the Afrikaans Churches to reach this ideal. Church unity is not only for church meetings, but it must be seen in unity of faith, hope and love, in dogma and everyday life.

Discussions in the RCSA must continue because it is part of the ongoing reformation of the Church of Christ (Van Wyk, 2003:13-15).

2.2.4 The Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa (AFM)

In his book, *My buurman se Kerk (1973)* (My neighbour's Church), Dr Piet Meiring addressed some questions to one of the very well known pastors of the AFM, Dr Justus du Plessis, the then General Secretary of the AFM. During the years since the founding of the AFM in South Africa, it was a church for the poor. The Reformed Churches had seen the AFM as a "sect" and it was only in 1990 that the DRC accept it as a Church. Through the years and especially through the years of depression of the 1930's, many of the not so "well-off" members of churches like the DRC and others found a spiritual home in the AFM and the church helped them to have their human dignity restored.

One of the controversial situations in the AFM occurred when Dr Gerrie Wessels, pastor of the AFM became a member of the Senate of the then Government. This event also brought the AFM closer to the politics of the day. This also led to young men doing military duty and those who didn't want to do it, served their country by joining non-fighting units. Because the people from the AFM were part and parcel of the broader

South African society, they could not hide from the things that went on through the Apartheid years (Meiring, 1973: 106-120).

In a question to Pastor George Mahlobo, General Secretary of the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa about the role of the churches and especially the pastors as regards their role in South Africa, he answered that it seems to him that white members view the church as a sort of custodian for its cultural values. An issue such as language is a challenge in education, in the schools. What remains is the church. In the AFM all cultures are welcome, but the AFM Afrikaans churches are still Afrikaans, and it seems that although the church is one, there are still some churches which find it difficult to “integrate” with cultures other than Afrikaners. The church is, however, moving to a situation where there can be multi-racial worship services in the near future. For example in a city like Pretoria, they have Doxa Deo, a multi-racial congregation

The question was asked of Pastor Mahlobo: *Would you say that the pastors of the local congregations do enough to help their people understand the whole issue of reconciliation?*

Response: We see in the cities that pastors are more inclined to mix with pastors of other race groups. But in the smaller towns, where pastors are dependent on the congregation for their stipend, it is not so easy. But our pastors must do much more to help their congregations. Even in Johannesburg there are white pastors of the AFM who have never been to Soweto. They don't know what is going on there.

He went on to say that the AFM has to deepen its unity by encouraging the integrated training of theology students. At the moment there are still different Theological Colleges for the different race groups. Discussions are underway to examine how to reflect the composition of the church in the student body. (Addendum 13)

Since the AFM is not often on the front pages of the media, the researcher thought it well also to have an interview with Dr Isak Burger, President of the AFM. The question was posed to him: *Were there things that happened in the AFM that caused members to be traumatised in the wake of the coming elections in February 1994 and the TRC in 1996?*

(Example: In the DRC there were things like the Open Letter, Stormkompas, Rustenburg, etc)

He responded in the following way:

We must make no mistake. The profile of the members of the AFM is exactly the same as that of the other churches. They are working and living in the same society and have the same social and economical challenges. People who fear that if their daughters are in church and there are black or brown boys, there will be relationships; there will be problems with pension funds, etc. The one difference between the road to unity in the DRC and the AFM is that the DRC has a Belhar, where we have a Frank Chikane. The same emotions that are created by Belhar were also with us regarding Frank Chikane. You must remember that 70% of our members are black and brown, and the chances were almost 100% that he would be the president. So we had the same hurdles and problems that had to be overcome. I cannot say that the AFM members were all of one mind and that there were no problems. But mercifully, at that stage I had already been president for 8 years and the people trusted me. (See Addendum 1)

In a questionnaire submitted to Dr Frank Chikane, Vice-President of the AFM, he indicated that he was the President of the Composite AFM Church (which included the African, Coloured and Indian Churches) until unity in April 1996. From 1996 to 1999 he became the Vice President of the united and non-racial AFM. To the question, *The AFM became a united church in April 1996 and made much of the celebrations. Did the Afrikaans-speaking members have the same enthusiasm (from your perspective) as the rest of the church?* Dr Chikane answered:

As far as I can remember, there were some who were enthusiastic about the unity and enjoyed the celebration. But the majority of them were more concerned what all this meant to them. I would take a risk and say that even the leadership of the “white church” went into the unity with deep feelings of anxiety and uncertainty and were under enormous pressures from their constituencies. As in the political arena, they came into unity with the intention of conserving as much of their past life as possible, as well as ensuring that the leadership remained in the main in ‘white hands’. In this regard, I would say that the ‘enthusiasm’ would have been more about the above than the unity itself. (See addendum 14)

Dr Chikane also made it clear that he is concerned about the general classification of the AFM of SA as Afrikaans church, as this description is not correct. He would be happier to say that the AFM of SA is one of the South African churches with high numbers of

Afrikaans speaking members (including here the Coloured membership, as they also are Afrikaans speaking).

From the above it is clear that pastors and members of the AFM were also influenced by the political situation in the country.

2.2.5 Afrikaanse Protestantse Kerk (APK)

The Afrikaanse Protestantse Kerk (APK) is still a ‘young’ church (eighteen years in existence) which came into being in 1987. Prof. Isak Brink was asked: *Would you say that the church has lived out its testimony as part of the population of South Africa in a significant way since 1987?*

He responded to this question by saying:

The message that the APK is bringing to its members, is a pure Biblical message. People view us as having a stigma of politics around us, but I am not worried about that because we know what we do and what we convey to the people. If we carry out the message of the Word of God, then we trust that they will carry this message out and that will touch the whole population of South Africa. So, I think, yes, we are doing it but according to the working of the Church of the Lord Jesus. We are not doing it by making *statements*, especially not *written statements* because the media does not love us very much except when it is sensational. We do not have the channels to carry out our message, except through our members.
(Researcher’s Italics)

In the Deed of Foundation (Stigtingsakte) of the APK it is clearly stated:

We declare that only white Afrikaners and other white people who can identify with the white Afrikaners, may enjoy membership of this church, because we believe that God created a diversity of people-groups – also the Afrikaner; that God called to Himself – also from the Afrikaner – a people group for himself (God’s volk). (We declare) that where Christ dwells in a people-group the most intimate relationship comes into existence between the people-group and Christ; that every people-group may have its own place of worship where it can have intimate koinonia with God. (We declare) that the called people-group of God in every people-group – also the Afrikaner – can form its own church; that the diversity of church formations does not alter the God-ordained unity of the Church of Christ, but actually enriches it...” (Adendorff, et al 1997:26). (Researcher’s translation)

During the beginning years of the APK, Synod meetings spent much time on internal structures to establish a firm foundation for the new church. But as the circumstances in the country changed, more and more matters of current interest were discussed, for example the issue about religious freedom. Questions such as, when is it necessary to take up arms to defend oneself, were asked. Also the APK witnessed to the government on pressing questions of the time.

(Adendorff, et al 1997:27-38)

In his 1992/3 Christmas and New Year's message to the people of South Africa, State President F W de Klerk sent a plea to the churches of South Africa to organise a Day of Confession and Prayer – a day on which believers could thank the Lord for all the blessings received. This speech was followed with a letter dated 25 Jan 1993 to the Central Church Commission (CCC) of the APK, as well as to all church leaders in South Africa. The CCC answered the State President and said, inter alia:

We have to inform you that we as the responsible Commission of the APK do not see our way open to partake in such a Day of Confession and Prayer... We will call our members to intercede for all matters that serve our people, if it is the will of God..." (Die BoodsAPPER, April 1993:8, 9).

During the years that followed, this became the modus operandi of the APK – to oppose efforts from government and other churches to work with them. One such example will suffice. During February 1994, the CCC of the APK received an invitation from delegates of the DRC, NHK, RCSA and AFM to join in a discussion on the role of the church in this crisis situation in South Africa. The CCC accepted the invitation but made it very clear to the meeting that the APK didn't want to be compromised by issuing a statement afterwards as is the usual practice at these types of meetings. During the meeting the CCC stressed again the fact that their members are people who had not been satisfied with the practical views of the church and that they are not in any way going to be subservient to any political party.

Not everything had gone well during the meeting and so the APK distanced itself from the discussions and statement issued by the other churches. The APK made an appeal to the State President to cancel the general election of April 1994 because of the anticipated

chaos in the country. During this time they will call upon all believers to humble themselves and intercede for the country according to 1 Timothy 2:1-2 (Die Boodsapper; 4 April 1994:4).

In the official mouthpiece of the APK, the monthly periodical Die Boodsapper, articles appeared regularly on their view of the situation in other Afrikaans churches, government, etc. Most of these expressed a negative attitude, especially towards the DRC, as is understandable, knowing where they (APK) originated. In one such article, dated June 1995, the author took the Confession of Belhar as his theme and stated, inter alia, that this church (DRC) is on its way to the guillotine. He went on to say:

“Belhar knows only about horizontal reconciliation and this is no Christian reconciliation. The Bible knows first of all one reconciliation – the removal of guilt and the stopping of enmity between God and man. (Romans 5:10,11)... Nowhere is reconciliation used for the removal of God-given boundaries to bring about the ‘united world’ to which Belhar is pointing.”

The article went on to say that if Belhar was examined in light of Scripture, it failed the test. The DRC had put itself on a conveyer belt on its way to the guillotine – even if it takes two or more years (Die Boodsapper, June 1995: 1, 8).

As regards the task of the APK, it is said that the church has an obligation towards the outside world and that local churches must equip their members to reach out to other countrymen with the care of Christ, to protest against things that can harm the church, to witness to government, to let a prophetic voice be heard towards other churches, etc (Adendorff, et al 1997:96).

It must be said in all honesty, that the APK is very serious about its role in South Africa to be a home for the Afrikaners who couldn't find peace of mind in the other churches anymore. They put high premium on Biblical preaching, Covenant based Sunday School and other cultural activities, but how they will manage to retain the current younger members, especially the younger generation who haven't much to do with all the political paraphernalia of the past, remains to be seen.

2.3 ECUMENICAL TENSION DUE TO RACIAL RELATIONS

2.3.1 The Afrikaans Churches in the ecumenical arena

After its inauguration on 13 March 1907, *The Council of Dutch Reformed Churches (CDRC)* didn't pay immediate attention to ecumenical issues, but as time went by, the CDRC played a role in initiating and co-ordinating contact between the DRC and other Churches. From the history of the DRC it is possible to show that this church had tried, from shortly after the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), to normalise relationships with the other Reformed Churches in South Africa. Delegates from the Cape synod tried in 1917, 1923 and 1925 to establish co-operation with the other two Afrikaans-speaking Churches but without results.

After years of negotiations the first official meeting of the *Inter Church Commission (ICC)* (Tussenkerklike Kommissie) was convened on 14 March 1939 by the CDRC in Bloemfontein. At this meeting delegations of the DRC and the Reformed Church (Gereformeerde Kerk) were present. The Nederduits Hervormde Kerk van Afrika (NHK) was not present at this first meeting but a delegation from the NHK was present at the ICC meeting of 1943. The original goal was to propagate church unity and over the years, this was the driving force for this Commission to continue its work. One of the problems that the three churches had to face was the fact the ICC was only an advisory body. It could only make recommendations to the different Church Synods.

After the dissolving of the CDRC and the inauguration of the General Synod of the DRC on 12 October 1962, there was hope that the relationships between the three Afrikaans Churches would be better and more fruitful than in the past (Grobler, 1982: 237-253).

Through the years the ICC concentrated, to a very large extent, on the interpretation of the Canons of the Reformed faith, the studying of Scripture, the view of the Church, etc. The different churches had called on their members to become more involved with one other – each one in his or her own circle of influence, but also through joint worship services, the sharing of the pulpit and other communal projects in the community.

But a new development was taking shape – another body of representation for all churches of Reformed Confession in South Africa. During Synod meetings of the three “sister churches” voices were heard regarding the establishment of a *Conventus of Reformed Churches*.

2.3.1.1 Conventus of Reformed Churches in South Africa

During the last years of the 1990’s, voices were heard from, inter alia, the RCSA, NHK and the DRC as to the formation of a new ecumenical body to accommodate the Reformed Churches in South Africa. These discussions resulted in the formation of *The Conventus of Reformed Churches in Southern Africa*. It suffices to take notice of the *purpose, church polity position and participating churches* of the *Conventus*. (For a complete document, see Addendum 15).

1. Purpose:

On the basis of our common faith, confession and Reformed tradition

- to witness prophetically to our community and, if necessary, to society and the authorities;
- to provide mutual support and assistance where it is requested; and
- to co-ordinate possible co-operation with regard to common interest and responsibilities in society.

2. Church Policy Positioning

The *Conventus* is an assembly where churches discuss common matters on the basis of their common faith, confession and Reformed tradition, with due regard to the individual nature, ethos and history of each church. The agenda focuses on a Reformed witness in the name of the *Conventus*. Particular viewpoints of participating churches are not forced upon other participating churches. No church shall dominate another church.

3. Participating Churches

All Churches in South and Southern Africa with a Reformed confessional basis that identify themselves with the *Foundation and Functioning of the Conventus of Reformed Churches in Southern Africa* could become members.

The first meeting of the *Conventus* was held on 10 March 1999. Meetings are held on an annual basis. To date the *Conventus* has had eight meetings.

The number of participating church communities is currently at least thirteen out of more than twenty possible reformed churches in Southern Africa. The following reformed churches take part in the *Conventus*: the Afrikaans Protestant Church, the Calvin Protestant Church, the Christian Reformed Church, the Free Church in South Africa, the Reformed Churches in South Africa, the Reformed Churches Midlands, the Dutch Reformed Church, the Nederduitsch Hervormde Church of Africa, the Presbyterian Church of America, the Reformed Church in Africa, the Rhenish Church, the Reformed Churches Soutpansberg, and the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa

2.3.2 Ecumenical relationships between the Afrikaans Churches and other churches inside and outside of South Africa

During the 1930's the DRC had the lion's share in the establishment of ecumenical relationships. Around 1930 approximately sixty churches were working together in the *General Missions Council* with the sole object of preaching the gospel to the black inhabitants of the country. During 1936 the precursor of the South African Council of Churches, the *Christian Council of South Africa*, was established with two DRC ministers, Dr William Nicol (Chairman) and Rev. J M du Toit (full-time secretary), at the helm. But during the years of World War Two, the DRC withdrew from the Christian Council, although remaining a member of the WCC (Meiring 1991: 76).

For South Africa, 1948 marks the beginning of a new epoch when the National Party became the newly elected government. It would produce an effort, unparalleled in the history of the world, to completely reconstruct a society by separating its human races. Over the decades the Apartheid system would develop into a maze of legislation. The entire South African population would be classified in four categories: White, Coloured, Indian and Black. This act unleashed worldwide protestations and it was not accepted by everybody, especially in the church. One of the first attempts of Afrikaners breaking away from this system, occurred in 1955 when thirteen Pretoria academics, including political scientist W H Kleynhans, Greek scholar P V Pistorius and theologian B J Marais, produced a petition against the removal of the 'Coloureds' from the common

voters' role in the Cape. During the same time, theologian B B Keet published his booklet: "Suid-Afrika – waarheen?" (Whither South Africa?)

In 1980 the Reformed Church in Africa (RCA – Indian) proposed an umbrella body for all four churches of the DRC family. The white DRC did not accept the idea and it proved to be another missed opportunity for normalising relationships within the family. In the years to come the DRC would reap the 'whirlwind' (Krüger, 2003:204-207, 246f).

Serfontein (1982: 128) argues that apart from the black "daughter" churches and the other Afrikaans-speaking churches the DRC had no formal links with any other churches in the country. (It must be remembered that during the 1960's and up to 1987, there was no APK and the AFM was still seen as a sect. The APK came into existence in 1987 and the AFM was considered a church by the DRC, for the first time, at the General synod of the DRC in 1990.)

Up to 1980 the DRC had generally steadfastly refused to participate in inter-church gatherings called either by the SACC or other SA-based Christian organisations. In 1981 the DRC took a surprising step when Dr P Rossouw, the Ecumenical Affairs Liaison Director of the DRC, sent an invitation to ten major churches in South Africa to attend a conference to discuss the situation in the country.

The churches invited were the Baptist Church, the Church of England in South Africa, the Federation of Lutheran Churches, the Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church, and the Church of the Province of South Africa, the United Congregational Church, the NGKA, RCA, the NHK and the RCSA. The two Afrikaans Churches NHK and RCSA declined the invitation. Serfontein thought that the DRC took this step as part of a strategy for eventually launching a counter-organisation to the SACC. In the invitation letter it was said, *inter alia*, that no new structure was envisaged. Part of the letter read:

The general Synod of the DRC has decided that a penetrating analysis should take place between the DRC and other protestant churches with a conservative confessional basis. This far-reaching decision was taken on conceivable grounds and lends itself to something very noble in the ecclesiastical and broader South African situation if we put our hands together to the plough.

One thing must at the outset be stressed with emphasis – no new structure is envisaged. When we proceed on the lines of matters of mutual consent, our mutual calling, responsibility and menace and lastly points of difference, then we as believers may be sure that the road ahead will become clear.

The majority of the churches invited sent representatives to the meeting held in Pretoria on August 26, 1981. This was the first time, since the Cottesloe Consultation in 1960 that so wide a representation of churches had gathered. But in spite of all the good publicity the conference received, there were voices against it. Rev. Sam Buti of the NGKA slammed the conference. He reflected the views of several other black and white theologians present and deplored the fact that the SACC was not invited and that the DRC was only interested in ecumenical contact when it took the initiative itself. He went on to say that the conference had tended to ignore the deep differences between the churches on theological, political and social issues.

Serfontein suggested that the DRC had a two-fold aim in the conference. He said that the DRC tried to drive a wedge between the SACC and some of its member churches, and also between black and white radicals and conservatives in those churches. The second aim was to convince the German and Swiss churches – with whom the DRC was in dialogue with at a time – that it was indeed involved in making contact with black and multi-racial churches in South Africa, (a point on which it had been criticised) and also because leaders of the black DRC and other churches have asked churches in Europe to break off their bilateral relationships with the DRC (Serfontein 1982: 128-131).

As has been mentioned above (par 2.1.1) the SACC, in step with the WCC, supported the “Programme to Combat Racism” (PCR). This brought vehement reaction not only from churches in South Africa, (especially the Afrikaans Churches) but also from across the world. This has led to ecumenical isolation of the Afrikaans Churches and especially the DRC. There was a time when the DRC was on the frontline of ecumenical developments outside of South Africa. In October 1876 the DRC of the Cape became one of the first members of the newly inaugurated *World Alliance of Reformed Churches* (WARC). In 1948 the *World Council of Churches* (WCC) came into being and again the DRC was there. The Transvaal DRC became a member in 1949 and the Cape DRC in 1953.

The *Reformed Ecumenical Synod* (RES) was formed in 1946 and right from the beginning the DRC was also part of this ecumenical body (from Meiring, 1991: 76). Crafford and Gous (1993) showed clearly how, one after another, churches and groups in the world, began to avoid contact with the DRC: The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands; the Schweizerischer Evangelischer Kirchenbund; the Reformierter Bund Deutschland; the Reformed Church in America; the United Presbyterian Church in the USA; the Christian Reformed Church in North America (Crafford & Gous, 1993: 353-362).

In South Africa itself, conflict was unavoidable because of Apartheid and the Afrikaans-speaking Churches' support of it.

After Cottesloe, in 1963, Rev. Beyers Naudé founded the *Christian Institute* (CI) and it produced a journal, *Pro Veritate*. Through this journal and other studies, the CI provided material to challenge and guide Christian understanding and action. In 1965 the General Synod of the DRC resolved that all members of the church should resign from the CI. There was more and more an alienation from Naudé and the CI by Afrikaners. Thus he turned more and more to English-speaking Christians for support and also became more directly involved with black people in their struggle. This resulted in Naudé's banning in October 1977. (For the role of the CI and Naudé, see the Thesis of M J Heaney 2004.)

The CI was instrumental in bringing many of the African Independent Churches into relationships with one other and with the wider church in South Africa and beyond. The CI also played a determining role in the Study Project on Christianity in Apartheid South Society (Sprocas). Sprocas developed the *Message to the People of South Africa (The Message)* which was published by the South African Council of Churches (SACC) in 1968.

The Message was a decisive rejection of Apartheid and separate development as being contrary to the Christian faith in principle.

During the time after Cottesloe the *Christian Council* (precursor of the SACC) was relatively ineffective and, partly because of this, the CI took on many responsibilities that the Council should have taken on in the early sixties. Because the Message was so controversial in South Africa - even the then Prime Minister, Mr B J Vorster reacted on it, it is necessary to briefly highlight a few aspects of it.

The Message was a six-page document, which attempted to show how Apartheid and separate development are contrary to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Its starting point was the conviction that, in Christ, God had reconciled the world to himself and therefore made reconciliation between people both possible and essential to the Christian faith. The Message proceeded to point out the implications of this atoning work of Christ, in terms of the South African society. First of all it made it clear that “excluding barriers of ancestry, race, nationality, language and culture have no rightful place in the inclusive brotherhood of Christian disciples”. The main burden of the Message, however, was that this unity within the church could not be divorced from what was happening in society itself. Apartheid and separate development attacked the church at its centre; they denied the work of Christ. The Message declared:

There are alarming signs that this doctrine of separation has become, for many, a false faith, a novel gospel which offers happiness and peace for the community and for the individual. It holds out to men a security built not on Christ but on the theory of separation and the preservation of racial identity. It presents separate development of our race groups as a way for the people of South Africa to save themselves. Such a claim inevitably conflicts with the Christian gospel, which offers salvation, both social and individual, through faith in Christ alone.

The task of the church is to demonstrate the reality of this reconciling work of God in its own life. Thus Christians “are under an obligation to live in accordance with the Christian understanding of man and community, even if this is contrary to some of the customs and laws of this country”.

Reaction to the Message was dramatic. The English newspapers came out in strong support of the council and its Message, while the Afrikaans papers deplored it. Because the DRC justified separate development on theological grounds, the SACC statement actually condemned it, together with other churches with the same view. Therefore

dialogue between the DRC and English-speaking churches became extremely difficult. The Message also ushered in a new and more intense phase in the relationship between the state and the churches associated with the SACC, and, of course between the state and the council itself (De Gruchy, 1986: 103-122).

During 1982 the membership of both the DRC and NHK was suspended from the WARC because of their support of the policy of Apartheid. So by the mid-1980's the DRC was only a member of the RES, now called the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC). During the REC's meeting in Chicago 1984, the DRC delegation had a difficult time. At that meeting the REC voted with a majority against Apartheid and declared it to be a sin. The DRC and the RCSA were confronted about their support of the government's policy of Apartheid.

By 1988, during the Harare meeting of the REC, it was decided that a conference must be held in South Africa to try and solve the tension between the DRC and the other members of the DRC family. This became known as the "Vereeniging Consultation" of March 1989 (See par 2.2.1.8) (N G Kerk, 1997: 40-41).

However, in spite of all the ties between the DRC and other churches outside South Africa, one by one these ties were loosened. It happened more and more that non-Afrikaans churches from South Africa would use opportunities in ecumenical councils to expose the DRC to public contempt, because of its racist pro-government or pro-Apartheid viewpoint. It became clear that there was no longer room for the DRC in most of these councils. Dr F E O'Brien Geldenhuys made the comment that for the past thirty years the DRC was continuously on the defence at all the ecumenical bodies, because of its support of government policy. Unless the DRC was willing to listen to well-meant critique from other reformed churches, it would shunt itself into a cul-de-sac (Geldenhuys, 1982: 102).

D J Bosch, in an article *Die Ope brief in Konteks (The Open letter in Context)*, came to the same conclusion. He said that nobody could deny any longer the fact that the position of the DRC, with respect to international church relationships, was alarming. The

isolation of the DRC was a clear-cut fact. The big question is: how is the church going to handle this situation? Many people inside the church will see the “attacks” as a further proof of the prejudice of the other churches, and that they are totally under the influence of a leftist ideology. Thus, the sooner we break ties with them the better for us (from Bosch, 1982: 46, 47).

It was quite clear at this stage that things could not go on in this way in South Africa. Something had to be done to break out of the isolation in which South Africa found itself – not only the Afrikaans-speaking churches, but also the country as a whole.

From 1986 a change came in the DRC. At the General Synod of 1986, the document *Church and Society* was accepted as the official policy of the DRC. This document made it clear that it is no longer possible for the DRC to endorse the policy of Apartheid. The acceptance of this led to the church’s split 1987 when the Afrikaanse Protestantse Kerk (APK) was founded. In 1990 *Church and Society* was revised and it was on this ground that Prof. Willie Jonker confessed regarding Apartheid during the Rustenburg Consultation in 1990 (Strauss, 2002: 391,392).

After the Rustenburg Consultation, many churches were willing and ready to join in bilateral discussions with the DRC. The WARC, however, still upheld the suspension of the DRC. In March 1993 a delegation was sent to South Africa to have discussions with member churches and the DRC. The aim of this meeting was:

To obtain first-hand information about the process of unification which has started in the family of Dutch Reformed Churches ... Above all, the papers and discussions addressed themselves to whether or not the DRC has complied with the requirement of the WARC council in Ottawa, 1982.

At the end of the consultation, the delegates of the DRC, Professors PC Potgieter, JA Heyns, PGJ Meiring and Dr FM Gaum, reacted with a statement in which they wanted to bring clarity about the position of the DRC on Apartheid. They said, inter alia:

- 1 The DRC has acknowledged that Apartheid, as it was theologically justified and supported by the DRC, has largely contributed to a system of unequal, unjust distribution of economic resources, which has led to the serious discrepancy in income, standard of living, unequal education and training between White and Black. The DRC

has above all, compassion for the poverty and suffering of large numbers of people in our country and declares that it is prepared to cooperate in an ecclesiastical way in attempts to relieve the present need.

- 2 The DRC is committed to the dismantling of the system of Apartheid in both church and politics. In our frequent discussions with political leaders we are candid about it and we have handed our General Synod's 'Declaration of Christian Principles' to, amongst others, Pres. FW de Klerk, Mr N Mandela and Dr M Buthelezi.
- 3 Lastly we want to assure this consultation that the DRC is committed to the unity of the DRC family. We agree with the statement that this is the acid test whether the DRC has finally distanced itself from the racism of Apartheid and we are willing to be part of this process.

At this stage the WARC was not convinced that they must lift the suspension and, in August 1997, they mentioned the issue in the agenda of the meeting in Hungary (Ned Geref Kerk 1997: 58-60).

In 1997 the General Assembly of the WARC decided to lift the suspension on the DRC and by 1998 the DRC was again a full member of this worldwide ecumenical body (Strauss, 2002: 393).

One of the big moments in the history of the DRC came on 13 July 2004 when the DRC was welcomed back into the *South African Council of Churches* (SACC). At the meeting, Dr Coenie Burger, moderator of the DRC, said, inter alia, that it was wonderful to be where the DRC belongs. He and others in the DRC sometimes wonder how it was possible for the DRC to endorse Apartheid. He thought that if the DRC remained part of the ecumenical movement, it may possibly never have happened. The first mistake the DRC made was to think it could read and understand the Bible on its own. The second mistake was Apartheid. Burger said that the DRC's last Synod committed itself to God but also to the country. "*We are Africans,*" he said, "*and we want to be part of this country, have part in the solutions to problems and we want to do it together with the ecumenical movement*".

From 1962 to 1986 the DRC had discussions in its Synod meetings on the plausibility or not of having ties with the SACC and each time it was rejected. But in 1986 a change came and before the Synod meeting, the executive of the SACC met with the Broad

Moderation of the DRC. A press release stated “the need for more discussions has been aired and it will be referred to the different bodies for discussion” (Acta Synodi 1986:526). At the Synod of 1990 it was decided to apply for observer status to the SACC but it was not until 6 July 1995 that this was granted.

In 2002 the General Synod decided, by a two-thirds majority vote, to apply for full membership of the SACC and, as stated above, after sixty years the DRC was back where it belonged (Meiring, “*Welkom tuis, broeders*”. Die verhaal van die Ned Geref Kerk en die Suid Afrikaanse Raad van Kerke [1936 – 2004]).

In 1992 the Ecumenical Council of the NHK reported, at their General Synod, that it had come to the conclusion that participation in discussions with, or membership to the “big” ecumenical bodies, was not in the best interests of the church. These meetings normally degenerate into one or other pressure group. But the Council wanted to press the importance of ecumenism on the heart of the Synod because it is important for the Church and its testimony in the world to have these contacts with other churches. The General Synod reaffirmed once again the importance of ecumenical ties, but is of the opinion that for the current situation it is best to have bilateral contacts with other churches (Acta Synodi 1992: 247-258).

At the Synod meeting of September 2001, the Ecumenical Council reported that the resignation of the NHK from the WARC in 1982 would have far reaching implications for the church, because the resignation also impeded its relationships with other member churches of the WARC. Other mainline churches from the Reformed tradition are very cautious as regards having contacts with the NHK. In some cases these churches didn’t even reply to requests to have discussions. If the NHK wants to have ecumenical contact with the bigger group of Reformed churches, it will have to enter into discussions with the SACC and the WCC.

Reports were made that discussions with the SACC and the WCC were under way. The Ecumenical Council made the remark that for the past decades the NHK was in ecumenical isolation and that the church will have to take the initiative if it wants to

normalise and/or better its relationships with other churches. (Acta Synodi, September 2001: 466-472)

After all that happened as discussed above, the question is: Do the Afrikaans Churches have a future role to play with respect to reconciliation in Southern Africa? This question will be discussed in the next chapters.