

## HUMAN DIGNITY IN THE THEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE AGAINST APARTHEID IN THE DUTCH REFORMED FAMILY

J Christoff Pauw  
Beyers Naudé Centre for Public Theology  
Stellenbosch University

---

### Abstract

*The purpose of this article is to investigate the explicit and implicit use of the concept 'human dignity' in the theological discourse against apartheid in the Dutch Reformed family of churches. Specifically its use during the Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa in 1975, within the Broederkring and during the Synods of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in 1978 and 1982 is investigated. It is argued that the term 'human dignity' was consistently formulated from a specifically Christological point of view and can be distinguished from its use in more general human rights discourses of the twentieth century.*

**Key Words:** Apartheid, Dutch Reformed Churches, Church Struggle, Broederkring, Belhar

### Introduction

There is no clear consensus on the definition of human dignity. The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) seems to provide a more negative explanation, namely freedom from fear and freedom from want. My purpose here will be to consider whether recent church debates in South Africa provide any (implicit) ideas regarding the meaning of human dignity. I will focus on the theological discourse against apartheid as it developed in the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) family.

A survey of the literature shows that the term, 'human dignity', occurs in official church documents from the mid-1970s and although it is never defined, I will argue here that it is understood and employed in a specifically Christological fashion. The first explicit reference to human dignity was made by a commission of the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA) in 1975. It was subsequently taken up by an informal body of anti-apartheid DRC ministers called the Broederkring and finally formulated in relation to the work of Christ by the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) by 1982.

### 'Human Dignity' and the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa Synod of 1975

The DRCA synod of 1971 commissioned a study on race relations in South Africa in response to a study on race relations that was being conducted by the white DRC, which eventually led to the *Ras, Volk en Nasie*<sup>1</sup> report of 1974. *Ras, Volk en Nasie* was an attempt to defend the system of apartheid in church and society along biblical lines. An *ad hoc* commission, to study the Bible and the relationships between races and peoples, was established by the DRCA for the purpose of the proposed study. This commission tabled its

---

<sup>1</sup> *Ras, volk en nasie en volkereverhoudinge in die lig van die Skrif.*

report at the 1975 DRCA synod. A translation of the report was made afterwards and published under the title *The Bible and the relationships between races and peoples* (DRCA, n.d.). This final publication consisted of an introduction and six further chapters.

The introductory chapter explains that the matter was investigated by searching the Scriptures, but also by moving beyond a theoretical level “to the circumstances in which members of the [DRCA] were living in order to apply the Scriptural information concretely.” Furthermore, the report was intended not as a final word on the matter, but “as a contribution to an honest and frank debate between the churches of the DR family of Churches and their members.” Hence, as long as this debate continued, it concluded, “the hope continues that this family of churches may in future speak with one mouth and with one voice on these matters” (DRCA, n.d.).

The ensuing chapters consider the concepts of people, race and nation in the light of Scripture; race relations from a biblical perspective; the position of the church amongst the nations; biblical-ethical norms for relations between people; obstacles in the relations between people in the South African context; and the task of the church and the state in human relations in South Africa. After brief etymological and conceptual remarks on the terms race, people and nation, the second chapter affirms that ‘race’ does not appear in the Bible. The terms ‘people’ (*volk*) and ‘nation’ do appear, but never in a ‘clear technical sense.’ Some hermeneutical principles are derived from this to guide the remainder of the study: Firstly, it notes that Scripture is not a scientific handbook. Secondly, “Scripture is primarily concerned with the relationships between God and [human beings], with the proclamation of the way of salvation and the coming of the Kingdom.” Finally, this statement implies that “the acts of the people of God must be seen in this light, and cannot simply be transferred to any existing people in its relationship to other peoples (DRCA, n.d.).”

The third chapter comprises the major part of the report. It affirms the ‘unity of the human race’ as a fundamental principle throughout the Old and New Testaments. This is expressed in the creation narratives and in the various genealogies of the Old Testament. Throughout these texts, common ancestry and “the complete equality of the generations” are maintained, which leads to the statement: “Ethnocentrism is broken down here.” The “God-willed differentiation” between people “never erases the fundamental unity and there are no races or peoples who are fundamentally inferior or different in comparison with others” (DRCA, n.d., pp. 11-12). This is maintained in the New Testament. The chapter then devotes much attention to texts that were used by DRC theologians to support apartheid: Genesis 10 and 11; the unity of the nations as they fill the earth (Gen 10) remains primary, it states, since it is a fulfilment of God’s blessing on Noah in Genesis 9:1 to be fruitful and multiply. This is also not denied by the New Testament which, it states, “combines the unity and diversity of nations in Acts 17:26.” The sin of the Tower of Babel was therefore not the striving for unity, but “the aims of the builders, i.e. ‘... and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad’ ... did not regard God in this.” Therefore, humanity was dispersed, but Israel would remain the focus point of history: “Israel, the people of God, in other words, the Church, has a special task in bringing about the unity of the nations,” as also emphasised by the outpouring of the Spirit in Acts 2 (DRCA, n.d., pp. 12-16).

The remainder of the chapter deals with the history of Israel and of the prophets in so far as it relates to relations between peoples. Various conclusions are drawn, including that diversity in Scripture is not absolute and that the boundaries between nations can change (and when it does “the principle of justice must be taken into account”). Mixed marriages are also shown not to be against Scripture and therefore “[the] Synod requests the

Government to repeal the law [prohibiting mixed marriages] on fundamental grounds” (DRCA, n.d., pp. 39-41).

In the fourth chapter the special calling of “the Church amongst the nations” is stated to be the unity in Christ – “a fellowship in faith that transcends all barriers” – as both indicative and imperative. The church does not deny diversity: “the natural diversity of peoples and nations remains within the church of Christ, but is sanctified by him ... [diversity] will never lead to spiritual separation.” As such, pluriformity in the church relates to the diversity of gifts in the church, which remains in the service of the unity of the church. In preserving both diversity and unity, the priority remains to establish the kingdom of God in every community. Where this means that groups establish their own church organisations, the chapter concludes that, “care must be taken that no harm is done to the unity of the church,” because “differentiation in the church must not lead to separation.” Therefore, “church services must be open to all who sincerely wish to worship” (DRCA, n.d., pp. 42-50).

The fifth chapter discusses a range of biblical norms “as basis of all human relations.” The church has the task of instilling these norms in its members and proclaiming them in society. Four of the principles are copied directly from the DRC’s *Ras, Volk en Nasie* report (1975, pp. 25-26), namely love (*ahab*, Matt 22:37-40), justice (*sedaka*, in the sense of letting justice be done, e.g. Deut 14:34, but also the righteousness of Christ and compassion, e.g. 1 Cor 1:30; 2 Cor 5:21), truth (*emet*, in its meanings of steadfastness, sincerity, honesty, e.g. 2 Kings 20:19, Prov 12:19, but also in the more judicial sense of justice and righteousness, e.g. Zech 7:9) and finally peace (*shalom*, meaning well-being, also in a socio-political sense, e.g. Num 6:26) (DRCA, n.d., pp. 51-53). However, a principle not employed in *Ras, Volk en Nasie* is added as the very first principle, namely human dignity. This principle is derived from two related biblical texts:

Because God created man [sic] in his image (Gen 1:28) nobody may despise another on the grounds of faith, cultural or racial differences. Because peoples and nations are equal before God, He shows no partiality (Acts 10:34; Rom 2:11; Eph 6:9; Gal 2:6, etc.) People who impair the human dignity of another, usually do it out of superiority, which is unbiblical, and injures the feelings of the other person to such an extent, that tension results. ... [Such] attitudes can be seen in our society in South Africa and are strongly condemned in the light of Scripture on the grounds of the human dignity of all people. To be treated with dignity is one of the major needs of the Black man in our country (DRCA, n.d. p. 51).

Chapter six provides a brief outline of the South African context ‘against its historical background,’ focusing on the division and awarding of land, the political exclusion of blacks and major social problems such as migrant labour, wage structures and black dependency. The norms outlined above were then applied to critique this situation. As far as the principles of human dignity and love are concerned the report expresses its sorrow at “situations where the dignity of Blacks is injured, for instance with regard to such matters as common worship, the forms of address, facilities for worshipping in white areas, ‘pass laws’, etc.” (DRCA, n.d., p. 61).

The final chapter discusses the different tasks of the church and of the state. The task of the church, it says, is firstly to proclaim the gospel to its members, but secondly to proclaim this in all spheres of life and also to the state. This implies the need to “warn whenever injustice is done in the implementation of current policy and in the application of the laws of the country.” The task of the state is to maintain order and ensure justice for all in accordance with the norm of love. The church’s relation to the state must be one of

obedience to its authority, “provided the legal order does not conflict with the Word of God.” In conclusion, five tasks of the church are reiterated: the church has a proclamation task, which includes a prophetic witness; it has a serving or diaconical task, which includes becoming involved in people’s political aspirations (also “giving help and pastoral care to the families of political prisoners”); it also has “a koinonial task or a calling to communion”, which implies that the reconciliation of Christ be made visible in the church and the community; it has an intercessory task; and finally, the report concludes that the church must obey the state and pray for the state, which in return has the task of bringing about peace and stability (DRCA, n.d., pp. 62-66).

The report was ahead of its time in many ways, as it sought a thorough investigation of the interpretation of Scripture, especially in the texts that were typically used to defend apartheid. This led to the emphasis on the unity of the church as a fundamental ecclesiological principle. It also had a clear hermeneutical character by surveying the socio-political conditions of its members in South Africa (criticising the state’s policy for endorsing inequality and discrimination against black people) and also by emphasising the need for further discussion and negotiation. Of great importance was also the report’s incorporation of human dignity, based on the *imago Dei* concept, as a primary principle and what it called the “unity of the human race”.

### **‘Human Dignity’ and the Broederkring**

In 1974, the so-called ‘Broederkring’ (BK) was established among black DRC ministers and members as “a seriously considered and concerted effort to organise for a biblical, Reformed and relevant witness in the struggle for justice, liberation and reconciliation within the DRC family context” (Mokgoebo, 1984:14).

The emphasis on a biblical response to the day-to-day experiences of apartheid in church and society was prominent in many of the discussions of the BK. In time, they organised themselves into different regional bodies and whenever a meeting was held it would start with Bible study, but specifically to read the Bible from within their context of oppression and their struggle against injustice. This emphasis on the Bible found expression in the main vision of the BK, namely the unity of the DRC family of churches. The goals of the BK were expressed in five points: (1) to work towards organic church unity in the DRC family on the levels of congregations, presbyteries and synod (and not merely on synodical level, as was discussed in the Federal Council); (2) to earnestly consider the prophetic office of the church with regards to the oppressive structures and laws in South Africa, as well as the priestly office with regards to the sacrifices that these unchristian politics bring, which includes the oppressor who lives in the grip of fear; (3) to make the kingly reign of Christ triumph over the ideology of ‘apartheid’ or ‘separate development’ or any other ideology, so that all inhabitants of South Africa may live in human dignity; (4) to bring about the gospel’s liberation of the church and the state, which includes liberation from injustice, inhumanity, alienation and lovelessness; and (5) to support the ecumenical movement in establishing the reign of Christ in all areas of life, and beyond that to lend support to all organisations inside and outside South Africa who aim for the above goals (Nordholt, 1983, p. 28). Elsewhere, the aims of the BK have been summarized as “achieving structural church unity, helping to dismantle apartheid in society, and doing so as part of the ecumenical movement in South Africa” (Kritzinger, 1984:8).

In 1979, the BK executive issued a ‘Theological Declaration’ as a statement of faith for their members. It was in the form of a confession and included four statements:

1. We believe in the God and Father of Jesus Christ who upholds the whole universe by his Word and Spirit. He struggles for his own righteousness with regard to God and fellow man. In this respect God chooses constantly for his own righteousness and consequently stands on the side of those who are victims of injustice.
2. We believe that God reveals Himself in his Word as the One who throughout history in his relationship to men binds Himself to his own justice in order to make the world a place to live in. His life-giving Word became man in Christ Jesus, through whom He breaks the power of injustice. By His Spirit He gives people the possibility to again live in obedience to his Word.
3. We believe that God gathers for Himself in this world a new people who consist of men and women He has liberated from oppressive powers through Jesus Christ. This people of God has the responsibility to live as the one undivided body of Christ. As God's property the church must be busy standing where God stands viz. against injustice and with those who are denied justice. To fulfil this task it is necessary that the church should constantly search after the truth of God's Word. This is true especially because we owe greater obedience to Christ than to human governments, power or ideologies.
4. In our South African situation this means that we as part of the church of Christ in this world should unflinchingly persevere for establishing God's justice. The church may, in faithful allegiance to its Head, Jesus Christ, come into conflict with human authorities. If the church has to suffer in the process we know that this is part of the way of God's people through history and that the word of Christ remains in force, 'I will never leave you or forsake you' (Heb 13:5) (*Broederkring: Theological Declaration*, 1979).

Here the purpose of the church was identified strongly with the justice of God, which implies unity ("to live as the one undivided body of Christ") and taking the side of the oppressed ("standing ... against injustice and with those who are denied justice") even when this brings the church "into conflict with human authorities." A key argument here was the reign of Christ over all spheres of life – not only the spiritual, but also the social and political – as the actualisation of human dignity.

### **'Human Dignity' and the Dutch Reformed Mission Church Synods of 1978 and 1982**

The 1978 and 1982 synods of the DRMC were decisive in the formulation of a theology against apartheid. At the 1978 meeting, the first official synodical decision against the policy of apartheid in its entirety was adopted. This decision came as a result of the incorporation of the DRMC seminary into the University of the Western Cape in 1973. The theology students were taught about 'black theology' and encouraged to critically reflect and debate on apartheid. These students were exposed to much political protest against apartheid on the campus, and these classes helped to shape their theological critique against apartheid. The arguments became constructed around the concept of reconciliation. One of the students, Russel Botman, has told the story as follows:

Unknown to many, modest discussions in a class of Prof. Jaap Durand ... played a formative role in the embryonic phase of the debate on reconciliation and apartheid in South Africa. Jaap Durand was then professor of Systematic Theology and taught a class of which I was a member. On a certain day in 1978 a discussion ensued where we asked what the theological crux of the sin of apartheid was. We had spent many hours before then debating the ethical injustices of apartheid and now wanted to trace all of that knowledge to its theological centre. From this debate emerged the proposal 'that apart-

heid was inherently against the gospel' and the reason for this was found in its 'point of departure'. 'Apartheid,' we said, '[proceeds] from the irreconcilability of people'. Needless to say Jaap Durand played a formative role in constructing the text in our thoughts (Botman, 1996).

The notion that apartheid had the irreconcilability of people as its point of departure – as opposed to the gospel's emphasis on the reconciliation of all people in Christ – resonated in the circles of the young churches of the DRC family. It became a central motif also in the anti-apartheid theology within the DRC.<sup>2</sup>

After their debate the students wished to see their proposal taken further. Durand then approached JJF Mettler and IJ Mentor, two established leaders in the DRMC, who agreed to sign a discussion point to synod, drafted by Durand. The discussion point 152 on 'Apartheid Policy' was referred to a temporary commission, which suggested minor editorial changes. The final decision, which was approved by synod after some discussion, read as follows:

The DRMC reconfirms its deepest conviction that the Church ought not design or prescribe party political policy. According to its prophetic calling the Church is however obliged to criticise and object when a government follows a policy or policies that cannot uphold the demands of the gospel, especially if the government claims to be a Christian government. The Church wants to express its conviction that the apartheid policy and/or separate development, as maintained by the government, is contrary to the gospel:

- because over and against the gospel of Christ's directedness on the reconciliation of human beings with God *and* with one another, the forced separation of people on grounds of race and colour is based at the deepest level on the conviction of the fundamental irreconcilability between people who are thus separated;
- because the system that has arisen out of such a policy necessarily had to and did lead to an increasing polarisation between people, especially since the practice has irrefutably shown that within the system one population group, namely the whites, is advantaged and that consequently the gospel's demand of justice for all is not fulfilled; and
- because thereby the human dignity of not only the disadvantaged populations, but the human dignity of all involved is affected (*Acta Synodi NGSK 1978*, pp. 399-400, 559, 618-619).

The notion that the human dignity of those in power is also affected by apartheid was hereby introduced and was repeated in a number of further statements from the DRMC and the DRC.

The year 1982 was of great importance in the theological struggle against apartheid. The World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) Assembly in Ottawa was attended by a number of black and white South African DRC theologians. Allan Boesak was elected president of WARC and apartheid was given a central place on the agenda. The conference issued a "Resolution on Racism and South Africa."<sup>3</sup> The point of departure was human dignity and reconciliation in Christ. "God in Jesus Christ", it opened, "has affirmed human dignity. Through his life, death and resurrection he has reconciled people to God and to themselves." It further stated: "The gospel of Jesus Christ, demands ... a community of

---

<sup>2</sup> See Durand (1982) for an elaboration on the distinction between apartheid's presumption of "irreconciliation" as opposed to the Gospel's notion of reconciliation in Christ.

<sup>3</sup> The document is available in De Gruchy and Villa-Vicencio (1983:168-172). Citations to follow are from this source.

believers which transcends all barriers of race – a community in which the love for Christ and for one another has overcome the divisions of race and colour. The gospel confronts racism, which is in its very essence a form of idolatry.” From this perspective, apartheid in society and in the church was discussed as one such “pseudo-religious ideology,” which it said was in direct contradiction to the promises of God for his world and for his church. “These promises, clearly proclaimed by the prophets and fulfilled in Christ, are peace, justice and liberation. They contain good news for the poor and deliverance for the oppressed, but also God’s judgment on the denial of rights and the destruction of humanity and community.” Therefore, the churches of the Reformed confession had the responsibility to present the “concrete manifestation of community among races, of common witness to injustice and equality in society, and of unity at the table of the Lord.” In this, the DRC and the Nederduits Hervormde Kerk (NHK), “in not only accepting, but actively justifying the apartheid system by misusing the gospel and the Reformed confession,” were judged to “contradict in doctrine and in action the promise which they profess to believe.” Thus, the meeting declared “that apartheid (‘separate development’) is a sin, and that the moral and theological justification of it is a travesty of the gospel, and in its persistent disobedience to the word of God, a theological heresy.” The sin of apartheid was fourfold:

- it is based on a fundamental irreconcilability of human beings, thus rendering ineffective the reconciling and uniting power of our Lord Jesus Christ;
- in its application through racist structures it has led to exclusive privileges for the white section of the population at the expense of the blacks; and
- it has created a situation of injustice and oppression, large-scale deportation causing havoc to family life, and suffering to millions.
- apartheid (‘separate development’) ought thus to be recognized as incurring the anger and sorrow of the God in whose image all human beings are created.

The direct connection between human dignity and reconciliation in Christ is most clearly expressed in this document. This was reiterated at the 1982 DRMC synod just a few weeks after the WARC assembly. The synod had appointed a Temporary Commission for Ecumenical Relations to respond to WARC. The report of this commission<sup>4</sup> dealt extensively with the decision of the WARC Assembly. It restated and further developed the principle of irreconcilability that underpinned apartheid and how especially the church, more than any other body, had to oppose this: “Indeed, irreconcilability stands over and against the idea of reconciliation, [which is] the life artery [*hartaar*] of the Christian gospel and therefore the life artery of the existence and the proclamation of the church.” The emphasis was therefore on the church as “a reconciled community of people, a united community”, which bears witness to “new hope and a new possibility for the world.” Of particular interest was its refusal to base this rejection of apartheid on single Bible verses; this was explained as follows:

We do not offer one or more Bible texts. One can jump around too easily with Bible texts, so much so that it was even possible for years to maintain that apartheid is Scriptural on the grounds of only two [texts]: the story of the tower of Babel (Gen 11: 1-9) and Acts 17:26. No! The touchstone for apartheid is the central biblical message of reconciliation. If it fails here, single disparate texts cannot save it. In fact, then the traditional exegesis of such texts also becomes fundamentally questionable.

A further critique against apartheid by the 1978 synod – that apartheid polarised society by advancing the interests of one population group to the disadvantage of others – was restated as against the gospel’s demand of equal justice for all people. Unequal justice also affects

---

<sup>4</sup> *Acta Synodi NGSK 1982:704-720*. Citations to follow are from this source, translated, unless otherwise stated.

the human dignity, not only of the deprived, but of all involved. Racism, the report continued, “fosters a false feeling of superiority and is based on the presupposition that character and ability are determined by race.” As such, it “disavows the reconciling and humanising work of Christ” and therefore apartheid “is a pseudo-religious ideology as well as a political policy.” The ideology of apartheid prevents the ninth article of the Apostolic Confession – “I believe in the one holy catholic apostolic church, the community of saints” – to “determine the practice of church structure.” This “secular gospel of apartheid,” the report concluded, “structures the being and the bond of the Dutch Reformed Churches in South Africa.” Hence, the report proposed that the decisions of WARC on a *status confessionis* be endorsed – apartheid was a sin, its moral and theological justification made a mockery of the gospel, and its continued disobedience to the Word of God was a theological heresy.

Finally, the same synod drafted the Confession of Belhar, which placed the reconciling work of Christ as its central message. Two of its articles formulate this conviction. The second article points to Christ and his reconciling work as the special gift and calling of the church. God grants victory over division and enmity, which opens up hope and new possibilities in the world. The church is an instrument of this (which is illustrated with various images) and must therefore oppose forced separation between people. Again, in conclusion, any doctrine that sanctions such separation in the name of the gospel or of God is rejected:

We believe that God has entrusted to his Church the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ; that the Church is called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world; that the Church is called blessed because it is a peacemaker; that the Church is witness both by word and by deed to the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Cor 5:17-21, Mt 6:13-16, Mt 5:9, 2 Pet 3:13, Rev 21-22):

- that God by his life-giving Word and Spirit has conquered the powers of sin and death, and therefore also of irreconciliation and hatred, bitterness and enmity that God, by his life-giving Word and Spirit will enable His people to live in a new obedience which can open new possibilities of life for society and the world (Eph 4:17, Eph 6:23, Rom 6, Col 1:9-14, Col 2:13-19, Col 3:1, Col 4:6);
- that the credibility of this message is seriously affected and its beneficial work obstructed when it is proclaimed in a land which professes to be Christian, but in which the enforced separation of people on a racial basis promotes and perpetuates alienation, hatred and enmity;
- that any teaching which attempts to legitimate such forced separation by appeal to the gospel, and is not prepared to venture on the road of obedience and reconciliation, but rather, out of prejudice, fear, selfishness and unbelief, denies in advance the reconciling power of the gospel, must be considered ideology and false doctrine.

*Therefore, we reject any doctrine which, in such a situation sanctions in the name of the gospel or of the will of God the forced separation of people on the grounds of race and colour and thereby in advance obstructs and weakens the ministry and experience of reconciliation in Christ.*

In the third article, the principles of justice and peace are introduced as central to the character and purpose of God. This justice is granted especially to the vulnerable and to those from whom justice is withheld in society. To this the church must also be true, and therefore any ideology that legitimates injustice is rejected:

We believe that God has revealed himself as the One who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among people; that in a world full of injustice and enmity He is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged and that He calls his Church to follow Him in this; that He brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to

the hungry; that He frees the prisoner and restores sight to the blind; that He supports the downtrodden, protects the stranger, helps orphans and widows and blocks the path of the ungodly; that for Him pure and undefiled religion is to visit the orphans and the widows in their suffering; that He wishes to teach His people to do what is good and to seek the right (Dt 32:4, Lk 2:14, Jn:27, Eph 2:14, Is 1:16-17, Jas 1:27, Jas 5:1-6, Lk 1:46-55, Lk 6:20-26, Lk 7:22, Lk 16:19-31, Ps 146, Lk 4:16-19, Rom 6:13-18, Am 5):

- that the Church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that the Church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream;
- that the Church as the possession of God must stand where He stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged; that in following Christ the Church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others.

*Therefore, we reject any ideology which would legitimate forms of injustice and any doctrine which is unwilling to resist such an ideology in the name of the gospel.*

### **Voices against Apartheid from within the Dutch Reformed Church**

It is clear that the link between human dignity and reconciliation was by this stage well established. Hence, DRC expressions of human dignity also immediately referred to reconciliation, as in the 1982 *Ope Brief* (Serfontein, 1982) and the 1986 *Church & Society* (1987) document. These documents repeated the reference to reconciliation and unity in the church and made no further effort to interpret the meaning of human dignity. Before 1982, the concept of human dignity does not seem to have played any direct role in those voices in the DRC that did attempt to criticise apartheid.

### **Conclusion**

Hence, it is difficult to argue that recent church debates in South Africa included a concerted effort to provide a definition of human dignity, apart from the initial reference to the image of God and the equality of all human beings. It is even more difficult to trace direct lines between the human rights discourse on human dignity and the DRC's anti-apartheid theology's utilisation of the term. It may be possible to establish such a link in the broader church involvement in the struggle against apartheid, but that would require a separate study.

However, what does seem to be clear is that human dignity was clearly associated with the concept of the reign of Christ and particularly to reconciliation in Christ (as opposed to the 'irreconciliation' proposed by apartheid theology). This provides some interesting points of departure when reflecting on human dignity within the South African and the African context.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

*Acta Synodi NGSK 1978.*

*Acta Synodi NGSK 1982.*

Botman, HR 1996. Narrative challenges in a situation of transition. In HR Botman and RM Peterson (eds.). *To remember and to heal. Theological and psychological reflections on truth and reconciliation* (pp. 37-44). Cape Town: Human & Rousseau.

*Broederkring: Theological Declaration 1979.* Retrieved June 15, 2005, from <http://www.ngkerk.org.za/abid>.

*Church and Society. A testimony of the Dutch Reformed Church 1987.* Bloemfontein: Pro Christo Publishers.

De Gruchy, JW & Villa-Vicencio, C (eds.) 1983. *Apartheid is a heresy.* Cape Town: David Philip.

DRCA (n.d). *The Bible and the relationships between races and people. A report by the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa.* Bloemfontein: NG Sendingpers.

Durand, JF 1982. Die kerk se profetiese roeping: Kommentaar op deel 2 van die Ope Brief. In DJ Bosch, A König & W Nicol (eds.). *Perspektief op die Ope Brief*, (pp. 66-75). Cape Town: Human & Rousseau.

Kritzinger, JNJ 1984. From Broederkring to Belydende Kring. What's in a name? In SP Govender (ed.). *Unity and Justice. The witness of the Belydende Kring* (pp. 5-12). Braamfontein: Belydende Kring.

Mokgoebo, ZE 1984. Broederkring. From 1974 to .....? In SP Govender (ed.). *Unity and Justice. The witness of the Belydende Kring* (pp. 13-18). Braamfontein: Belydende Kring.

Nordholt, H-H (ed.) 1983. *Apartheid und Reformierte Kirche. Dokumente eines Konflikts.* Neukirchener-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag.

*Ras, volk en nasie en volkereverhoudinge in die lig van die Skrif (RVN) 1975.* Cape Town: NG Kerk-Uitgewers.

Serfontein, JHP 1982. *Apartheid, change and the NG Kerk.* Johannesburg: Taurus.

*Universal Declaration of Human Rights.* (1948). Retrieved May 1, 2009, from <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>