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## Sunday Morning - The Most Segregated Hour

On Racial Reconciliation as Unfinished Business for Theology  
in South Africa and Beyond

Inaugural lecture delivered upon accepting the position of VU University  
Amsterdam Desmond Tutu Chair holder in the areas of Youth, Sports and  
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Sir, as one Christian to another, for through our common baptism we have been made member of and are united in the Body of our dear Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. This Jesus Christ, whatever we may have done, has broken down all that separates us irrelevantly – such as race, sex, culture, status, etc. In this Jesus Christ we are forever bound together as one redeemed humanity, black and white together.<sup>1</sup>

St. Paul waxes quite indignant when he thinks the unity of the Christian community has been jeopardized or undermined. ... He stresses the unity, the harmony, the oneness. It is a body in which the natural distinctions of race, sex, culture are of no moment any longer. They have been transcended in Jesus Christ our Lord. He mentions this fact first in 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 and then again in Galatians 3: 26-28.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> D. Tutu, in a open letter of May 6, 1976 to the then prime minister, John Vorster, in D. Tutu, *The Rainbow People of God: The Making of a Peaceful Revolution*, New York etc.: Doubleday, 1994, 7.

<sup>2</sup> D. Tutu in his capacity as the then Secretary General of the South African Council of Churches defending the SACC before a state commission of inquiry, *The Rainbow People of God*, 63.

Mijnheer de Rector, dames en heren,

Since I have the honor of being appointed as the Desmond Tutu Chair on Youth, Sports and Reconciliation at the Faculty of Theology, it appears that I am predestined to speak about the topic of reconciliation. I accept this destiny with joy and will use this opportunity to speak to you about racial reconciliation. Politicians attempt to avoid this sensitive topic because they consider it one of those identity issues that have divisive potential. I will argue that churches, and religions in general, tend to do the same. So, I will present today—in the aula of VU University Amsterdam—what they might not prefer to hear in parliaments and synods.

Let me just remind you of what happened last year to the then senator and presidential candidate Barack Obama. During his election campaign, the media focused on the color of his skin, while Obama avoided doing so. He wanted people to vote for him, not because he was black, but because he was the right man for the job. However, the media published excerpts from old sermons of Reverend Jeremy Wright Jr. of Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago where Obama and his family were committed members. In these sermons Rev. Wright criticized the racist and nationalist policies of the US.

On the defensive, Obama delivered the most important speech of his campaign: *A More Perfect Union*. In this speech Obama indicated that he wanted to go beyond identity politics. He tried to explain his pastor's remarks in the context of the still widely racially segregated congregational life in the USA by saying that, "The fact that so many people are surprised to hear that anger in some of Reverend Wright's sermons simply reminds us of the old truism that the most segregated hour in American life occurs on Sunday morning".<sup>3</sup> So finally, it was his church membership that forced Obama to speak out more clearly on an issue he had tried to avoid.

This leads us to some important questions. Why is Sunday morning the most segregated hour? Is this only an American and perhaps South African racism issue which Europeans think they left behind after the Second World War? And is this also the most racially segregated hour in South Africa? These are intriguing questions that stimulate theological reflection. Therefore, we first need to discover whether race is still an issue in South African culture and faith communities. My argument is that theological uncertainty contributes to the ongoing racially segregated religious practice.

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<sup>3</sup> Barack Obama, "A More Perfect Union – March 18, 2008", *The New York Times* *Obama: the Historical Journey*, New York: Callaway, 2009, 107.

The theology of the church, guided by its creedal confession as being one and catholic, does not know how to account for human social diversity.

It is relevant to study these issues—not merely for religions and theology in South Africa, but for Christian churches and theology worldwide. It is also important for the understanding of the relationship between religions and social identities in general. To say it in different words: racial, ethnic and national identities are unfinished ecclesial and ecclesiological business for Christian churches all over the world.<sup>4</sup> In this respect, South Africa is an important case study that has global implications.

### **Racial reconciliation in South Africa as a national challenge**

For those with an outsider's perspective on South Africa, it might be a surprise that even today the country has not overcome its racial apartheid legacy. The way that the Republic of South Africa reinvented itself—by making a transition from a racist state to the rainbow nation that now celebrates its racial diversity—has been welcomed worldwide. The political and spiritual wisdom provided by former President Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu has set a new standard for leadership in countries in situations of transitional justice. The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) is by far the best known of truth commissions and has become the main reference point for new ones.<sup>5</sup> Notwithstanding the enormous amount of international attention for the departure from apartheid, race is still an issue in South Africa. The rainbow

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<sup>4</sup> I have borrowed the expression 'unfinished business' from the South African context, where it became a fixed expression in the aftermath of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It refers to issues such as the prosecution of those who where either denied amnesty or refused to apply for it, or to the reparations for those found to be victims of gross violations of human rights. It also relates to the problem of access to the TRC archives, and finally, it is used as a broad term referring to the still unfinished task of national reconciliation. See C. Villa-Vincencio and F. Du Toit (eds.), *Truth & Reconciliation in South Africa: 10 years on*, Claremont: David Philip, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> P. Hayner, "Same species, different animal: how South Africa compares to truth commissions worldwide", in C. Villa-Vicencio, W. Verwoerd, *Looking Back Reaching Forward: Reflections on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa*, Cape Town: Cape Town University Press, 2000, 32-41, indicated four characteristics that made the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission different from other truth commissions: its amnesty granting power, the quality of the public hearings, the manner in which the terms of the commission were crafted, and the overriding focus on reconciliation as a primary goal of its work.

nation monitors the state of its racial reconciliation and is not satisfied with the current results.

Before dealing with the current indicators of racial reconciliation, let me remove the misunderstanding that the TRC was successful in this matter. The TRC did not deal with the race issue in a thorough way. The mandate given to the commission was to focus on the cases of gross human right violations in the period between 1 March 1960 and 6 December 1993.<sup>6</sup> Of course, racism was an important cause for gross human right violations, but these violations constituted only the proverbial tip of the racism iceberg. Discussing its mandate, the Commission wrote in its report: “There were cases in which people were victims of racist attack by individuals who were not involved with a publicly known political organisation and where the incident did not form part of the specific political conflict. Although racism was at the heart of the South African political order, and although such cases were clearly a violation of the victim’s right, such violations did not fall within the Commission’s mandate”.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, the time limit of thirty years, covering the high tide of violent repressive apartheid governments, constitutes a complicating factor for an in-depth coverage of racism. Racial tensions and racism have been deeply imbedded in South African culture and economy for centuries. In the “Foreword by Chairperson to the TRC Report”, Archbishop Emeritus Tutu indicated that racism far extended the apartheid era. “Racism came to South Africa in 1652”.<sup>8</sup> That is the year in which Dutchman Jan van Riebeeck arrived near the Table Mountain.

In conclusion, the TRC did not have a mandate to expose the racial past of South Africa in a systematic way, and racism was not its focus. At the same time, its reports recognized racism as the major cause of violence in the apartheid era, and it recommended dealing with racism as a potential cause for continuing and increasing tensions in the new South Africa.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See for the text of the mandate of the Commission, the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act of 1995 in E. Doxtader and Ph.-J. Salazar (eds), *Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa: The Fundamental Documents*, Claremont: David Philip, 2007, 13-27, especially p. 14 on the objectives of the Commission.

<sup>7</sup> § 127 in ‘The Mandate’, *TRC Report Vol. 1*, 84.

<sup>8</sup> Desmond Tutu, “The Foreword by Chairperson”, *TRC Report Vol. 1*, 16: “This is not the same as saying that racism was introduced into South Africa by those who brought apartheid into being. Racism came to South Africa in 1652; it has been part of the warp and woof of South African society since then ...” (§ 65).

<sup>9</sup> In its recommendations, the Commission called on South Africans to commit themselves to reconciliation and unity, among others by addressing “the reality of ongoing racial discrimination and work towards a non-racial society”

This brings us back to the monitoring of racial reconciliation. The South African Reconciliation Barometer provides us with an indication of the perception and attitude of South Africans themselves with respect to this issue. Since 2003, this barometer is published yearly by the *Institute for Justice and Reconciliation*, a spin-off institute from the TRC.<sup>10</sup> The latest barometer of 2008<sup>11</sup> shows the six variables that are regularly monitored: human security, political culture, cross-cutting political relationships, dialogue, historical confrontation, and race relations. The conclusion reads: “Citizens felt economically less secure, physically more unsafe, and less confident about the future, particularly as such confidence pertains to relations between South Africans of different races”.<sup>12</sup>

Next to income inequality, the survey indicates race as the second source of division within the country. “Race, through historic political, financial and educational privilege, therefore continues to be a strong predictor of well-being, despite material advances of a steadily growing black middle class”.<sup>13</sup> The survey notes a general decline in optimism about the future of South Africa. However, the decline in relation to race relations is striking (see figure 6).

Again, I quote the survey: “Yet, the magnitude of the decrease in optimism towards the third measurement, relating to the peaceful coexistence of people of different races, has been the most surprising. The year-on-year decline of close to 20 per cent is significant and worrying,

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(“Recommendations”, *TRC Report Vol. 5*, 304). “Recognising that racism underlies many of the rifts and divisions still present in society, the commission recommends that government institutions as well as the private sector and civil society take all possible measures to overcome racism. Such measures should include policies and practices of transformation and development with regard to structures, culture and attitudes”.

(“Recommendations”, *TRC Report Vol. 5*, 308). See for a negative evaluation of the TRC’s dealing with racial reconciliation, H. van der Merwe and A. R. Chapman, “Did the TRC Deliver?”, in A.R. Chapman and H. van der Merwe (eds.), *Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa: Did the TRC Deliver?*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008, 260-3.

<sup>10</sup> In 2000, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) started in Cape Town with Tutu as patron in order to promote reconciliation, transitional justice, and democratic nation building in Africa by means of research, analysis, and political intervention. See the website of the Institute at <http://www.ijr.org.za>.

<sup>11</sup> The SA Reconciliation Barometer 2008 can be found at <http://www.ijr.org.za/politicalanalysis/reconbar/sarb-media-report-final.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> The SA Reconciliation Barometer 2008, 21.

<sup>13</sup> The SA Reconciliation Barometer 2008, 9.

given the fact that race and ethnicity does constitute significant faultlines within our society”.<sup>14</sup>

The figures are even more worrisome if one takes into consideration the increased basic contact and social interaction between the country’s four main constitutive groups: black, coloured, Indian, and white. They suggest that increased exposure does not necessarily lead to greater understanding between people from different backgrounds.<sup>15</sup>

Trying to explain this substantial decline in racial trust, the Barometer refers to the timing of the fieldwork phase of the survey—between March and May 2008, a period of a number of high-profile incidents culminating in xenophobic attacks in several cities.<sup>16</sup> But it concludes: “Regardless of its contributing factors, this measurement does suggest that public perception relating to the depth of the faultline of race has increased significantly”.<sup>17</sup>

These recent, less optimistic perceptions on race relations are confirmed by economic research into race and economic inequality. Blackness no longer automatically implies disadvantage. A new, black, African middle class has emerged. But this cannot conceal the fact that race categories continue to shape economic inequality in South Africa today, particularly among poor and working class black people. The official ‘non-racialism’ ideology of democracy tends to disguise the ongoing link between race and class.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, white households that were relatively poor under apartheid have experienced an absolute decline in their living standards.<sup>19</sup>

The outbursts of xenophobic violence in 2008 and 2009 confirm the anti-foreign sentiments previously existing among South Africans. Racialized physical markers such as skin color, dress, and language indicated

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<sup>14</sup> The SA Reconciliation Barometer 2008, 14.

<sup>15</sup> The SA Reconciliation Barometer 2008, 15.

<sup>16</sup> The SA Reconciliation Barometer 2008, 15. Reference is made to the Skierlik Massacre, where a young white man went on the rampage and killed four residents of the informal settlement, Skierlik, in January 2008, and to the notorious Reitz video at the University of the Free State in March 2008.

<sup>17</sup> The SA Reconciliation Barometer 2008, 15.

<sup>18</sup> The American political scientist M. MacDonald in *Why Race Matters in South Africa*, Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 2006 warns against the suggestion that the race issue is over because of the rise of a black middle class in South Africa and because of the official ‘non-racialism’ ideology of democracy. He exposes the continuing link between race and capital.

<sup>19</sup> Z. Erasmus, “Race and identity in the nation”, in J. Daniel, R. Southall & J. Lutchman (eds.), *State of the Nation South Africa 2004-2005*, Cape Town: Human Sciences Research Council Press, 2005, 9-33. Erasmus summarized economic research of Seekings and Nattrass; De Swardt and Bezuidenhout in 2002 and 2003, 11-14.

otherness.<sup>20</sup> Nowadays, the state also employs race categories in order to redress the inherited racial inequity. Race indications are instrumental in affirmative action, in black empowerment programs, and in the national census.

Some argue that race is best forgotten and ignored. The past must not be taken into account. The future should be the focus. The problem with this approach is that it leaves racialized inequalities untouched. Another common strategy is to understand race as the factor that determines everything we do and all that we are.<sup>21</sup>

The sociologist Zimitri Erasmus from Cape Town University, commenting on various strategies to deal with race, concludes that "... South Africans who are ready to prevent others from using the races as political resource for their own gain, all too often preserve their own right to do the very same".<sup>22</sup> She criticizes the accompanying discourse of those who condemn others for using and abusing race. She deconstructs the implied thinking that racism is a problem that can be fixed. Instead, she favors another approach to race that acknowledges that racialized scripts of reality and racialized scripts for behavior are normative in society rather than odd exceptions, and which recognizes complicity with racism and race thinking. Instead of denying racial identities, she argues for more vigilance about race thinking and for learning new ways of working and living with racialized identities and with race.<sup>23</sup>

In conclusion: what these data and analyses confirm is that race goes far beyond perception and that racial thought is still deeply imbedded in South African society. It continues to influence people's lives, and the struggle to bend racial inequality and exclusion is still long. Indeed, racial reconciliation is unfinished business in South Africa, and it might be for a long time to come.

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<sup>20</sup> Z. Erasmus, "Race and identity in the nation", 15-19.

<sup>21</sup> Z. Erasmus, "Race and identity in the nation", 24-8. Erasmus gives examples of speeches of former President Mbeki and refers to the racialized xenophobia.

<sup>22</sup> Z. Erasmus, "Race and identity in the nation", 28.

<sup>23</sup> Z. Erasmus, "Race and identity in the nation", 29-30. In her argumentation she refers to Paul Gilroy, one of the current theorists on race.

## **Racial reconciliation in South African Churches as an ecclesial challenge**

The next step of my argument concerns racial reconciliation as unfinished business for the churches in South Africa. Not only politicians but also the sectors of civil society have to squarely face this issue in order to come to terms with it. Faith communities constitute a major factor in South African society to whom many turn for spiritual and moral guidance.

In discussing the role of racism in faith communities, the outsider perspective might be misleading. During the apartheid era, many churches worldwide were involved in the anti-apartheid movement. They condemned the apartheid policies as racist and in contradiction to the Christian universal call for reconciliation with Christ. The *Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk* (The Dutch Reformed Church), which supported the apartheid regime of the National Party when it came to power in 1948, formed the notorious exception—to the embarrassment of the protestant churches worldwide. So, why should we discuss racial reconciliation in the churches in general?

The Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission offers a good first indication of the level to which faith communities were involved in apartheid policies. The TRC did not only investigate individual cases of gross human right violations, it also looked into the way institutions such as the health sector, the judiciary, the media, the business sector, and the penal system were involved in apartheid. Faith communities were also invited to reflect on their role in the apartheid era, and hearings were organized.<sup>24</sup>

The Report made important observations on “ecclesial apartheid”. Forty-one faith communities wrote submissions or gave representations in response to the invitation by the Commission. Among the Christian denominations, two Afrikaner churches reacted negatively; the *Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk* did not respond and the *Gereformeerde Kerke* decided not to participate.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> “Institutional Hearing: The Faith Community”, *TRC Report Vol. 4*, 59-92. A list of written materials received by the TRC from faith communities and a list of testimonies at the faith hearings can be found in J. Cochrane, J. de Gruchy & S. Martin (eds.), *Facing the Truth: South African faith communities and Truth & Reconciliation commission*, Claremont: David Philip, 1999, 191-8. For a report on the quality of the submissions, see also, ch. 10 “Wounded Healers”, in L.S. Graybill, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa: Miracle or Model?*, Boulder – London: L. Rienner Publishers, 2002, 133-44.

<sup>25</sup> Four individual theologians of the *Gereformeerde Kerke* did make a submission, see *TRC Report Vol. 4*, 60 (§ 5). The largest Afrikaner church, the Dutch Reformed Church, submitted a written contribution and presented itself at the hearings. For a critical

The report summarizes the faith communities' self-description of their relationship to apartheid. It describes how they acted as agents of oppression through acts of omission and through acts of commission and legitimization, such as active support of state policies and agents, involvement in state structures, suppression of dissidents, propagating state ideology, and providing military chaplains.

In my opinion, the strongest expression of influence by apartheid ideology on faith communities is what the report calls the "internalizing of racism". The most remarkable application constituted the division of denominations along racial lines—a practice not only occurring among the Afrikaner churches.

Despite their claim to loyalties that transcended the state, South African churches, whether implicitly or as a matter of policy, allowed themselves to be structured along racial lines – reinforcing the separate symbolic universes in which South Africans lived. Besides the Afrikaner churches and the Apostolic Faith Mission, the Lutheran Church, too, was racially divided; its white members consistently refused to join the unity movement that was to become the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Conservative-evangelical organizations were also affected by the climate of the country ... While the Seventh Day Adventist Church ... began to "pattern itself after the thinking of the politicians".<sup>26</sup>

The churches that were not officially racially divided were influenced in their internal practices as well.

... Some, such as the Salvation Army, confessed to tacit support of racism. And while the Catholics officially disavowed racial divisions, "effectively there was a black church and a white church". This was equally true of each of the English-speaking churches – it has been suggested that Sunday morning and evening constituted the most segregated hours of the week. ... Stipends were drastically different for black and white clergy, reinforcing racial stereotypes of lifestyle differences. ...<sup>27</sup>

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evaluation, see R. Botman, *The Offender and the Church*, in J. Cochrane, J. de Gruchy & S. Martin (eds.), *Facing the Truth*, 126-31.

<sup>26</sup> *TRC Report Vol. 4*, 68-9 (§ 42).

<sup>27</sup> *TRC Report Vol. 4*, 69 (§ 43). See also, J.W. De Gruchy, "Grappling with a Colonial Heritage: The English-speaking Churches under Imperialism and Apartheid", in R. Elphick and R. Davenport, *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social and Cultural History* Oxford-Cape Town: Currey – Philip, 1997, 155-72; J.W. De Gruchy, "The

The report explains that discrimination also existed outside Christianity, as Muslim representatives confessed. The Commission observed:

In most cases, faith communities claimed to cut across divisions of race, gender, class and ethnicity. As such, they would seem *by their very existence* to have been in opposition to the policies of the apartheid state, and in pursuing their own norms and values, to have constituted a direct challenge to apartheid policies. However, contrary to their own deepest principles, many faith communities mirrored apartheid society, giving the lie to their profession of a loyalty that transcended social divisions.<sup>28</sup>

In its conclusion, the commission, due to its nature, could not get involved in the internal restructuring of faith communities. However, advice addressing ecclesial apartheid can be found in the original report produced by the *Research Institute on Christianity in South Africa* at the request of the TRC. It was this document that would form the basis for the TRC's own final report on the institutional hearings with faith communities.<sup>29</sup>

The way to internal reconciliation for *de jure* and *de facto* racially divided groups within the same denominational family is, according to the report, through reunification with special attention for the socio-economic dimension of the split.<sup>30</sup> “The inter-institutional dimension of healing is very important. Healing institutional and denominational splits is more than simply an expression of doctrinal unity; it is the acid test for commitment to socio-economic transformation”.<sup>31</sup>

In interviews in 1999 and 2000, some South African religious leaders pointed to the racial composition of the churches as a reflection of the social divisions in society. They considered the mistrust within the churches to be the biggest obstacle for churches on the way to national reconciliation. At the same time, these internal divisions make the churches excellent laboratories for reconciliation.<sup>32</sup>

Chastening of the English-Speaking Churches in South Africa”, in W.E. Van Vugt and G.D. Cloete, *Race and Reconciliation in South Africa: A Multicultural Dialogue in Comparative Perspective*, Lanham e.a.: Lexington Books, 2000, 37-52.

<sup>28</sup> *TRC Report Vol. 4*, 65 (§ 29). The italics are original.

<sup>29</sup> “Faith Communities and Apartheid: The RICSA Report”, in J. Cochrane, et al. (eds.), *Facing the Truth*, 15-77.

<sup>30</sup> *Facing the Truth*, 61.

<sup>31</sup> *Facing the Truth*, 74.

<sup>32</sup> H. Van der Merwe, “The Role of the Church in Promoting Reconciliation in Post-TRC South Africa”, in A.R. Chapman and B. Spong (eds.), *Religion and Reconciliation in*

Social scientist Audrey Chapman summarizes the situation within the churches:

While faith communities frequently claimed to cut across divisions of race, gender, class, and ethnicity, in most cases they did not. Instead, they were (and continue to be) separated into racially and sometimes economically homogenous groupings both at a denominational and congregational level.<sup>33</sup>

When we are aware of this history of racism in the church and the impact of apartheid state policies on the church, the internalization of racism and apartheid within the ecclesial structures comes as no surprise. If the still unsuccessful attempts to unite the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa with the Dutch Reformed Church count as an indication of the difficulties of dealing with embedded racism, we may expect that the racial reconciliation process in the churches will be long and difficult. This is, again, unfinished business. One can fear that Sunday morning will continue to be the most segregated hour in South Africa as well as America for a long time coming.

### **Racial reconciliation in the South African Churches as an ecclesiological challenge**

In the case of the primarily Afrikaner church—the Dutch Reformed Church—the term ‘internalizing apartheid’ may not be correct because it suggests that apartheid was introduced through outside pressure. In reality, it was the other way around. The DRC externalized its own structures into society, even before they became the legal norm under the apartheid laws of the National Party governments after 1948. The DRC had its apartheid structures in place before that date.

The way in which the DRC developed policies of separate development in the 19<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are well documented.<sup>34</sup>

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*South Africa: Voices of Religious Leaders*, Philadelphia and London: Templeton Foundation Press, 2003, 269-281, esp. 275.

<sup>33</sup> A.R. Chapman, “Perspectives on Reconciliation within the Religious Community”, in A.R. Chapman and B. Spong (eds.), *Religion and Reconciliation in South Africa: Voices of Religious Leaders*, 282-301, quote from 298-9.

<sup>34</sup> An overview of this development with further literature references in J.C. Pauw, *Anti-apartheid theology in the Dutch Reformed Family of Churches: A depth-hermeneutical analysis*,

Before that time, from the arrival of Van Riebeeck in 1652 onwards, the *Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* had only allowed for one organized religion on its territory in the Cape—the Reformed Church, under the responsibility of the classis Amsterdam. Baptized non-whites became members of this permitted church. They had to sit at the back of the church, or were expected to take a place in the side sections or on the ground. They were, however, members of the one church where the Eucharist was shared together.

The prospect of having to welcome non-whites may have been an important reason for the white congregants' lack of interest in introducing their slaves or free Khoikhoi to the Christian faith. But after the British arrived at the end of the eighteenth century, other denominations than the Reformed Church were tolerated and an Afrikaner identity began to emerge as a response to a dreaded British takeover. Language, skin colour, and religion were major aspects of this new Afrikaner identity.

With respect to the Eucharist, the norm in the first half of the nineteenth century was: one Eucharist in one building. Requests to the synod to change this were turned down. The synod of 1857, however, did accommodate the request. New white members of a local congregation that consisted of members of Khoikhoi origin requested to have a separate Lord's Supper apart from the existing congregation. The synod gave its consent, awkwardly phrasing their motivation as "because of the weakness of some". Thereby they claimed biblical legitimacy by referring to Romans 14:1, while at the same time subtly admitting that this was a non-ideal solution.

The permission to have separate communion on the basis of the color of one's skin would open the way for separate congregations and, later on, separate synods.<sup>35</sup> In this way the construction of the apartheid structures in the church began more than ninety years before the start of its legal implementation in South African society.

A concept of separate worship for whites and non-whites was motivated by the fear of *gelijkstelling*—equalization of blacks and whites—and the 'nightmare scenario' of 'racial mixing'. The 19<sup>th</sup>-century racial concept of the superiorly developed white race and the fear of degeneration of that race by

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(dissertation defended at VU University Amsterdam on 7 September 2007, published on own account), 67-76.

<sup>35</sup> See, H.R. Botman, "The Offender and the Church", in *Facing the Truth*, 127-8. Also A. du Toit, "No Chosen People. The myth of the Calvinist Origins of Afrikaner Nationalism and Racial Ideology", in *American Historical Review* 88 (1983), 920-52; J. Gerstner, "A Christian Monopoly: The Reformed Church and Colonial Society under Dutch Rule", in R. Elphick and R. Davenport, *Christianity in South Africa*, 16-30.

mixing with so-called 'less developed' races were common in that era's hierarchy of races.

Of course, these arguments provided no biblical or theological justification. In the first half of the twentieth century a specific mission theology would be used to help in the construction of a theology that supported racial segregation within the churches. The so-called 'three selves' principles of Gustav Warneck and Henry Venn were also influential in South Africa through the evangelical Scottish missionary Andrew Murray. They stipulated that indigenous churches should be established as self-supporting, self-governing, and self-extending institutions. In this way a theological justification was found and presented to defend segregated denominational structures.

I have not only described the example of the history of the Dutch Reformed Churches in order to observe the special preparatory role played by this church in the development of the state apartheid structures in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. My primary goal is to focus on the importance of theology. Justification was required and offered for things that were not self-evident. Racially segregated churches were not self-evident. They contradicted the confession of the church as one. To say it differently: these ecclesial structures posed a specific theological question that is an *ecclesiological* challenge.

After all, imagine what would have happened in South Africa if in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Dutch Reformed Churches had concluded that these segregated church structures contradicted Christian ecclesial identity and had to be dismissed as heretical.<sup>36</sup> If theology in that context had successfully functioned as an instrument of internal critique, apartheid structures might never have received political acceptance within the National Party, nor within the ballot box of 1948. The unity of the church was at stake and was subsequently lost in segregated church structures. For this reason, the call for church unity within the Dutch Reformed Church family as an expression of racial reconciliation makes sense.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Not all theologians and church leaders within the DRC went along with apartheid structures in church and society. The most prominent among them was Beyers Naudé, who was forced to step down and was finally expelled.

<sup>37</sup> N. Koopman, "Towards Reconciliation and Justice in South Africa: Can Church Unity Make a Difference?", in S. Kim, P. Kollontai and G. Hoyland (eds.), *Peace and Reconciliation. In search of a shared identity*, Hampshire/Burlington: Ashgate, 2008, 95-109.

## Racial reconciliation as an ecclesiological challenge for world Christianity

The faith community hearings at the TRC disclosed how many other churches, next to the Afrikaner churches, internalized, in one way or another, apartheid ideology. This can be partly explained by strong state pressure. At the same time, however, it might also signal a potential vulnerability within Christian ecclesiology itself. I am convinced that this is the case and that racial reconciliation is an ecclesiological challenge for churches worldwide.

This might come as a surprise considering the role played by many churches in the struggle against apartheid. Indeed, after World War II the ecumenical movement would increasingly distance itself from this model of racially separated churches that was officially placed within the family of the Dutch Reformed Churches and criticize its theological justification. Numerous statements condemned racism. A program to combat racism was launched. South African churches that supported apartheid policies and implemented them in their own structures were confronted with suspension of their membership of ecumenical bodies.<sup>38</sup> The message was clear. Apartheid was a racist policy and in contradiction to the gospel message of the reconciliation of races. The condemnation of apartheid acquired *status confessionis* and racially segregated churches were condemned as heretic.

Churches currently profile themselves as public agents on the way to reconciliation. The World Council of Churches has welcomed the United Nations' call to observe 2009 as the International Year of Reconciliation. Reconciliation is one of the few words that originated from the Christian tradition which remains in the secularized vocabulary of modern politics.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> See A.J. van der Bent (ed.), *Breaking Down the Walls: World Council of Churches – Statements and Actions on Racism 1948-1985*, Geneva, WCC, 1986, and P. Webb (ed.), *A Long Struggle: the Involvement of the World Council of Churches in South Africa*, Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994. G. J. Hermann, *Apartheid als ökumenische Herausforderung: Die Rolle der Kirche im Südafrikakonflikt*, Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Otto Lembeck, 2006. The WCC commemorated the 40th anniversary of the Notting Hill Conference which laid the ground for the WCC Programme to Combat Racism (PCR) with a conference *Churches against Racism* 14-7 June 2009 in Doorn (the Netherlands).

<sup>39</sup> Colin Gunton, "Introduction" in C. Gunton (ed.), *The Theology of Reconciliation*, London – New York: T&T Clark, 2003, 1.

It is a central aspect of the Christian faith. Jesus Christ accomplished the renewal of our relationship with the triune God.<sup>40</sup>

Taking the commitments of many churches to the struggle against racism and apartheid and their contributions to reconciliation in the public sphere into account, the conviction that racial reconciliation is still a challenge within religions and churches themselves requires some explication.

To make my case, I will describe the way in which the 20<sup>th</sup>-century ecumenical movement dealt with social identities, including racial, national, and ethnic identities. The ecumenical movement is an interesting case for two reasons. It has a history of publicly condemning violence caused by racial, national, and ethnic tensions. At the same time, since the unity of the church is its core business, the ecumenical movement is the environment where resistance can be expected against attempts to link the Christian message and its denominations too closely to racial, national, and ethnic identities. These attempts would contradict the unity and the catholicity of the church.

A good example in this respect is the 1937 *Life and Work* conference in Oxford that exposed nationalism as a major catalyst to international conflict. The meeting gathered under the threatening cloud of an imminent war that was due to nationalistic profiling, especially by the German Nazi state. In the theme of the conference: *Church, Community, and State*, the word ‘community’ was the English translation of the German concept *Volk*. At that time, the notion had a clear racial undertone. So the conference dealt separately with *Volk* as nation and *Volk* as race.<sup>41</sup>

The conference was very critical regarding the church’s approach to race. First, it advised that the church raise its voice against racial pride, racial hatred and persecution, and the exploitation of other races in all its forms in society. The conference particularly referred to the sin of anti-Semitism. Second, racial discrimination leading to the exclusion of people or compulsory segregation in the church should be barred. This statement

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<sup>40</sup> See for the contributions on the public hearing organized by the WCC in Geneva 19 February 2009, the WCC website <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/themes/reconciliation.html>. Setri Nyomi, in his contribution, refers to South Africa after 1994 as a refreshing departure from actions that perpetuate a cycle of violence, and as a major contribution to reconciliation and healing.

<sup>41</sup> The conference produced a longer and a shorter report on the theme of “Church and Community”. They can be found in J.H. Oldham, *The Churches survey their task. The Report of the Conference at Oxford, July 1937, on Church, Community and State*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1937, 188-240 and 67-76. For an analysis, see E. Van der Borgh, “Oxford Revisited: A Re-reading of the Report on Church and Volk at the Life and Work Conference in Oxford 1937”, *Exchange* 33 (2004) 1-19.

offers an obvious condemnation of the practices in the Evangelical Church in Germany after the adoption of the Aryan clause. Within it some may have read a warning for the South African Dutch Reformed Churches against proceeding further on the road towards ecclesial racial segregation. Third, according to the conference, race, color, or social status barriers cannot be accepted in Christian homes. However, this advice in favor of social interaction should not be read as an approval of racially mixed marriages, because that might lead to “unfair handicaps on later generations”. This last remark expresses the still prevalent thinking of that time about the assumed biological dangers of racial mixing.

When *Volk* is understood in terms of ‘nation’, the approach is much less critical than when *Volk* is interpreted as ‘race’. The critical Christian approach to race has three theological fundamentals: creational (all humans are by birthright children of God created in his image), christological-soteriological (all are brothers and sisters for whom Christ died), and ecclesiological (all are brought together in the fellowship of God’s one true church). The theological approach to nation, on the other hand, is mainly positive. The nation is a God given order (*Ordnung*) to regulate humanity on earth. It is striking that potentially critical christological and ecclesiological approaches are lacking. As a result, the identity of the church is not discussed in relation to the nation. Race segregation in the church is condemned as contrary to its identity, while the carving up of churches along national lines is not even considered to be problematic.

Next to the different appreciation of race and nation, the study of the ecumenical movement in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century reveals another, even more striking, element. When it came to the identity of the church, it was not the socially orientated *Life and Work* commission, but *Faith and Order*—the theological commission of the ecumenical movement—that was the appropriate place to discuss that issue.

*Faith and Order* organized a conference in the same year in Edinburgh, but it did not deal with issues such as nation and race in relation to the unity of the church. The conference only briefly mentioned the national churches under the heading “non-theological factors that hinder church unity”.<sup>42</sup> It

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<sup>42</sup> After examples of obstacles due to historical factors, we read about churches agreeing on doctrinal matters but having different cultural origins: “These Churches are not conscious of any obstacles to such union because of mutually exclusive doctrines. They are, however, kept apart by barriers of nationality, race, class, general culture, and, more particularly, by slothful self-content and self-sufficiency”. (L. Hodgson (ed.) *The Second World Conference on Faith and Order held at Edinburgh, August 3-18, 1937*, London 1938, 258-259.)

indicated that issues related to the division of people along racial or national lines were problems of the secular world, not of the church. The conference suggested that if such issues were a stumbling block on the way to church unity, they were of a practical, non-essential nature, and implied that it might be easy to resolve them once the essential theological differences were solved.

After World War II, a new ideological confrontation emerged that pushed national and other identities into the background. However, for many in the West, the end of the Cold War brought a re-awakening of the violence that can accompany identity politics. Many were surprised by the resurgence of nationalistic violence and practices of ethnic cleansing in the heart of Europe. Highly unexpected was the use of religions as identity markers in these post-communist societies that had been thoroughly secularized under state control for over 40 years. Serbs, for example, presented themselves as Orthodox, Croats as Roman Catholics, and Bosnians as Muslims.

Of course, religions were abused for political purposes, but at the same time religions also used the opportunity to present themselves in the public sphere. In this heated atmosphere, they knew and used the Christian peace and reconciliation vocabulary, but more importantly, many religious leaders, theologians, and lay believers defined themselves in terms of national or ethnic identities without reserve. There was no theological reticence whatsoever. That is not surprising, since a common opinion also expressed in *Faith and Order* documents was that social identities within the church were of a non-theological nature that did not harm the fundamentals of the one, catholic church.

It is in this context that in January 1997 the Faith and Order board decided to begin a new project entitled *Ethnic Identity, National Identity and the Unity of the Church*, abbreviated as ETHNAT.<sup>43</sup> As the title suggests, the churches represented in *Faith and Order*, for the first time in its history, seemed to be ready to recognize that these social identity issues are closely linked to the unity of the church.

The shift in policy is primarily motivated by the recognition that the church is not only divided because of outstanding theological and ecclesiological differences, but also by potentially destructive divisions within the human community. The secondary motivation is the awareness

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<sup>43</sup> T. Best and A. Falconer, "Ethnicity and Nationalism in Relation to Christian Unity", *Minutes of the meeting of the Faith and Order Board, 8-15 January 1997, Abbaye de Fontgombault, France*, Faith and Order Paper n° 178, Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997, 38-47.

that working on the unity of the church forms a major contribution to the unity and reconciliation among all of humankind.

Topics to be discussed in the new project included the relationship between nationalism and the unity of the church (questions of catholicity and unity, diversity, and the local and the universal inculturation), the role of nationalism and ethnicity within denominationalism, and the role of Christianity in relation to ethnicity and nationalism in the various continents. Among the specific questions to be addressed, the following were mentioned: the nature of human identity (anthropology), the nature of the church as both local and universal, the theology of election, the cultural captivity of the churches, the concept of memory and the nature of tradition, the role of religious symbols in community building and conflict, a hermeneutic of otherness and embrace, the relation of majority and minority groups in society, the impact of missionary endeavour on ethnic identity, and finally, Christian formation or malformation.

When Faith and Order finally decided to begin this project in 1997, the momentum, in fact, had faded. The Dayton Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, had already been signed in November 1995. The delay in the start of the project was caused by a combination of reasons. The uncertainty about the future of the ecumenical movement with its central agenda for the visible unity of the church in a late or postmodern era with a new appreciation for diversity and otherness played an important role. Another consideration was formed by the diminished financial resources. This forced the WCC to reconsider its priorities, to reorganize its structure, and to reduce its staff. But the real motivation hidden behind these actions was the same old reluctance to deal with the issue of national and ethnic identities within the church, especially by theologians representing Protestant and Orthodox churches. They knew that the theological foundation for the connection of their denominations with national or other social identities was absent or questionable.

As a consequence, the project was contested from the beginning. The emphasis on the unity of the church and the problem of national and or ethnic affiliations was countered by voices warning that this issue is dangerous and potentially divisive. Instead, some members emphasized that the connection of church and nation or church and ethnic group has positive aspects as well. There tended to be a confrontation between a

‘Western’ unity perspective and a ‘Southern’, more specifically, African diversity perspective.<sup>44</sup>

The project lagged for years, and finally in 2006 a study document entitled *Participating in God’s Mission of Reconciliation: a Resource for Churches in Situations of Conflict* was published without plans for a follow-up project.<sup>45</sup> The altered title expresses the change of purpose. The question of the unity of the church is no longer central. Instead, the issue now is how churches can be assisted in reconciliation work in situations of conflict. The focus has shifted from the ecclesiological dilemma to an ethical challenge. The belief in the reconciliation potential of churches in the context of national and ethnic strife could rally churches behind the project where the unity issue failed. As an observer, one has the feeling that Faith and Order wanted to get rid of this contested project.

Race is introduced in part IV, “Perception from the Social Sciences”. It is part of the document because the “study seeks to address conflicts based on national, ethnic and racial identities” (§ 50). In contrast to the 1937 Oxford conference that tended to approach race negatively and nation positively, this document understands nation and race in a more neutral and similar way—as identity markers that are used to mark ‘otherness’. A second input from social sciences is the insight that the changing nature of these identities indicates that they are less primordial and rather a human-made construction that uses aspects such as language, race, religion, origin, custom, destiny, and territory to construct identities (§ 51-2).

This sociological and anthropological input helps in analyzing and understanding what happens in the secular world when national, ethnic, and racial violence erupt. But these insights are dismissed when it comes to understanding the church as a social community. Then faith language prevails that denies the social and anthropological reality. The text says that those who become Christian, as it is expressed in baptism, leave behind national, ethnic, and racial identities (§ 116-7). It confirms the traditional approach within *Faith and Order*: ethnic, national, and racial identities are a problem for the secular world, not for the church. The document is based on the presupposition that the anthropological laws that are so fundamental in human behavior do not apply to the church itself as a social communion.

A person who becomes a Christian and becomes a member of a church is supposed “to be called out of” ethnic, national, or racial identities. The truth

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<sup>44</sup> *Minutes of the meeting of the Faith and Order Board, 15-24 June 1999, Toronto, Canada, Faith and Order Paper n° 185, Geneva: WCC Publications, 1999, 55-7.*

<sup>45</sup> *Participating in God’s Mission of Reconciliation: A Resource for Churches in Situations of Conflict, Faith and Order Paper n° 201, Geneva: WCC Publications, 2006.*

is that becoming and being Christian does not infer leaving behind one's anthropological identity. That is impossible and would mean a denial of humanity. All these identities comprise what we are. We do not leave them behind when we become Christian and a member of the church. Nor do they evaporate. For example, the fact that I have a Dutch mother and a Belgian father and that I grew up in Flanders will forever be part of who I am. I cannot be called out of this identity. I cannot leave it behind.

This also means that we have to be careful how we understand the sacrament of baptism. Baptism does not imply a *tabula rasa*. When people become Christian, they do not lose their previous identities, but their identities are brought into perspective. Their membership in the body of Christ now becomes their primary identity. This has consequences for all other identity markers in the life of a Christian. They should no longer assert absolute claims. Whether I am male or female, whether I have my roots in a working class family or in nobility does not make a difference. The defining point is that the Christian belongs to Christ, but the other identity markers remain.

I conclude that racial reconciliation is not only an issue that South African churches must tackle as an ecclesiological challenge. Racial identities, as well as national, ethnic, and tribal identities challenge churches worldwide. How can we accept the social anthropological identities that we share and, at the same time, confirm and live the unity of the church as God's gift to humanity? Social identities and their potential to exclude form an ecclesiological challenge for world Christianity.

## **Concluding methodological implications**

### *1. South African ecclesial apartheid in another perspective*

In the past, most research regarding South African ecclesial apartheid was performed in the context of the history of Southern Africa. It revealed that the Afrikaner nationalist agenda motivated Afrikaner church leaders and theologians. The nationalist agenda was first developed in the context of the strife between the Afrikaners and the British in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and then in the context of the attempt to create favourable positions for whites in relation to the non-white majority of the country in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Globally, many churches and many Christian World Communions rejected support for the implementation of apartheid policies by the *National Party* governments, the segregated denominational structures within

the Afrikaner churches, and the internalization of racism within many denominations in South Africa. They condemned the ecclesial situation in South Africa, especially among the Afrikaner churches, as not only disgraceful and inhuman, but also as fundamentally in opposition to the Christian creed and thus heretical. Attempts in the past—and even today—to minimize what happened by portraying it as only a failed attempt at social engineering, an unsuccessful effort to organize cultural diversity, or as an uninspired endeavour to construct a contextual theology of the then South Africa have been dismissed. Moreover, all of these attempts cannot eliminate the shared responsibility for the systematic discrimination of non-whites, for the legacy of misery and enhanced violence, and for the brutal force of gross human rights violations in apartheid South Africa.

At the same time, South African churches have been and are confronted by a challenge that transcends the South African context and that is familiar to churches worldwide. That challenge is how to recognize diverse social identities and, at the same time, confirm and express the unity of the church. It is an issue in Amsterdam as it is in all European cities where new migrant congregations are established daily. Most Ghanaian Presbyterians in Amsterdam, for example, do not join Dutch Reformed congregations but start their own Ghanaian Presbyterian church. In my own denomination, the United Protestant Church in Belgium, an issue is how to help the French speaking members and the Dutch speaking members relate to one another in one united church. In Central and Eastern Europe, where mostly Orthodox churches consider themselves as guardians of the national identity of their nations, it is also an issue. It is an issue in American churches where the national American identity—symbolized by the American flag next to the cross at the front of the church—has become as important as their Christian identity. It is an issue all over Africa where churches tend to be ethnically or tribally structured. In all these examples, a similar ecclesial and ecclesiological problem must be solved: how the contextual expressions of Christian faith interact with the confession of the church that it is one holy, catholic, and apostolic body. How can the contextual expression in a diversity of cultures relate to the universal nature of Christianity? How to live together with difference is not only a social, political and cultural challenge, but also a fundamental ecclesial and ecclesiological problem.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> E. Van der Borgh (ed.), *Affirming and Living together with Differences*, Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2006.

Considering South African churches in this way opens up new perspectives. It not only gives urgency to these issues that linger on in many churches, but the South African example reminds us of the potential evil that can result from bad answers. More important, South African experiences in the past and present provide us with biblical and theological arguments, motives, strategies, and structures—many to be avoided and some others to be cherished—in the search for expressions of Christianity that give space to its local and its universal aspect.

## *2. Not all calls for reconciliation establish good public theology*

The central message of the gospel is that humans are reconciled with God through Jesus Christ. Related to this message is the call for reconciliation among humans. In general, it appears that the best that Christians can offer in societies torn apart by conflict is to call for reconciliation. But this approach must be nuanced in situations of ethnic strife. When churches become involved in identity politics and religion becomes an identity marker, then these general calls for reconciliation—suggesting that it is a societal problem outside the church—lack credibility and will not be effective. Even if religions remain silent regarding their role, those with insight will realize that religions are part of the problem. Instead, a confession of shared responsibility and repentance, and commitment to reach out to the ‘other’, is more relevant.

The search for a critical theology that acknowledges the power of social identities in individual believers and in faith communities, but at the same time transcends these because of the new identity in Christ, is part of the effort to take responsibility. For these reasons, I consider the practice by ecclesial bodies to go public with texts that present identity politics that lead to violence as a problem of the secular world and not of the church as examples of bad public theology. The new reconciliation document of Faith and Order has continued to follow this tradition.

South Africa has a tradition of public theology that goes back to the apartheid era, which is practiced by supporters and critics of apartheid.<sup>47</sup> In secularized Europe, the tendency is to be more hesitant when it comes to going public. The Desmond Tutu Chair at the Faculty of Theology offers an interesting place to reflect on the conditions, methods, and arguments in public theology.

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<sup>47</sup> See e.g. the articles of Dirkie Smit in D.J. Smit, *Essays in Public Theology*, Collected Essays 1, Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2007 and the work published by the Beyers Naudé Center for Public Theology (Stellenbosch University).

### *3. The importance of theology*

The South African example of the development of apartheid structures within the church before their implementation in society through the *National Party* governments is an example of the influence that religion can have on broader society and of the importance of theology. Theology is an essential tool of internal critique for every religion. If theology had functioned better, it could have prevented the wider proliferation of apartheid through internal criticism that used biblical arguments and the Christian tradition. Later on, theology would become an element in the struggle to fight the legitimacy of apartheid.<sup>48</sup>

No denomination is immune from a problematic binding to social identities. In the case of apartheid structures in the Dutch Reformed Church and its later theological justification, the issue has been raised whether elements can be identified in Reformed theology that can be abused for justifying apartheid. Among them are Kuyper's teachings on sphere sovereignty, the Reformed doctrines of predestination and covenant, and Protestant ecclesiology.

To protect denominations against abuse of social identities, a theology is needed that helps them to resist a too close relationship without denying the reality of existing social identities. It will have to take into account Christological, soteriological, creation theological, eschatological, and ecclesiological elements in order to do justice to the cultural contextual as well as to the universal aspects of the Christian faith and the Christian church.

For that reason, the original research plan of the Ethnat project of Faith and Order was indeed relevant. Religions need ongoing theological reflection to keep them focused. As the Desmond Tutu Chair at the Faculty of Theology, I intend to contribute to this reflection.

### *4. Interdisciplinary research*

The Ethnat project of Faith and Order used new insights regarding race and identities from social sciences. Race was removed from its obvious shadow of racism and redefined as an identity marker. Racial, ethnic, and national identities were no longer understood as unchangeable primordial facts, but as changeable human constructs. These insights were relevant in the

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<sup>48</sup> Pauw, *Anti-apartheid theology in the Dutch Reformed Family of Churches*.

document because they helped the theologians who wrote the text to gain a better understanding of the mechanisms that determine identity politics.

Nevertheless, part of my criticism of the document on reconciliation is that it only applied the insights of the social sciences to the social identities in the secular world and not to the church as a social communion. If that had been done, a theological discourse could have developed which recognized that individual believers and faith communities are characterized by a variety of identities, and that in situations of conflict regarding identity the priority of identities is crucial.

There is another aspect to interdisciplinary research. Theology also has a relevant contribution to make to interdisciplinary discourse in the church, society, and the academy. The wisdom that theologians have to offer is based on the sacred writings of religious traditions and their ongoing re-interpretation in new contexts. It is essential to keep this in mind amid the variety of arguments offered by other disciplines. I remember an international conference last year on religions and poverty. At the end of the meeting, a contributing economist challenged the theologians to offer less pseudo-economic and more theological reflections.

Guided by the principles that interdisciplinary research is beneficial for theology, and that theology can only contribute if it brings contributions from its own theological sources, I will stimulate interdisciplinary research, and I hope to contribute to the methodological discussions on interdisciplinary research as a member of the VU Institute for the Study of Religion, Culture, and Society (VISOR).

## **Final words of appreciation**

Mijnheer de Rector, dames en heren,

It is now time for some final words of appreciation. It is an honour and a privilege to be appointed to a chair named after Archbishop Desmond Tutu. I want to thank the members of the executive board of the university for inviting me to this position. I would like to thank the board of the Faculty of Theology for proposing me for the chair and its new dean, Professor Wim Janse, for his friendly and practical advice. I give a special word of thanks to its former dean, Professor Bram van de Beek. Bram, eight years ago you invited me to join you at VU University Amsterdam and uprooted my life as a pastor in Belgium. Since then your wisdom and your theological production have been a continuing source of inspiration.

I would like to mention SAVUSA – South Africa-VU University-Strategic Alliances, who are here today. I am thankful to its committed staff and its enthusiastic director, Dr. Harry Wels. I look forward to the collaboration with my fellow Tutu professors—Chris Elbers, Stephen Ellis, Geert Savelsbergh, and Marceline van Furth (who is yet to be installed).

I can use network language or *ubuntu* language when speaking about others I wish to thank; both indicate that I owe much—in fact most in my life—to others. I mention IRTI, the International Reformed Theological Institute, with its commitment to international theological research. I refer to my colleagues at the section of Dogmatics and Ecumenics and the staff of the Faculty of Theology. And there is the United Protestant Church in Belgium, the place where I became aware of the influence of social identities within the church and where we discussed how to combat apartheid in South Africa.

I offer my final word of thanks to my parents without whose love and values I would not stand here, and especially to my wife Tania, to our four daughters, and to our grandson. You are a continuing source of inspiration and motivation.

I thank you for your attention.

## **Samenvatting**

*Zondag ochtend – het meest gesegegreerde tijdstip.*

*Over raciale verzoening als niet afgeronde zaak voor de theologie binnen en buiten Zuid-Afrika*

Meer dan 15 jaar na het einde van apartheid blijkt ras nog steeds een belangrijke factor in de Zuid-Afrikaanse samenleving. De Waarheid- en Verzoeningscommissie beschreef in haar rapport de grote invloed van apartheid op religies; niet alleen de passieve en actieve steun aan het toenmalig regeringsbeleid, maar ook de hoge mate waarin racisme geïnternaliseerd was in de kerkelijke praktijk. Het uiterst moeizame proces naar eenwording binnen voormalig raciaal gescheiden denominaties bevestigt dat ook in de kerken de factor ras nog lang niet verdwenen is. Zondagmorgen is nog steeds het meest gesegegreerde tijdstip van de week in Zuid Afrika.

Vanuit de christelijke theologie van de kerk wekt de invloed van ras als sterk identiteitskenmerk blijvend verwondering. Dat wringt met de belijdenis van de eenheid van de kerk als uitdrukking van het geloof in één God. De invloed die raciale apartheid heeft gekregen binnen de meeste kerken in Zuid Afrika kan geïnterpreteerd worden als een teken dat de christelijke theologie van de kerk onvoldoende gewapend is om een antwoord te geven op het antropologische gegeven dat mensen zich van elkaar onderscheiden met verwijzing naar sociale identiteiten als ras, natie, etniciteit en stam. Dat vermoeden wordt bevestigd in het onvermogen van de oecumenische beweging om deze sociale identiteiten te erkennen en tegelijkertijd de eenheid van de kerk te versterken. De problemen met de plaats van migrantenkerken in Europa, de rol die Orthodoxe kerken zich toemeten als behoeders van de nationale identiteit, en de realiteit van tribale kerken in Afrika geven aan dat we met een globaal probleem te maken hebben dat de grenzen van Zuid-Afrika ver overstijgt.

## **Eddy Van der Borgh**

Professor Eddy Van der Borgh is the Desmond Tutu Chair Holder of the Faculty of Theology. He studied German Philology in Louvain, Belgium, as well as Protestant Theology in Brussels, Belgium, and obtained his PhD degree at Leiden University. From 2002, he has been working at the VU University Faculty of Theology, and his research focuses on aspects of systematic theology and ecumenical research. He has published on theology of ministry, ecclesiological topics and the relation between faith communities and ethnicity, and is the editor of *Studies in Reformed Theology* and of the *Journal of Reformed Theology*. He is also involved in the development of the new policies for ministries of the United Protestant Church in Belgium.

## **Desmond Tutu Programme (DTP)**

The VU University Amsterdam Desmond Tutu Programme (DTP) was launched on 4 December 2008, in a festive ceremony in which Archbishop Em. Desmond Tutu himself addressed the audience. During this ceremony, the four Desmond Tutu Chair holders were installed.

The DTP focuses on the themes of Youth, Sports and Reconciliation. Its aim is to strengthen cooperation between VU University Amsterdam and its six partner institutes in South Africa while at the same time contributing to capacity building at campuses in South Africa. Four faculties will host a Desmond Tutu chair for an initial period of five years: the Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS), the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration (FEWEB), the Faculty of Human Movement Sciences (FBW), and the Faculty of Theology (FTH).

The holders of the VU University Desmond Tutu Chair (DTC) will stimulate, and contribute to, academic cooperation between the Netherlands and South Africa, through the (joint) supervision of South African PhD students, through teaching Bachelor and Master students at and exchange students between VU University Amsterdam and South African universities, particularly, but not exclusively, focusing on our six partner institutions in South Africa with which VU University Amsterdam has a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on an institutional level. For more information, see [www.savusa.nl](http://www.savusa.nl).