

"THE ROLE of the SOUTH AFRICAN CHURCH  
in the STRUGGLE  
AGAINST APARTHEID:

AN ENQUIRY INTO THE MEANING of THE KAIROS DOCUMENT"

Honours Undergraduate Essay  
(History of Ideas)

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PROLOGUE: RESEARCH and OTHER DIFFICULTIES AND PROBLEMS

"In their stance against the ideology of apartheid, vague Christian notions of 'reconciliation', 'peace', 'justice', 'human dignity' and 'equality' have been annunciated. These 'ethical precepts' totally lack any rigorous historical mediation and have therefore resulted in political inefficacy. The historical churches have simply not recognized that a concrete and specific form of analysis (ideology) is necessary to give effect to their anti-apartheid sentiments." *Daryl Balia*<sup>1</sup>

"The riots can in no way be described as reactions against the Government's apartheid policy. The disturbances are a periodic phenomenon and have nothing to do with poverty and low wages." *H.F. Verwoerd*<sup>2</sup>

"It is in circumstances such as these that the reconciling word has to be proclaimed, not in any vague and indefinite manner, but addressed specifically to the situation...." *Archbishop Joost de Blank*<sup>3</sup>

"The greatest threat lies in man's unholy craving to sell his soul to an ideology." *L.H. Mangope*<sup>4</sup>

"The Christian faith transcends all ideologies and all nationalistic ideals...Christian faith is more than a mere alternative for Ideology, in the sense that it is not merely a utopia. It is eschatological, rooted in the promises of Christ and the liberating deeds of Yahweh and in the knowledge that these promises, in a real sense, have had their fulfilment in Jesus Christ." *Allan Boesak*<sup>5</sup>

"We cannot, however, deify or absolutise any system of thought..." *Charles Villa-Vicencio*<sup>6</sup>

"God needs our co-operation in the process of liberating the nation, but prior to that, he needs our understanding." *Michael Cassidy*<sup>7</sup>

"Active involvement in changing the situation requires more than theology. It requires an engagement of reality through ideological commitment and praxis....A positive relationship with Marxism is necessary because it alone provides an adequate analysis of the situation and a strategy for changing it." *John deGruchy*<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Christian Resistance to Apartheid. p.164.

<sup>2</sup> in Norman Phillips, The Tragedy of Apartheid. p. 126.

<sup>3</sup> Out of Africa. p.15.

<sup>4</sup>"The Role of the Church in the Independent Homelands" in Theo Sundermeier, Church and Nationalism in South Africa. p.166.

<sup>5</sup>Farewell to Innocence. p.121.

<sup>6</sup>Spirit of Hope. p.71.

<sup>7</sup>The Passing Summer. p.335.

<sup>8</sup>The Church Struggle in South Africa. pp 206,208.

"For such a politics to be a reality, the Church has to retain freedom from ideological captivity, and at the same time become concretely involved in social issues and critically engage the ideologies that claim allegiance of people and societies." *John deGruchy*<sup>9</sup>

"It also seems to be self-evident that discrepancies in perceptions would not have been able to grow to such proportions if the elites would not have been isolated from each other. A lively dialogue always challenges extreme positions, draws attention to overlooked aspects and makes one aware of alternative perspectives to a situation." *Human Sciences Research Council*<sup>10</sup>

"What looked before as though it could never happen is easy to understand. Once it is upon us, we accept the inevitability of the first multiracial election in South Africa, and we forget the defiant hope of a fourteen-year-old boy, which helped make it possible.

In hindsight, we can see how everything fell into place and that it was quite natural, even reasonable, that it would happen. It was inevitable, at least it seems that way in hindsight. Inevitable in hindsight and impossible in foresight.

Between impossibility and possibility, there is a door, the door of hope. And the possibility of history's transformation lies through that door." *Jim Wallis*<sup>11</sup>

"In a nutshell, the apartheid and segregationist ideas, born out of fear, are *Christian heresies*, which became a *party policy*, which evolved into a *tribal ideology*, which grew into a *national idol*, and which finally imprisoned all of us in a *demonic stronghold*." *Michael Cassidy*<sup>12</sup>

"It is on the inward level that the nemesis of sin arises- and so arise history's catastrophes. Thus, it is on that level alone that the ultimate issues of history can be resolved, healed, and history given grounds for hope..the inner life of man and women alone where both creativity and sin gestate, is part and parcel of their objective history." *John deGruchy*<sup>13</sup>

"It is of the utmost importance for the church in South Africa to realise its proper limitations if it is to fulfill its proper tools." *John deGruchy*<sup>14</sup>

"Christianity's impact on the race issue in South Africa has been extremely ambivalent, but there are signs on the horizon of a definite coming break, which may lead to a healthy and balanced revival of what is basic in this great faith." *G.C. Oosthuizen*<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Church Struggle. p.219.

<sup>10</sup>Religion and Intergroup Relations. p.80.

<sup>11</sup>The Soul of Politics. p.238.

<sup>12</sup>The Passing Summer. p.334.

<sup>13</sup>The Church Struggle. p.205.

<sup>14</sup>Church Struggle. p.223.

<sup>15</sup>"Christianity's Impact on Race Relations in South Africa", in Martin Prozesky, Christianity Amidst Apartheid: Selected Perspectives. p.119.

"Where white and black Christians still meet, traitors interact with stooges....Nevertheless, the stubborn continuation of these fragile contacts may maintain an infrastructure of human relationships which may gain in importance as the situation deteriorates and the system approaches the breaking point. Without such a basis, the prospects for a wholesome reconstruction will be dim. Also the continuing demythologisation of ideological absolutes and loyalties as well as the challenge to keep unpopular option open, will not be without its effect on the ongoing struggle." *Klaus Nurnberger*<sup>16</sup>

"The Church is still part of an unredeemed world and subject to the same conflicts and biased perceptions. The difference is that the Church can provide the context where these perceptions can be changed." *Klaus Nurnberger*<sup>17</sup>

"It is hard to believe that our prayers can help a country hell bent on its own destruction, but this is the faith we profess, and this faith needs putting to the test as never before." *Archbishop Jost de Blank*<sup>18</sup>

Words, agreeing and conflicting, stand side-by-side and yet across from one another; drawn into a crystal-clear kaleidoscope of a most ambiguous and confusing subject: the South African Church.

In approaching the subject of the role of the church in South Africa certain difficulties present themselves. The following comment by the compilers of a three-volume bibliography is very telling:

"In the process of compiling this bibliography the editors became aware of some interesting tendencies in Southern African church historiography... To begin with, it would seem that it is not objective enough, but is hampered by particularism and a polemical or apologetic tendency. Even a superficial glance through this bibliography will show how much of the material has been written for popular consumption.....church historians (generally) approach church history from an exclusive cultural/denominational point of view. A large number of church historical contributions have lacked an ecumenical perspective and have proved to be little more than mere descriptions of particular denominational institutions and activities. There is apparently little awareness of the

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<sup>16</sup>"The Impact of Christianity on Socio-economic Developments" in Prozesky, Christianity Amidst Apartheid, p. 162.

<sup>17</sup> in HSRC report: Religion and Intergroup Relations, p.83.

<sup>18</sup>Out of Africa, p.viii.

work or even the existence of other churches."<sup>19</sup>

An added research problem was the dearth of material to be found in some of the more 'objective' and comprehensive general histories, such as Davenport's, or even Oakie's work. One would have hoped that a lack of objectivity on the part of church people would have been compensated for, more than it was, by those who did not have the same interests vested in their writing as the church people. Unfortunately, this was not the case.

The above difficulties combined tended to produce a very fragmented account of church activities in South Africa. This fragmentation became particularly frustrating whenever it became apparent that it was virtually impossible to double-check the historical accuracy of some of the claims of some of the more polemic documents. al  
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For example, claims were made by a minority of articulate and prolific theologians concerning the 'impact' of the Kairos Document on South Africa, and its significance for the world in general. However, outside of their own writing, the document appeared to have very little 'impact'- although it did cause a considerable stir. (P.W. Botha thought it important enough to be refuted on public television by leading churchmen.)<sup>20</sup>

Yet, where it was made mention of outside of the writings of its supporters, it was referred to with reservation, and seemed to

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<sup>19</sup>Hofmeyr, Rykheer and Nel. History of the Church in Southern Africa, A select Bibliography ...material to 1980. (VI)p.xiii

<sup>20</sup>Cassidy, Michael. The Passing Summer. pp.319,320.

"Exercised" or  
5 "brought to bear."

be regarded as a statement which summarised a particular point in a particular stream of thought. In other words, rather than *having* influence, the Kairos Document seems to have been more of a marker of the influence already ~~had~~ by a certain movement.

Moreover, it is difficult to tell just how influential that movement was, outside of a select group of very well educated black clergy representing some of the mainline churches.

The claim is made that the Kairos Document was essentially a *grass-roots* statement. It is felt that the Document is a reflection of the *true* experience of the majority. That it has a critical mass of support by virtue of its identity as the voice of the suffering seems to be taken as a sign of its authenticity, with the implication that theologies outside its scope are not authentic, or are less so.

However, it is not clear that the Document's roots are in the community of the majority. (as opposed to their being in the community of a minority of articulate, black leaders) One point raised by the Human Sciences Research Council Report, published just three years after the release of the Kairos Document, was that conscious members of the two high-profile church groups in South Africa (both pro- and anti-apartheid) constituted less than half of the total population.<sup>21</sup> These findings would seem to suggest that the 'grassroots' felt they had more pressing concerns than taking sides theologically.

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<sup>21</sup> Religion, Intergroup Relations and Social Change in South Africa, p.35.

Neither is there a great deal of evidence showing that it had such a critical mass of support among those who were concerned about the relationship of their Christianity to their socio-political situation. Various statistics would suggest that the largest single group of black Christians do not even belong to many of the churches represented by the signatories of the Kairos Document.<sup>22</sup> They belonged, at the time of the Document's publication, to what are known as the African Independent Churches, comprising somewhere between 3-4000 separate denominations.<sup>23</sup>

There is no reason at all to presume that the members and clergy of these churches would have any more tendency to rally in support of mainline clergy than they had since their inception. On the contrary, since they first broke out of the mainline tradition in 1884<sup>24</sup>, the Independent Churches have displayed a marked tendency to avoid any kind of overt political commitment, such as is the Kairos Document. ✓

This is of course, not to say that the nearly 6 million members of these churches are not politically active. The riots, strikes, burnings, vandalism and necklacings of late 70's and the 80's would make such a statement ridiculous. A more likely probability is the suggestion that, by 1985 when the Document was released, the majority of blacks, including black Christians, had

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<sup>22</sup>These were predominantly the Anglican, Methodist, United, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Reformed Catholic, Lutheran and Sending Churches.(see list of signatories, back page of the Kairos Document, Challenge to the Church) ✓

<sup>23</sup>Froise, Marjorie. World Christianity: Southern Africa, p.70.

<sup>24</sup>Hofmeyr, Rykheer, Nel. op.cit. p.337.



begun to give up on the church institution in terms of its ability to help them win freedom. Thus, it would appear that rather than being at the head of a tide, the Kairos Document lagged in far behind.

Furthermore, insofar as it represents an official statement of the mainline church leadership, it is not hard to imagine that the majority who might support it would have found it not only late, but redundant. Let me put it this way: if you have been aware for 40 years that you are oppressed; and if you are currently engaging in activity from Monday to Saturday (and Sunday after service) to fight that oppression; and if you have heard people like Bishop Tutu for 30 years assuring you that you will overcome apartheid because it is evil, it is hardly a new news that the oppressed must now fight oppression because they are loved by God, and God is against evil.

But now I am getting ahead of myself. What needs to be pointed out is that, while there is evidence to suggest that the Kairos Document is perhaps not as influential as some supporters claim, it is a statement which is paradigmatic of a particular line of thinking within certain parts of the South African churches which has had a great deal of sway among theologians and church people. As a result, the Document itself does have a large figure in the minds of many church people. ✓

It is just that it is next to impossible to tell whether its significance in political and historical reality is as large as its corresponding mental image would suggest. It is certainly

interesting that another finding of the HSRC was that the majority of South Africa's population, in all colour groups, felt that their religion had more to do with reconciliation, than with liberation. The majority of both blacks and whites felt that above all things, the primary role of religion was conciliatory, not confrontational.<sup>25</sup> These findings place into serious question the Kairos claim to be voicing a final realisation of prophetic confrontation rooted in the masses.

However, at this point, as illustrated by the preceding list of citations, the 'truth' of whether or not 'God's Kairos' actually had more to do with man's chronos than is acknowledged rests somewhere between one set of words and another.

The incomplete and fragmented nature of the research material available is such that it presents substantial problems to anyone attempting to do a thorough investigation into the movements within the church, (such as the Black Theology movement represented by Kairos) and the significance of those movements for South Africa as a whole.

From within South Africa, where material would at least be more abundant, the task would be long and difficult. It would require hours and hours, not just of reading, but of speaking with people from all quarters in order to search out the links between things, and realities behind events and statements, which are otherwise hidden from the distant eye.

From a position outside South Africa, the task is virtually

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<sup>25</sup>Religion, Intergroup Relations..., pp102, 105.

impossible because there is simply not enough information. Moreover, there is a marked tendency for the libraries available to this particular student to stock a very narrow range of material. Much of it is not even written by South Africans, but by North Americans with a particular (and very dated) mode of engaging in political analysis. They have a particular reading of history in general, which naturally colours the way that they read South African political history.

While it is now an academic given that no-one can write without bias, this particular bias in this instance is particularly annoying because it seems so out of character with the way that the available representation of South African writers see their own political history.

It is as though the South Africans were too busy acting to sit down and put the pieces together- so the gap was filled by North American scholars who appear to have very little feeling for South Africa itself. They tend to regard her history as a case to prove a point which they have decided on a priori.

Of course, my whole argument here is highly tenuous. But if it is, it is largely because I have had to read South African church history by inference, rather than direct observation. And with a nod to those other North Americans (Jukes and Fatton especially), I would have to concede that they must have faced the same problem, which is why they took such liberties in constructing their particular stories the way that they did.

In summary then, much as I would like to write about 'the role

of the Church in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa', it is impossible for me to do so responsibly. That is, I could not do so without conveying the impression that I had successfully managed to wade through the spectrum of fulminations on what the church ought to have been, and found the dirty/brilliant truth about what she was.

In any case, 'the church' is much like Martin Luther's Bible—it has a wax nose. Conceivably, anyone could find grounds somewhere within church history for almost any argument.

It does not help that even the word 'Church' is so deceptively singular. If it were obvious what role 'the church' actually had, I would still have to decide whether 'the church' meant the institution, or institutions, or whether it was simply the Body of believers.

To speak of the 'Church' in the context of South Africa, as in the world in general, is to speak of a multifaceted thing. The 'Church' is seen and experienced as anything from a mystical 'body' of believers in a specific dogma, to a hierarchical power structure, to a social force: a potential agent of social change as well as a diligent guardian of the status quo.

Obviously, it is beyond the scope of this essay to address each of the identities and roles attributed to this word 'Church'. And yet, any time the word 'Church' is used, it is somehow true that all of these are treated in some way. Another part of the problem in defining 'Church' has to do with the fact that many things are labelled 'Church' which are not.

Insofar as the Church is an organisation of finite human beings spread around the globe, and certainly all across South Africa, it is an admixture of all of the above definitions. It is, as it were, a field of wheat and tares; both a den of robbers, as well as a home for the servants of the Most High God. It is at once a rotting corpse and the Body of Christ, and in these respects it is like man himself- the image of God, but terribly removed from his former glory.

Still it remains difficult to say exactly who the church was because there is no way to divide nominal 'believers' from 'true' believers. Jesus himself pointed out that until the end, there will be tares mixed in with the wheat- and wheat mixed in with the tares!-, and it will be impossible, even sinful, for anyone to try and judge which is which.

It is only possible in specific instances to discern whether or not a person, groups of people, or leaders of church institutions seem to be behaving and speaking in ways which are in accord with the ways and words of their proclaimed standard, the Bible itself and the life of Jesus Christ.

For believers around the world, (and one decides on one's own if one does or does not fall into this category) the process of discernment is extremely important. In fact, if the words of Jesus carry as much weight as they should among people who claim to follow Him, then each Christian has a very serious duty to weigh carefully absolutely everything which makes a claim to speak about God, Christ or man.

It is not as though we are completely lost on the vagaries of a sea of incertitude, where all 'truth' were valid simultaneously. Even without an adequate account of 'the facts', there is still a standard. While not useful for judgements of historical accuracy, that standard is useful in the discernment of the textual fidelity of those who claim it as their own. It is not as though the project of such discernment implies judgement by strange and external criteria.

Were there no standard, were all truth claims equally relative, then such evaluation would be arrogant. However, since the very existence of Christian theology presumes a biblical norm, all theology must be held up to the Bible as a whole. It must be evaluated according to its fidelity to the message of what the universal Church accepts as the Christian Bible. (both Testaments, minus apocrypha)

It is not a matter of judging the authenticity or motives of those who claim to be one's brethren, but a matter of evaluating their claims to speak the truth on the basis of their own standard. For example, in 1982 the World Alliance of Reformed Churches held a meeting in Ottawa, in which it declared that the theological justifications for apartheid were a heresy. WARC did not conclude that members of churches which supported the doctrine, or even the theologians who wrote it were therefore heretics. (Which would imply that they were seen to be cut off from God- a most serious charge.)

The doctrine was clearly regarded as evil, drawing people away

from God. However, WARC reserved judgement of *people* for the Judge of us all, and rightly so. Unlike rejection of Christ's teachings, it does not follow that because one rejects a teaching, that one also condemns the people who are the teachers.

What is the case with Christ is not the case with other human beings, because Christ's identity is his teaching: namely, the teaching that He is God and Man is the essence of the 'good news'.

To disregard this teaching is to disregard Christ's claims about Himself, which is the same as disregarding Christ. But part of His identity is His uniqueness. Thus, one cannot at the same time accept Christ's teachings about Himself *and* reject His uniqueness. It is a rejection of Christ's uniqueness which claims that all human beings, like Christ, are what they speak about Christ. Christ is what He speaks about Himself, but human beings are qualitatively different: human beings are not Christ. Therefore, they cannot *be* what *they* speak about *Him*.

It is on this ground that it becomes possible to argue that one can maintain a stance of critical discernment regarding the teachings of people who claim to speak the truth about Christ, even rejecting those teachings, without at the same time rejecting the human beings who expound them. In short, the legitimate and responsible exercise of discernment is not the same thing as judgement; negative conclusions are not the same thing as condemnation.

Having said all of the above, it is certainly a very interesting paradox that an entity with as much influence in South

Africa as the Church, should be so *enigmatic*. Perhaps it is not even the Church itself, as much as the people which are the church. But even this seems not to be surprising at all, considering that what I have read of South Africa has testified to a country which is itself at once a place where everything is clear, and where nothing is what it appears to be.

Furthermore, with regard to the lack of 'objectivity', one might even question whether or not this lack actually is disadvantageous. It is not altogether bad that people who cannot be wholly objective do not pretend otherwise. While it does make my research difficult, the reason has mostly to do with the scope of my work. Had I four years and 500 pages instead of four months and 50, the emerging picture could only be all the more vibrant for the purity of its diverse elements.

In addition, while the lack of communication and synchronisation in church documentation and activity can certainly be criticised, this very fact betrays a great deal about a core problem in the historical life of the various churches in South Africa: namely, isolationism.

If church people and theologians showed little concern for what was being said and done in other parts of the wider Body, it is because they are children of their context. They are exhibiting an approach to otherness which is symptomatic of what is known to South Africans as the 'laager-mentality'.

Since the laager-mentality frames a great deal of what goes into the 'South African Way of Life', it should not be criticised



too quickly as an historical oversight, (although criticism of it in general is not without good reason) but rather understood as one of many crucial keys needed to unlock the meaning of much of South Africa's story.

So what does all of this mean? That I cannot, finally, give any picture at all of the church's struggle in South Africa? Yes and no.

If I do so, it is as a member of the Church universal, not as any kind of authority on South Africa. Of the South Africans I read, many were concerned that the lessons South Africa has bled to learn should be taught to the world, that the rest of the world might be able to learn from her suffering. In many respects, the point of non-South Africans reading about South Africa is not so that we can give South Africans the benefit of our presumptuous objectivity. South African history is rather to be read in a manner similar to the reading of a Greek tragedy; the essential message of which is always 'this is NOT the Way! Don't go here!!'.

If the devastation of a people is tragic, this does not give the rest of us an opportunity to let ourselves off of the hook. The lesson of tragedy is not that Inevitability reigns: it is that you have choice, so make it well.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> The Greeks wrestled hard and long to make order out of Chaos, and with impunity modern social theorists have concluded that all was a steady, Darwinian march to a tune of inevitable and unstoppable universal rules. But we have a curious irony. Perhaps Jesus should have said 'He who lives by inevitability will die by the same..'. The social 'scientists' seem to have overlooked the most important scientific development (pun intended) of the last thirty years: Chaos theory.

Essentially, what the scientific theory of Chaos means in human terms is that everything in life (that means history) boils down to a series of 'ifs'- otherwise known as 'coincidence-plus-choice' or 'God-plus-choice',

While I cannot explain the 'role of the Church in South Africa's struggle against Apartheid', I can, and have a responsibility to, examine particular articulations of what that role 'ought' to be. Insofar as the Church anywhere is a particular instance of the Church catholic, the Church everywhere must guard against ghettoised interpretations of her role.

The Church everywhere constitutes a single Body, the members of which are accountable to one another. Therefore, when one member makes claims about what the Church ought to be and speak in particular situations, that member is proposing a mode of being and speaking which is relevant to the Body as a whole.

In the present global situation, there is a great deal of debate and confusion in the Church everywhere as to her political, social and economic responsibilities. Among so many voices, the crucial question is 'what is the Church's voice politically? Socially? Economically?'.  
 Socially? Economically?'

The old understandings of the relationship of Church and State have been tossed up like spray out of the roiling confusion of

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depending on whether you believe you have a soul or not. (Since social scientists are typically 30-40 years behind developments outside their field, perhaps it would be harsh to hold them responsible for misreading the scientific meaning of history. Yet, they have always had Greek tragedy, and in South Africa especially, they have had Christianity which has always underlined the place of choice in history.)

So, though 'tragedy' is allowed to become an excuse for passivity in front of the (modern and enlightened) forces of historical change, science has turned out to be a traitorous alibi. Not even science conspires against the Christian assertion of the last 2000 years of the responsibility and worth of individual choice, and the unknowable mystery of the future. This is more than just a very interesting concept. It means that there is now absolutely no way out of the personal responsibility of evaluating everything which purports to explain how one should act.

When this action is prescribed by Church people, and when it is proclaimed to be the definitive mode of understanding the implications of the gospel for social/political/economic situations, I, as a member of the same worldwide Church, have that much more responsibility to question their proposal.

modern and post-modern political identity. The Church everywhere needs to seriously rethink (and sometimes think for the first time!) about who she is, politically. So, it is a matter of pressing interest to the Canadian Churches, and to me as a member, what the South African Christians have to say in response to this question. S/i.

Therefore, after having read this body of material, it is clear that I have a *responsibility* to discuss it. While I am not at a place where I can give a clear and accurate picture of the South African Church in her struggle (mainly because of the difficulties already mentioned), I can describe particular claims and evaluate them in the light of their bearing on the mode of political being for the Church in general. As the most controversial and (in)famous of those appears to be the Kairos Document, this is the one to which I now turn.

INTRODUCTION

In September/October of 1985, a group of 50 theologians from in and around Soweto issued a 'Challenge to the Church". It was a document signed by 100 additional theologians and clergy, and claimed to herald the arrival of God's 'Kairos', or God's time; God's 'moment of truth'. This was to be, at long last, the truth about the churches in South Africa; the truth about what they had been doing wrong, and about what God was revealing to be their true obligation. This was the truth about the call of God in the lives of Christians across the country.

At long last it was clear just exactly how the Church could be 'relevant' *qua* Church to the situation of apartheid; it was clear what the 'real significance' of her theologies was in this context of crisis- and equally clear how her mistakes ought to be corrected.

October '85 happened to occur four months after P.W. Botha (by then Executive State President) had declared a State of Emergency- (or rather, had seen to it that one was declared.) It was also four years after the Eloff Commission had been appointed to investigate the South African Council of Churches, three years after apartheid had been declared a heresy in Ottawa, two years after Mkhonto we Sizwe (MK) had exploded its first car bomb, and

two years after the tricameral constitution had been introduced, sparking a new wave of unrest and violence in the Townships. In short, the Kairos Document was a product of extreme and difficult circumstances.

But 1985 was also the same year that Desmond Tutu was elected the Archbishop of Cape Town- one year after having been appointed to the Bishopric of Johannesburg, and having been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize; It was the same year that evangelist Michael Cassidy with African Enterprise, and 70 others called together 400 church leaders from all denominations for a National Initiative for Reconciliation (NIR) conference; the same year that the government secretly approached Nelson Mandela while he was still in prison, offering him freedom if he would unconditionally speak on behalf of the ANC (including MK) in rejecting violence; and the same one in which prisoners held a hunger strike, winning their first victory of such magnitude ever: 900 prisoners were released.

So, while police repression increased revealing the 'reform' of petty apartheid to be a farce, other events were proving that that same repression was less a show of strength than a final, desperate thrust with a crumbling sword.

However, be that as it may, these other events were not as painful as the first set, therefore they captured less attention. When they were the focus, such as Tutu's Peace Prize, or the NIR, they were regarded in a negative light. People were not listening to Tutu any longer- he was seen as too 'soft'.

As for the NIR, the kindest of its critics referred to it as

simply making 'no connection between Church and politics'. It did not engage in a social analysis, and was therefore seen as irrelevant- in spite of the large number of delegates it attracted.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, in spite of evidence to the contrary, there was ample reason for perceiving the South African political situation to be irretrievably extreme, necessitating an uncompromising response- especially given that fence-sitters made likely candidates for 'necklacing', and other forms of public murder.

At the very least, a church which did not take her stand clearly within the given paradigm of South Africa's conflict would be seen to lack credibility. If the Church was not credible now, the argument went, then she would be cast aside when the dust had settled, and would have no place in a new South Africa.

Moreover, if the Church was not credible, then people would give up on God, and was it not the Church's responsibility to see that people accepted God? Therefore, the task of the Church in the experience of crisis would be to make herself credible; to stand in such a way as to make her position clear to the eyes of all.

Essentially, this is what the 'Kairos theologians' aimed to do. What they achieved was an uncompromising criticism of two trends they discerned in South African theology and their relation to politics. The critique was followed by an equally unambiguous call for the acceptance of a third theology which they saw as presenting a challenge to the Church's policies of action within

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<sup>27</sup>deGruchy, John. "The Church and the Struggle for South Africa" in Theology Today, July '86. PP. 235-239.

the political and social world that was South Africa at the time.

According to this group of radical theologians, the call of the gospel was a 'prophetic' call. They saw themselves as standing at the end of a long line of biblical prophets, calling out judgement to sinners and the way of salvation to the theologically, spiritually and politically lost.

They concluded their work expressing the 'hope that it [would] stimulate discussion, debate, reflection and prayer, but above all, that it would lead to action', and by inviting 'all committed Christians to take this matter further, to do more research, to develop the themes we have presented here or to criticise them and return to the Bible....'<sup>28</sup>

As previously mentioned, the Kairos Document did provoke debate- most of which pivoted around their dubiously unqualified commitment to the 'cause of the oppressed'. The big question which worried the white community in general, white church leaders, and certainly P.W. Botha was what exactly such commitment implied. With the 'oppressed' engaging in increasingly anarchic waves of violence (however understandable) there seemed to be very little doubt in most people's minds that the Kairos Document was a deliberate appeal in support of a 'just revolution'.

With good reason, the largest issue at stake seemed to be the churches' stance on the issue of violence. Mixed into this issue was an ongoing debate about the definition of violence itself. It appeared entirely dependant on which side one was on: ie; if one

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<sup>28</sup>The Kairos Document, p.24.

supported the State, obviously 'freedom fighters' became saboteurs and communists, and State repression became a struggle for peace and order.

From the other side of the fence, criminals and vandals became 'freedom fighters' and State repression represented a 'total onslaught' of the System on the entire black population.<sup>29</sup>

However, the Kairos theologians were not, primarily, taking a stand on the issue of violence. Their theological criticisms aimed at what they labelled 'Church and 'State' theology were, above all, intended as the final, levelling blow to the ideological supports feeding and propping up these theologies. As the Kairos theologians saw it, white theology could be divided into two ideological camps, both of which undermined the 'true' intent of the gospel of Christ; hence, the biblical message itself.

The central problem in the resistance to apartheid up until their time was an inability for the mainline churches<sup>30</sup> to take the bull by the horns, as it were. This was due primarily to their unacknowledged ideological allegiances. Because of ideological

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<sup>29</sup> 'Total onslaught' was actually Botha's term for the co-ordinated efforts of black 'communists' (fifteen-year-old children who threw stones and burnt buildings on empty stomachs) and international communist lackeys (the UN and the World Council of Churches) to exclude Afrikaners once and for all from their hard-won place in the South African sun. (to get the Nationalist government to give up apartheid.) I use the term from the reverse side of the conflict on purpose. In many respects the thinking and perceptions of those struggling against apartheid seem very much to have been heavily informed by the general thought climate set up by the defenders of apartheid. As a general phenomenon, this seems to be part and parcel of the whole dynamic of confrontation. It is inherent in situations of conflict because conflict is always over a common point, since it is a perversion of communion which depends on a point of mutual agreement.

Such an observation would be a trite commonplace worthy of being left out of this discussion if it did not also explain the difference between dialogue and dialectic; which difference has relevancy to this entire discussion at the fundamental level.

<sup>30</sup> by which are meant the umbrella group of so-called 'English-speaking Churches', and the Dutch Reformed family of churches, with the exception of the Mission, or Sending-Kerk.



captivity, rooted in their basic group interests in maintaining the status quo, the mainline churches held either a 'Church theology', or supported the State in its espousal of a 'State theology'. Hence, they were rendered powerless when it came to their ability to seriously and effectively fight apartheid.

Such a position was not only morally reprehensible on the basis that whatever did not effectively fight for freedom was *de facto* against it, but was also a theological heresy. The idea of naming theological heresies in modern South Africa was not strange: 'Apartheid theology', or theology which justified apartheid, had already been declared heretical by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches only three years previously. What appeared novel about the Kairos statement was that, in addition to criticising overtly pro-apartheid theology, the Kairos theologians went on to attack all theology which did not agree with their own 'prophetic theology'.

Of course, the statement was not made in quite this manner. Instead, broad and sweeping categories were used to divide all South African theology into three groups. It was an automatic effect of such categorisation that theology could only be Kairos' 'prophetic' theology, or against it-- and the Kairos Document was very clearly intended to have this effect.

So, either by default, or by definition, whoever disagreed with the Kairos statement automatically fell into the 'Church' or 'State' category; and from there, into the consequent judgment of the Almighty. Although, naturally they left a disclaimer of sorts

inviting 'all committed Christians'<sup>31</sup> to hold their statements up to their own proclaimed Biblical standard.

They did not leave any doors open for philosophical or political criticism. Presumably, the act of doing so would have negated their own confidence. It is most likely that they did not think about it at all, and this would be hardly a surprise since most people are blind to the possibility of their own ideological entrapment.

Returning to the main point of the Kairos Document: to expose theology's ideological captivity and to propose a way out ('prophetic' theology), it seems important to ask whether they themselves are free from ideological hermeneutics which do not wind up destroying the essence of the 'good news' to which they are claiming most faithful adherence. In summary, while the Kairos theologians are free to condemn the use of an ideological hermeneutic in biblical exegesis when it comes to those who do not have their particular political stand, it is not at all clear that they themselves have not fallen into a similar trap.

The criticisms of 'State' and 'Church' are sweeping and general enough as to be of dubious accuracy, and for this reason it is worth examining them. But in addition, what is proposed as an alternative theology is not without problems either. Apart from the issue of violence, there is the deeper, more foundational question of whether the Kairos theologians have read their

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<sup>31</sup>Since the definition of 'committed' was interpreted by themselves, it is easy to see how potentially meaningless this disclaimer could be.

situation through their Bible, or their Bible through their situation.

Insofar as a situation constitutes a particular perception in the mind, the situation itself is largely a construct of the mind. The situation, then, is always formed through a particular conceptual grid. If the Bible is read through the situation, then the situation is the determinant of the biblical message. Hence, the conceptual framework by which the situation was initially constructed becomes the determinant of what the Bible says. In other words, the Bible gets read through an ideological hermeneutic.

When this happens, as the Kairos theologians point out *chez les autres*, it is not the whole Bible which is read, but only parts. When only parts are taken as 'the truth' for a situation, the whole is forgotten and the resulting doctrine ends up a heresy. Essentially, this is what happened in the development of theological justifications for apartheid.<sup>32</sup>

The reason that this point is so crucially important is not that I intend to discount the Kairos theologians' position by proving that their argument is internally inconsistent. Being human, it would be folly to expect perfect consistency on their part. Rather, the point takes the weight that it does because the Kairos theologians have engaged themselves in an exercise of theological contextualisation which they propose as a model to the

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<sup>32</sup>Loubser's work Critical Review of Racial Theology...the Apartheid Bible describes the process in detail.

world.

Having struggled decades for a liberation which seemed all too long in coming, this group finally found (or received) the message which would unlock the gates of freedom for the churches everywhere. Not that the worldwide Church was expected to formulate her theology in the same mould as the Kairos theologians had- that would make nonsense out of the whole idea of contextualisation. It was their method which they saw as being definitive.

Those who merely applied stock doctrinal concepts which were not part of the 'true' message of the Bible could be criticised, but the problem was not a situational application of stock ideas so much as it was an application of the 'wrong' ones. As a corrective, the Kairos theologians proposed to make the 'right' ones relevant to the South African situation. Instead of 'vague concepts' like 'reconciliation' and 'peace' which only served the existing, evil order, the moment of Kairos was a revelation that concrete concepts such as 'oppressor' and 'oppressed' could be applied.

If these categories strike the reader as being somewhat alien to the Bible, the point that Kairos was making was that they were not. These were Biblical categories, embodied in oppressed people like the Israelites and Jesus, and oppressors like Pharaoh, the Romans and their alibis- the Pharisees. The implication for the worldwide Church becomes an obligation to greater fidelity to these 'Biblical' concepts when she engages in theological work from

within other contexts.

Furthermore, the willingness of the Kairos theologians to take an uncompromisingly 'prophetic' stance within South Africa is seen as a challenge to the worldwide Church. The message between the lines is 'We have finally taken the stand the Church ought to take, therefore, now we will really be able to push history forward to 'finish the race marked out for us' and grasp hold of the eschatalogical promise of the Kingdom of God. If you want to avoid condemnation and enter into the Kingdom yourselves, you have to take a similar stand. Otherwise, you will be swept aside as irrelevant by the overwhelming tide of God's victory.'<sup>33</sup>

As this is a serious charge indeed, it is crucially important to examine very closely just exactly what the nature of the Kairos stand was. Was it 'prophetic' in the Biblical sense, and must we find our feet similarly in our own political climates if we are to have a real input into the making of freedom from our own various entrapments and oppressions?

The challenge of the Kairos Document to Christians in South Africa and around the globe is the challenge to follow the example of their political mode of ecclesiastical being. Is that mode right? Is it primarily biblical? Or is it primarily ideological? Is there something wrong with having an ideologically informed mode of being in the first place? If Christians are to take seriously at all the injunctions to 'be made new by the renewing of your

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<sup>33</sup>If this sounds more than a little triumphalist, or even Hegelian, it is because it is- but that discussion is for later.

mind' and to 'be in the world, but not of it', then the answer to this last is an emphatic 'Yes!'.

If the message of Jesus is the standard, which is what a Christian claims by definition, then by definition, nothing else can serve as a standard. Where an ideological hermeneutic determines the content and implication of the biblical message, then it is something else besides the Bible which has become the standard. In theological terms, the believer has replaced God with an idol, and the result of wrong belief will be wrong perceptions and wrong action. (As I am sure the Kairos group would agree- at least with regard to others, not themselves.) At least, action will be wrong in the sense that it will not be Christian, since it is no longer directed toward the message of the Christian God, but elsewhere. (This discussion would not apply to non-Christians, since 'wrong' here depends on a certain self-definition of a group and pertains to that group.)

For the Church all over the world faced with the dilemma over what her political mode of being ought to be, the Kairos answer must be thoroughly examined. Not only must one discern whether or not their answer was appropriate to their own situation and whether it remained faithful to the essence of the gospel, but one must also decide if a similar stance is demanded of oneself in one's own situation. For, if it is indeed God's Kairos- God's moment of truth- then what fools the rest of us would be to let it pass us by.

Yet, in order to get a proper sense of what is meant by a

'prophetic theology', it is necessary to place the words which describe it within the context of the Kairos Document as a whole. Without a proper sense of what the Kairos theologians describe as not prophetic, it is not possible to fully understand what they think is prophetic.

Moreover, if their theological analysis of the 'State' and 'Church' theologies seems to have adequate support elsewhere, then it is more probable that the conclusion of their analysis ('prophetic theology') was appropriate both to its own context, and as a model for prophetic theological and ecclesiastical political engagement in other contexts.

Just how true was their moment of truth with regard to 'State theology'?

## THE CRITIQUE OF STATE THEOLOGY

The Kairos Document opens its critique with the following definition of what they have chosen to call 'State' theology:

"simply the theological justification of the status quo with its racism, capitalism and totalitarianism. It blesses injustice, canonises the will of the powerful and reduces the poor to passivity, obedience and apathy."<sup>34</sup>

It does these hideous things by misusing theological concepts (especially Romans 13:1-7, 'Law and Order', 'communist', and the name of God) to give 'divine authority' to its own, nefarious purposes.

The Kairos theologians point out that the apartheid government is not unique in its blatant misuse of Romans 13. "Throughout the history of Christianity totalitarian regimes have tried to legitimise an attitude of blind obedience and absolute servility towards the state by quoting this text".<sup>35</sup> The apartheid government stands in a traditional line of like governments, which (incidentally) it has been the traditional duty of committed Christians to oppose.

Without naming who the 'State Theologians' might be, or precisely where their 'theology' is documented, the Kairos

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<sup>34</sup>"Challenge to the Church, the Kairos Document", p.3.

<sup>35</sup>ibid.



theologians contend that their main difficulty with State Theology's use of Romans 13 is that State Theology has attempted to apply the passage as though it were a universal principle, while ignoring the fact of their own, inherent contextuality.

Moreover, it is possible for State Theology to engage in a kind of theological imperialism because State theologians do not even read Romans 13 within the context of the Bible as a whole. Because they read it neither with the Biblical context, nor their own in view, they fall into the [heretical] error of missing the main point of the whole Biblical message.

Since they have forgotten the whole, (the ongoing story of God's liberating acts) they do not see how Romans 13 fits into that whole: illustrating an evil situation which God *allowed* but did not *will*, and which the Apostle Paul had to mention in passing because some of his flock naively believed that because they had become Christians, all State authorities would disappear from the earth.

Thus, the intention of the Kairos Document is not only that State Theology should be seen to have wrongly applied Romans 13 to the South African context, but that one must be open to the possibility that the passage is non-applicable to begin with. As Kairos puts it, "Paul...is simply establishing the fact that there will be some kind of secular authority and that Christians as such are not exonerated from subjection to secular laws and authorities. He does not say anything at all about what they should do when the

State becomes unjust and oppressive. That is another question."<sup>36</sup>

The second set of 'theological concepts' misused by State Theology are 'law' and 'order'. While the extent of the *theological* nature of these concepts is somewhat debatable, the Kairos Document assures the reader that they are indeed theological by virtue of the fact that they are used to demand unquestioned obedience to the State- which obedience is due God alone.

State Theology "tries to make those who reject [the law and order of the State of Emergency] feel that they are ungodly." Thus, the State usurps the Church's moral right to discern and decide on matters of justice and righteousness.

For the purpose of making such judgements, State Theology employs a new theological term: 'communist'. 'Communist' is a theological term because it is used to designate those who are 'evil', ie: those who disobey the State's 'right' to law and order. 'Communist' is the State theological equivalent to 'sinner'.

To match this new terminology, State Theology also updates more rustic language such as 'hell-fire-and-damnation' so that it reads 'horrors of a tyrannical, atheistic and terrorist communist regime'. Not only has State Theology ignored contextual reality, but by such 'translations', State Theology has perverted the meaning of biblical contextualisation in order to scare those who could not be awed into it, into obedience to their diabolical 'order'.

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<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, pp.4,5.

The most blasphemous of all the State Theology's heretical acts, however, is its flagrant abuse of the holy name of the Almighty God. As if it were not enough that police and military chaplains invoked God's name to comfort perpetrators of violence, the blasphemy has reached all the way to the idolatrous heights of the preamble of the State constitution. They quote:

"In humble submission to Almighty God, who controls the destinies of nations and the history of peoples; who gathered our forebears together from many lands and gave them this their own; who has guided them from generation to generation; who has wondrously delivered them from the dangers that beset them."<sup>37</sup>

The 'god' of State Theology, then, is very clearly not the God of the Bible. No god which is invoked on behalf of the State which maintains itself by use of teargas, prison cells, death sentences and repressive violence could possibly have anything to do with the God of the Bible. Opposite to the State god, that God is one who lifts up the humble and debases the proud.

"Christians who are trying to remain faithful to the God of the Bible are...horrified when they see that there are Churches, like the White Dutch Reformed Churches and other groups of Christians, who actually subscribe to this heretical theology."

True to their promise, the Kairos theologians did not mince words in the above criticism of State Theology. Whether they were right or not, it would be completely understandable if white Dutch Reformed Christians specifically, and Afrikaners in general, found this critique highly offensive.

While it is true that Jesus himself did not hesitate to call

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<sup>37</sup>ibid., pp. 6, 7.

the Pharisees of his day 'whited sepulchres' (and worse), J.A. Loubser has suggested that "if white Christians were to make use of the same inductive logic [as the Kairos theologians], they would have to judge Black Theology by the barbarous 'necklaces' with which black dissenters are executed..."<sup>38</sup>

It is a good point, but does not answer the question of whether or not the Kairos theologians are justified in their theological condemnation of the government and DRC's. It would appear that with the exception of a number who are "fooled and confused by these false prophets and their heretical theology"<sup>39</sup>, the white DRC's and the Nationalist government are viewed as being essentially the same organ under two different names.

Since it has already been pointed out that the Kairos critique made little legitimate distinction between theological and political terms, there is some ground for raising the question as to their accuracy in fusing the identities of the DRC and the State. What exactly was the relationship between Afrikaner politics and religion?

Putting this relationship into a nutshell, John deGruchy explains that "to Calvinists, the myth of apartheid had powerful appeal which made sense of nationalism. For nationalists, the Calvinist part of the mythology was part of being an Afrikaner-though it had no significance in itself."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Loubser, Critical Review of Racial Theology, p.154.

<sup>39</sup>Kairos Document, p.7.

<sup>40</sup>"The Revitalisation of Calvinism in South Africa.." in Journal of Religious Ethics, p.29.

It is a commonplace in the literature for anti-apartheid church people to point out that the Afrikaner Nationalist government is a hypocrite when it accuses churches of 'preaching politics instead of the gospel'. For many reasons there is a case to be made for the view that all aspects of life are somehow political, and that all politics is ultimately a religious concern.<sup>41</sup> However, in this particular instance, the rejoinder that Afrikaner churches are themselves political stems from their clearly political involvement in Afrikaner history.

Conversely, the State is seen as having a theology because of its historical dependence on theological justifications for its policies. While such mutual legitimation of political and religious discourse is common to histories the world over, some particulars of the South African story are needed in order to fully understand the vehemence and significance of the Kairos accusation.

According to the generally accepted account, the marriage of Church and nationalist politics had its roots in the time of the Great Trek.<sup>42</sup> At that time, the teachings of the Dutch Reformed clergy travelling with the Trekkers were a source of spiritual sustenance to the people. Reformed faith also provided a story into which the emerging Afrikaner people could fit themselves in order to find meaning in the middle of conflict and confusion.

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<sup>41</sup> The main argument is that all of human life is inherently religious, but is lived within a Body Politic. Therefore, all politics is a religious concern, at root.

<sup>42</sup> P.G.J. Meiring ("Nationalism in the DRC's" in Sundermeier Church and Nationalism p.56.) suggests that the tradition of close Church/State relations goes further back than that: Upon landing at Table Bay on April 6, 1652, Jan Van Riebeeck is said to have threatened that anyone absent from prayer would forfeit 6 days' water rations.

Identifying easily with such paradigmatic events such as the parting of the Red Sea and the Israelite movement into the Promised Land, they saw themselves very much as inheritors of the Israelite Promise.<sup>43</sup>

As inheritors of the promise, they were also God's instrument to the 'Caananite nations' (African tribes) for salvation. Out of this idea flowed the idea of 'trusteeship' which spawned a strong Afrikaner tradition in mission work. It also helped to support the idea that Afrikaners were divinely appointed leaders in South Africa.

But it was not during the Trek stage, or even shortly afterwards that the full identification of the Afrikaner Churches and people took place. This happened in the crucible of the Boer War and the subsequent period of Afrikaner poverty and Lord Milner's attempted anglicisation of the new Union under British direction (1910). Afrikaner frustration with British interference mounted under the leadership of Smuts and Hertzog, who, while Boer Generals, were viewed as sell-outs to British/Jewish capital at the expense of the poor Afrikaner farmer. *Smuts & Botha*  
*Hertzog's position more ambivalent.*

During this time the Churches became institutions for cultural preservation, as well as religious instruction. It was Dutch Afrikaner clergy such as the Rev. J.F. Naude who pioneered the first Afrikaner nationalist schools, developing the idea of a 'Christian Nationalist education'. Reverend Naude taught some of the first

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<sup>43</sup>As Alan Paton explained (Knocking on the Door, p.103): "...but the dangers of frontier life, wanderings and privations, the very nature of the land itself, caused to come especially vivid and alive the stories of the Israelites, their destiny as a chosen people, and the necessity to hold themselves elect and apart."

sermons in the Afrikaans language, and assisted in the production of an Afrikaans Bible.<sup>44</sup>

In these earlier years, the Church/people relationship was built primarily around the preservation and promotion of the Afrikaner identity itself. This process was helped by the influence of German Romantic Nationalism stemming from the Fichtean tradition of thought, and imported to the Afrikaner community in South Africa by young Afrikaner elites who picked it up while studying in Germany and Holland in the 1930's.<sup>45</sup> *Moodie* (??)

At the same time as they were learning a philosophical and political language conducive to the aims of a frustrated people who wanted to get out from under the British boot, they also found a theological argument compatible with their concern to avoid being swamped from below by the substantial and growing black population:

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<sup>44</sup> Klaus Nurnberger, "The Impact of Christianity on Socio-Economic Developments" in Christianity Amidst Apartheid, p.152.; Peter Randall, Not Without Honour, pp.1-3; P.G.J. Weiring, "Nationalism in the DRC's" in Church and Nationalism, Sundermeier, pp.56-66.; John deGruchy, "Revitalisation of Calvinism" op.cit. pp.23-32.; David Bosch, "The Afrikaners and South Africa" in Theology Today, pp.204-210; Neville Richardson, "Apartheid, Heresy and the Church.." in Journal of Religious Ethics, pp.1-5..... to name a few.

<sup>45</sup> Specifically, Derek Morphey highlights the following key philosophical ideas informing Afrikaner political thought (Cassidy, Passing Summer, p.121.): 1. God is to be identified very closely with nature. (Jacob Boehme 1575-1624).; 2. Not only is God identified with the world and with nature, which make up the 'whole', but his being so, individuals are only part of the whole and are therefore less important than the whole and unable to affect it (ie. they are not fully 'free'). (Baruch Spinoza 1632-1677).; 3. If the whole is more important than the parts, then the state is more important than its parts (ie. than the individuals comprising it.) (Frederich Schelling 1775-1854).; 4. The individual who would be absorbed into the divine whole must now make it his goal to be absorbed into the state, which is the whole. This is both his religious and his political duty. (Johann Fichte 1762-1814).; 5. If a nation would triumph in its upward struggle to civilisation, it must remain pure and unique, or it loses its fight. Morality is therefore defined in terms of what is good for the upward movement of this pure and civilised state. (Johann Herder 1744-1803).; 6. A nation stays pure in this struggle by maintaining its own language and culture (Herder). In this, controlled education is a key (Fichte).

the neo-Calvinism of Abraham Kuyper.<sup>46</sup>

While there is some debate as to whether Kuyper intended his theology to be used in the way that Afrikaner theologians employed it<sup>47</sup>, certain of his ideas lent themselves unquestionably well to the idea of segregation. For instance, along with the slogan "In isolation lies our strength."<sup>48</sup>, his teaching on 'sovereignty of spheres' had particular salience.

As early as 1907, the neo-Kuyperian Reverend W.J. Postma started calling for separate schools, churches, prisons, parliaments and universities for all non-Afrikaner, non-white (but especially African) people.<sup>49</sup> In the early 1940's the Afrikaner Churches were already petitioning the Smuts government and Malan's nationalists for legislation on mixed marriages (implemented in 1949).<sup>50</sup>

As the Nationalist party grew in strength, Church influence on the political structures did as well.<sup>51</sup> Unlike other places and

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<sup>46</sup>Joap Durand ("Afrikaner Piety and Dissent" in Villa-Vicencio and deGruchy, *Resistance and Hope*, p.41) points out that Kuyperianism was deliberately modified to 'fit' the nationalist view. As he put it, "Kuyperianism was introduced...when Afrikanerdom was looking for something reformed and orthodox, but also to accommodate nationalism. (p.42) Durand adds that Kuyper's theology transferred easily because of his cosmology which he presented as biblical. The doctrine had three key points: an emphasis on separate spheres of life; the principle of sovereignty of each sphere; the principle of diversity as a creation principle (making racial diversity ontologically essential).

<sup>47</sup>deGruchy, "Revitalisation of Calvinism" pp.26-28.

<sup>48</sup>David Bosch, *ibid.*, p.208.

<sup>49</sup>David Bosch, *op.cit.*, p.209.

<sup>50</sup>*ibid.*, p.113.

<sup>51</sup>According to Michael Cassidy (*Passing Summer* p.125), the streams of theological and political thought converged in Dr. Malan, who he quotes: "Our church has received from God a special calling in respect of the Afrikaner people with which it is so intimately related. It should therefore also be regarded as the church's duty



historical times, this rapprochement was not so much because of a political agreement worked out between the clerical and secular hierarchy.

Rather, 'Christian' and 'nationalist' had become almost synonymous in Afrikaner culture, such that virtually everyone in leadership was at least nominally a member of the Dutch Reformed Church. Not only did the Church teaching have a large place in their considerations, but the Church continued to provide a cultural basis of moral legitimacy.

Moreover, the Broederbond<sup>52</sup> ensured that the symbiotic relationship between religious and cultural leadership continued, for the maintenance of a cohesive national community and a consistent Afrikaner 'way'.

The working out of Afrikaner identity, and its subsequent

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to be national itself, to watch over our peculiar national interests and to teach our people to detect the hand of God in its history and genesis..."

Cassidy explains that Malan's policy was then enshrined in the Nationalist party's People's Congress of 1944, which stated that the policy of apartheid should be followed "so that each of the non-white population groups will find the opportunity to develop according to its own characteristics, in its own area, so as to acquire eventually full control over their own affairs...it is the Christian duty of the whites to act as guardians over the non-white races until such time as they have reached that level where they can look after their own affairs." (op.cit., p.125)

However, other sources (Hope and Young, The South African Churches in a Revolutionary Situation, pp.45-47.) appear to provide some evidence which would reduce the extent of Malan's commitment to the 'Christian' solution of apartheid. It was his campaign platform, but in response to the DRC Federal Missionary Council (1941) endorsement of 'separate development' using 'gospel principles', Malan is recorded as having stated that "total territorial separation is impracticable under the present circumstances." This could be read as an acknowledgement of white need for black labour, but also suggests that Malan's approach to apartheid was more pragmatic, and less theo-ideological than Cassidy has implied.

<sup>52</sup>An institution which functioned in the Afrikaner community in a manner similar to the way the Masonic Lodge does in Anglo and other cultures. It was established as a deliberate alternative to the Lodge in South Africa, with the express purpose of promoting the 'Christian national' idea. It did this by forming a network of leading Afrikaners who worked together to ensure that Afrikaners were promoted to as many positions of leadership as possible in every influential part of society, from politics, to the press and education, as well as the Dutch Reformed leadership.

preservation were deliberate projects which drew on the naturally bonding feeling of religio-cultural belonging. In a sense, both Afrikaner religion and culture had to be consciously forged out of an amalgam of French Huguenot, Dutch and other traditions in order to be able to offer a unified resistance to the *Roomse* and *Swart Gevaaren*. (the 'Roman', or English, and the Black 'Danger')

Thus, the Afrikaner brand of Calvinist religion was largely a product of an intention toward political power, and political power was seen as a religious duty. Towards one's own, this was a duty to maintain one's sacred identity before God. Towards the blacks, this became the duty to 'help' them 'develop along their own lines'.

In terms of theological justifications for what would become apartheid policies, the period just previous to the 1948 election of the Nationalist government was the most formative. The theology was further built up in the decade which followed, but by the time South Africa became a Republic in 1961, apartheid justifications had become a fully-blown ideology.<sup>53</sup>

In 1947, the New Testament Professor E.P. Groenewald submitted a pivotal document to the Council of Reformed Churches. As it turned out, the document, which provided a point-by-point 'scriptural' justification for the policy of apartheid, became the basis for DRC support of apartheid right up until the Dutch Reformed General Synod of 1986.

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<sup>53</sup> According to J.A. Loubser, the 'Apartheid Bible' was developed in the decade between 1938 and 1948, establish and accepted between 1948 and 1960, and then developed its ideological character between '60 and 1976.

Briefly, Groenewald's document justified national, social and religious apartheid on the basis of a reading of Genesis 11 (the famous Tower of Babel story) and Acts 2 (the Pentecost). As he and subsequent Afrikaner apologists saw it, the nations of the earth were punished at the Tower of Babel for trying to unify, in direct contradiction to God's express will that man spread out over the earth forming separate nations.

Moreover, the Old Testament theme is continued into the New through the illustration of the Church at Pentecost. Instead of bringing believers together to form one, visible body, God reinforced their linguistic differences, illustrating clearly his divine principle of national identity and separate life of national groups.<sup>54</sup>

In 1950 the South African Bureau for Racial Affairs (SABRA) was founded by the government. Its statement which follows encapsulates the full extent to which the political and religious modes of being had been fused together in the minds of the nationalist Afrikaner leadership:

"One of the basic values which lends meaning to the concept of 'apartheid', is the value of national binding [volksverband] .... Just like the individual, the nation has an intrinsic worth and dignity. The worth of the nation is even higher than the worth of the individual....it should be fundamental that we grant unto others what we claim for ourselves. This is playing practical politics, but the moral grounds and the deepest justification for it is that all other people (non-Whites) are our fellow human beings, that they bear in themselves the image of God; with an own intrinsic worth and dignity which is not to be assailed, and which we should always respect. Moreover, it is a fact that in our particular ethnic situation separate development offers the

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<sup>54</sup>Loubser, Critical Review... pp.60-80.

only true potential for the non-Whites to come to self-realisation as human beings.

But above all we are Christians who stand under the command of the Master that we should love our neighbour as ourselves...It is therefore essential to the meaning of apartheid, that together with the separation between nations and cultures, the Whites also accept the responsibility for the well-being and development of the non-Whites."<sup>55</sup>

As apartheid was erected, it became increasingly clear to the majority of the population that 'responsibility for the well-being of' was meant in a euphemistic sense. In the same year, the Federal Missionary Council of the Dutch Reformed Church in Bloemfontein 'formulated a blueprint for apartheid'. The result was unmitigated support for the Group Areas and Population Registration Acts in 1950, and the Separate Amenities and Bantu Education Acts of 1953 (among others).

Except for its objection to the 'Church Clause' of the 1957 Native Laws Amendment Act<sup>56</sup>, the Dutch Reformed Churches continued in their support of government policy, and government leaders continued to hold a great deal of sway in ecclesiastical matters. For example, it was at the insistence of Prime Minister Verwoerd<sup>57</sup> that the NGK Synod in the Transvaal formally rejected the findings of the interdenominational Cottesloe Consultation on race relations

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<sup>55</sup>Michael Cassidy, The Passing Summer, pp.137,138.

<sup>56</sup>which proposed a penalty for churches and the black persons involved where it was found that a black person(s) were in attendance at a church in a white district. The Dutch Reformed family of churches objected on the grounds that the State was interfering in the Church sphere, but did not complain further when the punishment was reduced to implicate only the guilty black, and not the church.

<sup>57</sup>Cassidy, op.cit., p.141. and David Bosch "The Fragmentation of Afrikanerdom" in deGruchy and Villa-Vicencio Resistance and Hope p.70. , among others. Loubser (Critical Review, p.88.) takes Verwoerd's action to be evidence of an ideological hardening, since "it is typical of the ideological approach that a thin end of the wedge is perceived and attacked."

following the Sharpeville massacre.<sup>56</sup>

During the 50's and 60's, South Africa saw the ANC Defiance Campaign, the Bantu Education Act (which restricted the right of school instruction for Africans to the Nationalist government of Verwoerd, who's stated goal was to limit it to whatever Africans <sup>whose</sup> needed to perform their 'proper' duties in life and no more), the Treason Trial (following the creation of the Freedom Charter), the removal of Sophiatown and other removals to the new 'Bantu Homelands', the Sharpeville massacre, the General Laws Amendment Act which gave the government the right of detention of up to 90 days without trial and the Expropriation and Terrorism Acts.

In 1966 Verwoerd was stabbed in parliament, and replaced by John Vorster who immediately proposed a bill to make it illegal to have multi-racial political parties, or to hold multi-racial meetings.

These are still only a tiny representation of the increasingly inhumane and brutal activities of the Nationalist government in the name of apartheid (by then renamed 'separate development') and 'Christian Nationalism'. Nearly 10 years after SABRA made the previously cited statement, Prime Minister Verwoerd explained his policies with the following:

"The policy of separate development is designed for happiness, security and the stability provided by their home language and administration for the Bantu as well as the Whites ....I am absolutely convinced that integration in a

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<sup>56</sup>Wayne Cowan ("Beyers Naude, Outcast" pp.38/39) lists some of the Cottesloe findings deemed most contradictory to government policy: all racial groups should share the rewards and privileges of society; the unity of the church does not allow exclusion on the basis of a colour line; there are no scriptural grounds for denial of mixed marriages (although they may be 'inadvisable').

country like South Africa cannot possibly succeed...I am seeking justice for all the groups and not justice for only one group at the cost of the other three...

If meddlesome people keep their hands off us, we shall in a just way, such as behoves a Christian nation, work out solutions in the finest detail and carry them out...."<sup>59</sup>

Exactly one decade later, Henning Klopper (Speaker of the House and one of three founding members of the Broederbond) gave the following summary of Afrikaner history, which I quote at length because, <sup>it</sup> encapsulates the generally accepted/propogated mythology <sup>it</sup> so well:

"When the volk was depressed after the 1938 election, with only 27 out of 140 members of Parliament, God gave us the Ox Wagon Trek.[the centenary celebration of the original] Through the grace of God the Broeders executed it. It was not that the Broeders sought to become big and powerful in the nation. God used them in this instance too. They planned it, but God used them as instruments to make the trek what it was. Many people told us in places where the Trek arrived, 'It is wonderful, it is from God.' ....Show me a greater force on the whole continent of Africa!...We [the Bond] support the State, we support the Church, we support every big movement born from the nation. We make our contribution unobtrusively....We have supplied the leaders to our nation. Pity the nation without a leader! Every time, a leader could be chosen for the nation from the ranks of the Afrikaner Broederbond.[He was speaking at the Bond's 50th anniversary] When we lost Dr.Malan, we had Advocate Strijdom. When death claimed him we had Dr.Verwoerd. When he died so tragically, God had another man ready for us (John Vorster)....the Afrikaner nation was...a miracle because we accepted God our Father as our Saviour in every crisis. In those dark days when it was difficult, we went on our knees with all our problems and God gave us a solution."<sup>60</sup>

In light of the above facts and quotations, it is easy to understand why the Kairos theologians saw State pronouncements as theological heresies, and why they held the Dutch Reformed Churches and their members responsible for the consequences of those

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<sup>59</sup>Cassidy, op.cit., p.141.

<sup>60</sup>Cassidy, op.cit., pp.142,143.

policies. However, it does not follow that State propaganda was 'theology'.

For example, the insinuation that 'communist' means 'sinner damned to hell' is not *theology*. It is political propaganda which makes use of religious ideas which are significant in the mind of the hearer. If there is any theology involved at all, it is in the mind of the hearer, but not the words of the State. The same is true for 'law and order', insofar as they are used by the State. When DRC clergy buy into the State's usage, their's may be a theological pronouncement, but it cannot be confused with the State pronouncement.

Furthermore, there is evidence to show that, even from as early as the late 1920's a White Reformed element of dissent with 'apartheid theology' existed. After 1960 it started to grow significantly, increasing in its ability to influence the Afrikaner nationalist orthodoxy. 'Apartheid theology' was virtually rejected by the DR General Synod in 1986.<sup>61</sup> Therefore,

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<sup>61</sup>In 1929 (Cassidy op.cit., p.123), Professor J. du Plessis of the Stellenbosch Seminary was submitted to a heresy trial for openly questioning the South African version of Kuyperian theology. Then, through the 50's, men like BB Keet and Ben Marais began to articulate their disagreement with the use of scripture to support apartheid- although they still supported it on pragmatic grounds.

Partially due to their influence, partially as the result of nearly two decades of wrestling spiritually and theologically with his faith, and partially because of the catalytic influence of the Sharpeville massacre and the DRC decision regarding the Cottesloe Consultation, Reverend Beyers Naude left his position in the NGK branch of the Dutch Reformed churches to start the Christian Institute. (various sources, but especially Loubser Critical Review, Randall, Not Without Honour, International Commission of Jurists Trial of Beyers Naude, and Peter Walshe Church Versus State in South Africa, The Case of the Christian Institute)

According to the CI Constitution and Statement of Intent, "The CI [was] based upon the Word of God, upon belief in God the Father, in Jesus Christ the Son, Redeemer and Lord, and in the Holy Spirit, and upon the conviction that for all who share such a common loyalty, it is desirable and necessary that determined effort be made to express and foster their unity in Christ....The CI is a voluntary association of members of different denominations of the Church of Christ in South Africa. The Institute is a witness to the unity of all believers in Christ, and in this way it endeavours to promote the one-ness of the church in obedience to Christ and his Word.

it would be historically erroneous to categorise all white members of Dutch Reformed Churches (or even their leaders) indiscriminantly, as the Kairos theologians have done. *note* ✓

It is true that the DRC provided a climate of moral acceptance for political apartheid. It is also true that this was made

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In addition, the Institute seeks to co-ordinate the witness of Christians in the present critical state of our country. The Institute wishes, in every way, to assist Christians in their witness; and especially by making believers more aware of the privilege and responsibility they have for studying the Word of God and accepting mutual responsibility for the calling of the Church in the world." (deGruchy, "A Short History of the CI" in Resistance and Hope, p.16.)

While deGruchy refers to the Institute as a kind of 'confessing Church' similar to that in which Dietrich Bonhoeffer was involved during the Nazi years in Germany, it was not properly speaking an alternative Church to a 'State Church'. Until the organisation was banned in 1977 after the Soweto riots, it remained an organisation of individual members who were committed to working within their respective church structures.

The more Marxisant Black Consciousness enthusiasts tend to regard the CI as an important stage in the development of the Black Consciousness movement. It was through the network of the CI that Biko and others had the opportunity to be educated in Black Theology, which inspired them with the message of personal black infinite worth. Biko, with SASO and later the BPC, worked closely with the Black Community Project established by the CI to do social and educational work in the townships.

The CI also helped organise the African Independent Churches into an Association (AICA), and it was through the CI network of connections that the AICA and the (too conservative) SACC were brought into dialogue. The result was a marked shift in the emphasis of SACC activities, towards greater involvement with the black community in areas which blacks, as opposed to benevolent whites, felt were important. Black leadership in the SACC increased at the same time-- changes which were seen by many as indicative of a beginning white 'conversion' to the black experience.

The CI's initial work was not directed toward blacks however, but the persuasion of Afrikaner and English-speaking Christians. While their efforts in this direction are generally regarded as a failure- especially concerning the Afrikaner community-, it would appear that the work and witness of Beyers Naude and the CI was actually very significant in terms of its influence amongst Afrikaner Christians. Though, this was of course not obvious.

Unless there had been some kind of long-term ferment under the surface, it would not have been possible for the Regional Synod of the Western Cape (1983) to decide that it could no longer "identify itself with the view that apartheid, or separate development, was a direct demand of the Bible" (Loubser, p.111); nor would the NGK Presbytery (1985) have been able to "confess that the NGK has often insensitively and uncritically tolerated the negative realities and consequences of apartheid. The decision of the General Synod (1986) to almost completely abandon its Kuyperian hermeneutic could also not have been taken suddenly- as a spontaneous response to Black Power, for example.

Thus, it would be inappropriate to presume that the CI had failed, and that the Afrikaner Reformed Churches were not undergoing a process of change from within. Loubser's work provides a detailed and interesting account of the development of apartheid as an ideology, and how that ideology became the primary biblical hermeneutic in the DRC's. Yet, he also details the simultaneous struggle within the ranks of the DRC over this same ideologized 'Bible'. While this process of change did take far longer than most would have wanted, it was happening because the DRC was not first a State Church. It was a body of misguided, but devout people, for whom even the tiniest step was often a personal leap. Cassidy frequently draws his readers' attention to this fact.



possible because DRC clergy formulated a theology which was not consistent with the biblical message as it is generally accepted by the Church catholic. (There is some question as to whether that message is primarily 'God's liberation of the oppressed', but this will be discussed later.)

In fact, this theology supported separation of peoples, when God's message is clearly about bringing people together, and bringing them to Himself. Therefore, the theology was a lie about both God and man. It was a heresy, and it was idolatrous because it took as its standard, not God's word, but a man-made ideological word through which it moulded God into its own image.

It is also true that it was a heresy which was supportive of a repressive State. It was a State-supportive theology. However, the DRC's were never State churches in the same sense that, for instance, the German Church was during the Third Reich. So, by definition, since it was not a State Church, its theology was not State theology. This is not a small point either.

Because the DRC was always first responsible to itself, it always retained a crucially important possibility of autonomy from the State which a State Church would not have. Ironically, this separation of the Afrikaner churches and the Nationalist state was also an implication of 'separate spheres' philosophy and theology. When it wanted to (such as in '57 over the Church clause), the DRC was capable of asserting itself.

Yet, for a long time the possibility of autonomy was always open, it was not always possible for most to take advantage of it.

Political and social pressure on ecclesiastical leadership was too great. If not all 'truly committed' Afrikaners did not leave the DRC, or become political dissidents, it is for understandable reasons. It took Beyers Naude nearly 20 years himself to come to the place where he was able to stand against the tide.<sup>62</sup>

While church members and leadership chose for some time not to rock the boat, the political climate worsened, rocking it anyway. Gradually circumstances became more conducive to personal re-examinations of faith among white Reformed laity and clergy.<sup>63</sup> By the time of the General Synod in '86, apartheid theology had been substantially undermined from within the Afrikaner community.

If the Church was not truly a State Church, the State was not consistently religious either. This means that there is no reason to call its pronouncements and policies 'theology'- especially in the period of the 70's and 80's, which is the primary concern of the Kairos Document.

Neither was the State always in need of theological justification. After the Nationalist government had been in power a couple of decades, it seemed increasingly capable of standing on its own. After a point, the State did not need a 'theology' because it had a rationale which was good in itself. (It would appear that certainly by 1985 when the Document was released, Botha's main justifying argument- 'total onslaught'- was not theological at all, but political. Where State pronouncements did

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<sup>62</sup>Randall, Peter. Not Without Honour. p.1.

<sup>63</sup>Joap Durand, op.cit., p.50.

infer a religious significance, it was much more on the superficial level of 'civil religion' than it was an expression of conscientious theological debate.)

To summarise, while the main stream of Afrikaner Reformed theology did succumb to ideological entrapment throughout most of the apartheid regime, by the mid-80's there were concrete signs that Reformed theologians and clergy were moving out of that trap quickly. Yet, as they were doing so, their monumental decisions could not have the same political impact they would have had at an earlier stage of apartheid development. Thus, it would appear that a critique of 'State theology' was not only inaccurate, but less needful and less powerful in terms of how it would impact the apartheid policies of the government.

It is as though the Kairos Document were announcing that the horse had escaped, just as the horse was returning to the barn and people were starting to use cars instead.

Nevertheless, the project for this essay is to discover how the Kairos' 'State Theology' was 'not-prophetic'. Clearly one way that 'State Theology' was 'not-prophetic' was its use of Romans 13 to uphold the status quo. While a proper exegesis of that chapter would certainly be interesting, for the purposes of this essay Romans 13 can be regarded as a particular example of a 'general principle' which was applied 'in ignorance of context' for the sake of the status quo.

Yet, there is some irony in this accusation. The above historical evidence does not suggest that the DRC had a problem

with the idea of contextual theology. Obviously 'apartheid theology' developed in response to a very particular context: the situation of the Afrikaner people.

Afrikaner Reformed theology was constructed specifically in support a perceived 'solution' to perceived situational problems. The DRC clergy who formulated apartheid theology were definitely not lacking a situational analysis. It is Loubser's thesis that, far from being vaguely 'universal', apartheid theology was Africa's first truly contextual theology. The problem was not textual *irrelevancy*- it was the manner of its contextual *relevancy*.

Afrikaner perception of their context was itself a product of fear before it was a statement of faith. Reading *from* their situation *to* the Bible, they were reading it through the ideological hermeneutic which had begun to develop around the mythology of volkskapitalism, and later apartheid.

For the Kairos theologians, this process amongst Afrikaners of reading the Bible through the situation clearly meant that Afrikaners wrongly placed self-interest before interest in the truth of God. The result was that Afrikaner ideology became the Afrikaner standard, replacing the true biblical message. Standing as it did in self-interested ideology, and not biblical God-interest, Afrikaner theology could not only fail to be prophetic- it also became an idolatry.

'Not-prophetic' in this case then, means a theological capitulation to a questionable philosophy for the sake of self-preservation.

To summarise the Kairos critique of 'State Theology', it is 'good in parts' (Cassidy's phrase), but clearly not wholly accurate. By the time of the Kairos Document, official theology was letting go of its idolatry- partially because of the influence of courageous Afrikaner Reformed 'prophets' (people who stood against the tide) like Beyers Naude. And again, State propaganda could hardly be properly called 'theology'.

Bearing all of this discussion in mind, it would be interesting to see just how true the Kairos 'moment of truth' was about 'Church Theology'.

## THE CRITIQUE OF CHURCH THEOLOGY

The Kairos Document begins its second critique with the explanation that 'Church Theology' consists of 'a series of inter-related theological assumptions' which they found to be the dominant theme running through the vast body of speeches, press statements, sermons and conference statements voiced by leaders in the 'English-speaking' Churches.

The category 'English-speaking' generally refers, in all of the material, to mainline churches which are neither in the Dutch-Reformed tradition, nor the African Independent family of churches, nor the Roman Catholic Church. Broadly, this means the United Congregationalists, Presbyterians and Reformed Presbyterians, Anglicans, Lutherans, Methodists and so on. Within many of these groups, there are also 'sister' churches whose hierarchy and organisation is primarily black.

Interestingly, the majority of Kairos signatories were representatives of the Anglican and Presbyterian churches, the Methodists, Lutherans and United Congregationalists- though in addition to these, a good number were Roman Catholic or Dutch Reformed Mission. Some represented Assemblies of God, which is a black charismatic denomination.

So, it would seem that the Kairos theologians were not criticising a Church of which they were not also a part- whose statements and conferences they had not contributed to, as leaders.

Be that as it may, they go on to point out that 'Church Theology' does not in fact express the 'faith of the majority'. In spite of what the majority feels, the utterances of handfuls of leaders are regarded by the media as constitutive of the official opinions of the Churches.

While these opinions tend to be critical of apartheid, they are so only in a very 'cautious' way; the criticism 'Church Theology' makes of apartheid is superficial and even counter-productive because it lulls the public to sleep with three 'stock ideas' it [mis]applies willy-nilly to the South African crisis. These are: reconciliation (which is equated with 'peace'), justice, and non-violence.

For Church Theology, reconciliation is the magical solution to all of South Africa's complicated problems. In order to show just how naive and fallacious this approach is, the Kairos theologians sum up the doctrine of reconciliation in the following way:

"We must be fair. We must listen to both sides of the story. If the two sides can only meet to talk and negotiate they will sort out their differences and misunderstandings and the conflict will be resolved."<sup>64</sup>

The big question the Kairos Document then asks is, is this *really* Christian, or does it just masquerade as such? e

They contend that 'reconciliation' has been turned into an 'absolute principle'- as though it could be applied to all cases of conflict (which, of course, it cannot). For instance, it might

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<sup>64</sup>Kairos Document, p.8.

very well be applicable between individuals, but is clearly misapplied to situations of group conflict. Between individuals, the problem is most likely to be a problem of misunderstanding, which is naturally solvable through dialogue.

However, "there are other conflicts in which one side is right and the other wrong." Obviously one cannot approach this second type of conflict in the same manner as the first, since it is no longer a matter of sorting out a simple misunderstanding, but a clear struggle between one evil side, and one right side in which reconciliation is impossible.

"There are conflicts where one side is a fully armed and violent oppressor while the other side is defenceless and oppressed. There are conflicts that can only be described as the struggle between justice and injustice, good and evil, God and the devil. To speak of reconciling these two is not only a mistaken application of the Christian idea of reconciliation, it is a total betrayal of all that Christian faith has ever meant. Nowhere in the Bible or in Christian tradition has it ever been suggested that we ought to try to reconcile good and evil, God and the devil."<sup>65</sup>

In view of the above, it would be 'totally unChristian' - sinful in fact- to try to reconcile the two 'sides' without first removing the evil injustices. Doing so would make sufferers accomplices in their own oppression, which would cause them to 'become servants of the devil'.

Beautiful as the idea of holding hands, black and white together, is, "no reconciliation, no forgiveness and no negotiations are possible" without justice and repentance first. After these last happen, then and only then will reconciliation and

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<sup>65</sup> Rairos, p.9.



negotiation be a Christian duty. This is the proper and biblical order of things, since nobody can be forgiven and reconciled with God until they have repented.

Moreover, in South Africa there is 'clear proof'<sup>66</sup> of a 'total lack of repentance on the part of the present regime'. So, unfortunately, the regime cannot be forgiven, much as "there is nothing [the Kairos theologians] would want more than true reconciliation and genuine peace". It is just that these cannot be had without justice. Until justice is had, there is nothing for real Christians to do but to follow Jesus, who said: "Do you suppose that I am here to bring peace on earth. No, I tell you, but rather dissension".<sup>67</sup>

Since peace and unity (reconciliation) cannot be had at the cost of justice, they cannot be had without having disunity, dissension and conflict first- since the regime is not ready to repent on its own. "To be truly biblical, our Church leaders must adopt a theology that millions of Christians have already adopted- a biblical theology of direct confrontation with the forces of evil rather than a theology of reconciliation with sin and the devil."<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>a 'recent speech' of P.W. Botha is mentioned- without reference, explanation of content, or consideration that if Church leadership does not adequately represent Church membership, perhaps other leaders should not be considered the perfect voice of the people under them either. The Document also mentions 'continued military repression of the people in the townships' and 'jailing of [regime] opponents'-- as though it were totally unconnected to any rioting, burning, necklacing, Inkatha/ANC fighting etc.. on the part of mobs of angry black teenagers. (Of course, their anger is justified and understandable, but it is also understandable if the white community and the government were fearful of such uncontrolled and anarchic violence.)

<sup>67</sup>ibid., p.9. (the passage quoted is Luke 12:51)

<sup>68</sup>ibid., p.10. I spend a good deal of time on this summary of the Kairos Document because the doctrine of reconciliation is so foundational to any understanding of the work of Christ. Therefore, it is very important to know exactly what Kairos said about it, and not skip over anything- lest it be said that their words were taken

Of course, it is not as though Church Theology is completely unconcerned about justice- it is. But the 'theological' question that the Kairos group asks is: "What *kind* of justice?". As it turns out, Church Theology is concerned with the justice of *reform*; the justice of the oppressor, and not the radical (biblical) justice which is determined from the people below.

The fact that almost all Church statements are made as appeals to the conscience and good will of the State and of whites is proof. If Church Theology were concerned with true justice, then the Churches would not be wasting their time negotiating with evil (talking to Botha), but would be speaking directly to the people.

Instead of negotiating for reforms, the Church would be demanding that the oppressed "stand up for their rights and wage a struggle against their oppressors".<sup>69</sup> Rather than "sitting back and waiting for the oppressor to see the light so that the oppressed can put out their hands and beg for the crumbs of some small reforms", the Church would be discharging its duty to inform the oppressed of their duty to get rid of sinful social structures.<sup>70</sup>

After all, "God's justice demands a radical change of structures. This can only come from below, from the oppressed themselves. God will bring about change through the oppressed as

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out of context in this essay.

<sup>69</sup> *ibid.* p.11.

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.*, pp.10,11.

he did through the oppressed Hebrew slaves in Egypt. God does not bring his justice through reforms introduced by the Pharaoh's of this world....real change and true justice can only come from the people- most of whom are Christians."<sup>71</sup>

Finally, there is the third 'abstract principle' of non-violence. In the same manner that Church Theology indiscriminantly applies 'reconciliation' and 'justice', it also speaks categorically of non-violence.

Just as Church Theology's reconciliation and justice turned out not to be true reconciliation and justice, it also so happens that the 'non-violence' they preach actually supports the most serious and evil of all violences: the violence of the oppressor.

The Kairos Document acknowledges that Church statements do condemn *all* violence- including State repression. However, this fact is irrelevant since their basic approach is to lump both State activity and the activities of freedom fighters into the single category of violence. Such generalisations deny the legitimacy of the fight for freedom, the roots of which are found in a "long and consistent Christian tradition ('Just War' theory) about the use of physical force to defend oneself against aggressors and tyrants."<sup>72</sup>.

Moreover, (and in spite of the many statements and decisions made by the English-speaking Churches in support of conscientious

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<sup>71</sup> *ibid.*, p.11

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.*, p.12.

objection) the Kairos theologians point out that the Churches are supporting the growing militarisation of South Africa. Why else would they allow their clergy to become military chaplains?

So, the truth emerges that Church Theology is not really unreservedly against violence. Even though it professes a kind of 'neutrality', neutrality in a situation of conflict amounts to a tacit support of the status quo. In the South African context, this means that the Churches of Church Theology tacitly support the oppressor.

Since the Kairos theologians do not think criticism is enough (after all, are they not Church in a way as well?), they also give an account for the "mistakes, misunderstandings and inadequacies of this theology."<sup>73</sup>

As they see it, exponents of Church Theology do not sit on the fence because they are insincere; they do so because they lack a social analysis. Since they make very little attempt to analyze what is actually happening in society, they do not properly understand it. Therefore, they "indiscriminantly and uncritically" apply the 'absolute principles' just discussed.

Not only would a lack of social analysis result in a complete failure to understand 'the mechanics of injustice and oppression' (apartheid society), it would also result in an inappropriate political strategy.

It is crucially important to have a correct understanding and a correct political strategy, because the activity of removing sin

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<sup>73</sup>ibid., p.13.

is fundamentally the activity of changing social structures- which is fundamentally a matter of politics. Churches cannot afford to be dewy-eyed about their politics if they are to have any meaningful input into political and social restructuring.

Such a complete lack of awareness of political reality has a reason: the Churches of Church Theology are too concerned with an individualistic and privatistic spirituality. This type of spirituality "tends to rely on God to intervene in his own good time to put right what is wrong in the world. That leaves very little for human beings to do except to pray for God's intervention."<sup>74</sup> In fact, this type of spirituality leaves Christians politically paralysed. Perhaps Church Theology does not want to be on the sidelines- but it is a consequence of its otherworldliness that its exponents are frozen there.

Of course, otherworldliness is not biblical. God redeems the whole person as part of his whole creation, therefore, *biblical* faith must be "relevant to everything that happens in the world"<sup>75</sup>- including the politics of apartheid.

In summary, the basic thrust of the Kairos critique of Church Theology is that, however well intended, it is politically naive. Clinging to otherworldly dreams, it insists on applying 'abstract principles' to the South African crisis. Of course, these are always misapplied, since Church Theology has no understanding of

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<sup>74</sup> *ibid.*, p.14.

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*, p.14.

the situation as it has no social analysis.

In other words, where State Theology was criticised for reading its Bible from a situation perceived through the wrong ideological framework, Church Theology does not even have a framework that has anything to do with material reality.

There is a strong implication that people who are now convinced by Church Theology still have the possibility of conversion open to them. All they need to do is to adopt the right social analysis: that of the 'biblical' dialectic of oppressed and oppressor.

However, as with their critique of State Theology, the Kairos critique of Church Theology also seems to be 'good in parts, but not wholly accurate.'

There does seem to be a great deal of evidence to the fact that the English-speaking churches sustained a dissonance between their profession and their behaviour; their profession and confession. From its inception in the mid-30's, the Christian Council of South Africa (later South African Council of Churches) raised its voice against discriminatory legislation- but that is about what Church action amounted to for some time.

Of course, there were the famous few, such as Trevor Huddleston, Ambrose Reeves and Michael Scott and Joost de Blank who began their more public activity in the 50's, but in general most white English-speaking Christians preferred not to rock the political boat.

After the Sharpeville massacre the English-speaking Churches

radicalised somewhat, and more individuals became committed to concrete action.<sup>76</sup> This seemed to be partially the effect of having been 'woken up' by the shootings, partially a reaction to the decisive event of South Africa leaving the Commonwealth, and partially the result of having more opportunity to act: Naude had started the CI. While he did not gain huge numbers of English-speaking members, at least there was now a leader who could co-ordinate people's activities.<sup>77</sup>

The effect of Naude and the CI on the SACC has already been discussed, so it will not be repeated here, except to say that the result was a radically changed SACC. By the mid- to late 70's, and especially after the CI was banned, there seemed to be a marked increase in the activities of the SACC as an organisation, but also in the congregations of its member churches. Desmond Tutu's appointment as General Secretary of the SACC in the mid-70's can be taken as evidence of broad change, since neither his election, nor the projects he embarked on would have been possible without a broad base of committed, concrete support.

Certainly by the writing of Kairos, there was a good deal more

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<sup>76</sup>Here I am speaking about individuals as Christians...and I don't mean to discount all sorts of individual involvement which was happening. Part of the problem in evening dealing with this question of involvement has to do with the fact that I will never know its degree, since most of it was a private decision. Now it is lost in history, and historians always write about groups and generalities, and quantifiable, documented things. It is almost unfair of the Kairos theologians to make the sweeping statement that they do, considering the difficulty involved in sourcing its accuracy.

<sup>77</sup>It isn't improbably that more people would have liked to act more and more decisively than they did. But if you are one in a sea of people, facing a State which is armed to the teeth against its own people, and you get a bright idea, but have no clue where to take it without being quashed before you got there, I imagine concrete action would be difficult. It should be noted that if the English-speaking Churches were not embroiled in a flood of action, neither was the greater part of the black population.

committed activity on the part of English-speaking Christians than there had been at any other time. So, although there was no evidence that any mass tide of English-speaking radicals ever existed, neither could one accurately claim that they were all sitting in the side-lines as the Kairos Document alleges.

There are further problems with the Kairos critique of Church Theology. To start, reconciliation does not seem to be as abstract, or unrealistic a principle as they contend. It is very interesting that one of the most articulate exponents of reconciliation was Bishop Tutu.

Regarding reconciliation, oppressors and oppressed, and non-compromise with 'evil' (Botha), Tutu said the following:

"...but however we approach it, the heart of the Christian Gospel is summed up in the word 'reconciliation'. This means that Jesus came to restore friendship and fellowship between God and man, man and man, between man and the rest of God's creation. He was sent into the world to effect atonement, at-one-ment; where there was disunity, division, alienation and estrangement, He established their opposites- fellowship, unity, togetherness, friendliness, community, peace, and wholeness."<sup>78</sup>

"We [the Church] are the body which exists for the sake of those who are not its members. Our greatest proclamation comes from our lifestyle...[multi-racial and reconciled in church and practical life]..."We must show we are members one of another because we are members of the Body of Christ. We are brothers and sisters of all those who have been baptised into Christ, and therefore we have a responsibility for them, especially those with whom we disagree. Whether he and I like it or not, Mr. P.W. Botha and I are brothers, members of the same family. I cannot write him off, I cannot give up on him because God, our common Father, does not give up on anyone. What is the consequence of this fundamental and disturbing theological fact? How do I carry out my responsibility to the oppressed and to the oppressor when both are my kin?...[we] must show forth what human society is meant to be- a forgiving community of the forgiven, a reconciling koinonia of the

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<sup>78</sup>"Christianity and Apartheid" in deGruchy and Villa-Vicencio, Apartheid is a Heresy, p.42.



reconciled...We must surely go ahead to encourage our people, black and white, to worship together, to pray and play together..."<sup>79</sup>

For Tutu, reconciliation is not abstract at all. It is his whole motivation, which can be seen clearly by the fact that he talks about it in almost every single public utterance of his. But he does not just talk about it. Now, in 1996, history has shown just how important Tutu's and other's actions for reconciliation were.

Tutu admits that 'great Christian words' such as reconciliation have been "thoroughly devalued by those who have used them to justify evil"<sup>80</sup>, but this is no reason to let go of them. Reconciliation cost Christ his life. It is certainly not cheap, and Christians cannot throw it away because it is also the basis of their life. Reconciliation undercuts the whole apartheid ideology of separation and irreconcilability. Without it, what is there to prove that irreconcilability is a lie? This is the vein of the argument for the doctrine of reconciliation.

Were all of Tutu's pleas and speeches 'Church Theology'? Perhaps he was 'out of touch' with people's real needs- he was a Church leader: he was the Archbishop of the Church of the Province, one the largest of the English-speaking churches. He was also heavily involved in the leadership of the SACC, as well as numerous other committees, councils, conferences and groups of Church

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<sup>79</sup> quoted by Margaret Nash, "Ecumenical Vision and Reality in South Africa" in Villa-Vicencio Resistance and Hope, pp.162,163.

<sup>80</sup> ibid., p.164.

leaders.<sup>81</sup>

Tutu's belief in the possibility of reconciliation was the source of his action-- and I do not get the impression that very many South African Christians would say that his work was unsubstantial and of no account.

Kairos says nothing at all about people like Tutu, perhaps because they defy the strict categorisation of the Document. Strangely, it would seem that this would be the case in the majority of instances. In all of my reading, I came across very few people that would have matched the Kairos description of 'State Theology' or 'Church Theology' people. This would suggest that Tutu's 'anomalous' nature was the rule, rather than the exception.

Secondly, the Kairos theologians criticise Church Theology's use of reconciliation on a theological basis: namely, Church Theology forgets that no reconciliation can be had without repentance, because it is only by repentance that man comes to God.

But it does not follow from this statement that repentance is therefore the only way between men. Jesus' command to forgive '70x7' was completely unqualified. Moreover, 'forgive as your Father in Heaven forgives you' is quite different from 'forgive as they repent'- which of course is nowhere in the Bible.

Anyway, the Kairos theologians are convinced that there is 'clear proof' that the oppressors exhibit a 'total lack of repentance'. So when they say that one must wait for repentance

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<sup>81</sup>A phenomenal list of his activities can be found at the back of Du Boulay's biography about him.

before one forgives, do they mean they have no intention of forgiving at all?

Third, the Kairos theologians criticise reconciliation, because 'Church Theology' operates on it by going to the oppressors, rather than the oppressed, and asking for 'justice'. They do not see that real reconciliation cannot be had until there are no longer any oppressors; so they ask for justice which will never be true justice, but only the peacemeal justice of reform.

Against this approach, Kairos claims that the only Christian approach should be one of non-compromise with the 'Pharaohs of this world'. In any case, it will not come through the negotiations of a few leaders, but only 'from the bottom'.

If the Kairos theologians are correct, they have picked the wrong biblical 'proof'. In the first place, Moses was raised in Pharaoh's house: he was the elite of the elite among the Hebrew people. Secondly, the story of Israel's freedom from Egypt starts and finishes with Moses negotiating with Pharaoh. At the point of the Exodus, God softens Pharaoh's heart, and he frees the people of his own will.

As for the people, they are grumbling complainers the whole time. Moses and Aaron have to keep reassuring them that God really spoke them on the Mountain.

Thirdly, the story makes a very bad analogy, because it is completely unapplicable to South Africa. The Hebrews left Egypt, a land owned originally by the Egyptians. But South Africa's oppressed have no where to leave to. They cannot afford to

'plague' their 'Pharaohs', because there is no-where to escape the retaliatory anger which would result.

Because they do not seem to consider this problem, they see no problem in applying traditional Just War theory. But the Just War theory is extremely old. Far from making it a tested and proven strategy, its age is a good reason for seriously reconsidering its application to the conditions of modern warfare. Perhaps it works logically, but there is a huge difference between applying it in a situation where people are using swords, and a situation of modernity. So much for the Kairos theologians' concern with context.

Finally, the Kairos Document argues that reconciliation cannot be a political principle. While it might be possible between individuals who have misperceptions of one another, it is not possible between social and political groups. They contend that there is a vast difference between groups and individuals, so arguments which apply to the former, do not apply to the latter. However, later their main disagreement with Church Theology's 'generalisation' of all violence is that it ignores important differences in the various meanings of violence. The example they use to illustrate their point is the example of the force of a rapist, and the force used by the woman to defend herself.<sup>82</sup>

But this analogy is hardly appropriate. It does not seem to occur to them that there is a vast difference between the struggle of two individuals, and the unpredictable and virtually

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<sup>82</sup>Kairos, p.13.

uncontrollable violence of revolution.

There is more which can be said about this second section of the Kairos critique. However, enough has been said to adequately show that the Kairos 'moment' about Church Theology, was not-so-true after all.

The main purpose of this essay is still to find out what 'not-prophetic' and 'prophetic are.'

Up to this point we have seen that for State Theology, 'not-prophetic' meant taking sides- but taking one's own side to the detriment of others. It meant accepting an ideology for the sake of self-preservation, reading the Bible through this ideological hermeneutic, and therefore reading so selectively as to miss the message of the Bible as a whole.

For Church Theology, 'not-prophetic' meant sitting on the fence. It meant not placing oneself unreservedly and unambiguously into a defined articulation of interest; a clearly marked camp in a battle-field of opposing forces.

At first glance, these two definitions of 'not-prophetic' appear contradictory. On the one hand, self-interest and its attendant ideological justification are rejected. On the other, the churches of Church Theology are reprimanded for not aligning themselves clearly in a field of such justifications.

Since it cannot be that the Kairos theologians meant to come up with two contradictory definitions of 'not-prophetic', they must be taken together within the context of the Document as a whole. Somewhere between the two poles lies the essence of what the Kairos

theologians mean by 'not-prophetic'. The conclusion most supportive of both poles would seem to be that 'not-prophetic' means a political stance, supported theologically, which does not align itself with the philosophically 'correct' (biblically supported) position amongst a range of available views.

The result of such a 'non-prophetic' stance is a 'wrong' (or non-existent) situational analysis, out of which flows ineffective and/or sinful responses to the situation.

Since this is what is meant by 'not-prophetic', 'prophetic theology' must be a theology which is ideologically correct; supporting the 'right' interests (biblically illustrated) and therefore resulting in an accurate situational analysis, and effective and right action. Right (prophetic) theology, must be the result of reading the Bible through the right ideological hermeneutic.

How prophetic is 'Prophetic Theology', and how appropriate is its challenge to action?

## UNCONCLUSION

## PROPHETIC THEOLOGY AND THE CHALLENGE TO ACTION

As opposed to Church and State Theology, Prophetic Theology does not concern itself with 'abstract principles' and 'generalisations'. It is 'bold and incisive'; prophetic "because it speaks to the particular circumstances of this crisis".<sup>83</sup> It does not sit on the fence; it takes a 'clear and unambiguous' stand.

Prophetic Theology avoids the pitfall of Church Theology because it begins with an adequate social analysis. Prophetic Theology has no illusions about the South African conflict being simply a difference of racial interests. Rather, Prophetic Theology sees clearly that the conflict is "between an oppressor and oppressed; between two irreconcilable causes or interests in which the one is just and the other is unjust."<sup>84</sup>

On the one hand, there are those who benefit from the unjust and oppressive status quo. On the other are those who do not. But there is more to this situation than simple opposition. Those who do not benefit from the system "are no longer prepared to be crushed, oppressed and exploited. They are determined to change the system radically so that it no longer benefits only the privileged few...even at the cost of their own lives. What they

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<sup>83</sup> Kairos, p.15.

<sup>84</sup> ibid.

want is justice for all."<sup>85</sup>

Since there is absolutely no possible compromise between the 'two conflicting projects' in South Africa ("either we have full and equal justice for all, or we don't")<sup>86</sup>, the situation is more than merely confrontational- it is *revolutionary*.<sup>87</sup>

Insofar as this revolutionary conflict is about division between oppressors and oppressed, the Bible has a great deal to say about it. God is not neutral, he takes sides.<sup>88</sup> God is a God who liberates the oppressed, starting with the people of Israel.<sup>89</sup>

God did not have the Jews compromise with Pharaoh- he led them right out of there, punishing Pharaoh uncompromisingly for his cruelty. And the message of Jesus is in complete continuity with God's message of non-compromise with sin. For God has "anointed

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<sup>85</sup>ibid., p.16.

<sup>86</sup>ibid.

<sup>87</sup>ibid.

<sup>88</sup>In support of this claim, the Kairos theologians quote a version of Psalm 103:6, which reads "God, who does what is right, is always on the side of the oppressed." I am not sure which translation of the Bible they were using. It would be interesting to find out, especially since the New International Version- which is one of the most universally accepted, and most up-to-date versions of the Christian Bible- reads in the following way: "The Lord works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed."

Clearly both versions mean to say that God is against oppression, but being against oppression and siding with a group of people are two different things. 'Siding with' could all too easily be taken as a divine sanction, and it seems to suggest that God would support war against the 'oppressor' because it is just. But this is clearly not what verse 6, taken in the context of the verses surrounding it could mean, since they are the following: "He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel: The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions...he remembers that we are dust."(verses 7-14)

<sup>89</sup>If this argument sounds familiar- it should be. It is the same argument put forward as the basis for Afrikaner 'Christian nationalism' and later 'apartheid theology'-- which was discussed in the previous section on State Theology. Details can be found in Loubser's work, Critical Review of Racial Theology, but also elsewhere.



[him] to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free..."<sup>90</sup>

Jesus is not unconcerned about the oppressor- he calls the oppressor to repentance.<sup>91</sup> But Jesus *identifies* with the poor, and the poor know it. "The oppressed Christians of South Africa have known for a long time that they are united to Christ in their sufferings. By his own suffering and his death on the cross he became a victim of oppression and violence. He is with us in our oppression."<sup>92</sup>

In addition to having a 'biblical' stance on oppression, 'Prophetic Theology' has an accurate analysis of tyranny. "From a moral and theological point of view"<sup>93</sup>, tyrannical regimes are illegitimate, since they act against the common interests of the majority, and only for their own. Because they are essentially motivated by the interest of self-preservation, tyrannical regimes are *irreformable by definition*.<sup>94</sup>

The selfish nature of tyranny means that the people inevitably begin to demand their own rights. Hence, violent repression becomes inescapable- tyrants are forced to resort to it in order to

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<sup>90</sup>This passage was spoken by Jesus in Luke 4: 18-19. He is quoting the words of Isaiah the prophet.

<sup>91</sup>Here the Kairos theologians seem to forget that perhaps the Church of Church Theology was doing just exactly this...anyway, they do not appear to think the point is worth dwelling on.

<sup>92</sup>ibid., p.17.

<sup>93</sup>ibid., p.17.

<sup>94</sup>ibid., pp. 17,18.

keep their position. When a people are faced with a tyranny, violent conflict is inevitable. Moreover, Christians have a *duty* to oppose all tyranny because it is evil.

Far from being abstract principles of political theory, these truths have direct relevance to South Africa. Since it acts in the interests of a tiny few, against the majority, the South African government is clearly a tyrant. Therefore, by definition it is irreformable. (Even though "individual members could experience a real conversion and repent"...which would mean they would have to leave the regime.)<sup>95</sup>

While tyrannical regimes like the South African government are enemies of the people, and therefore enemies of God in whose image the people are; and while enemies must be identified, enemies must also be loved. Many of the people who support this tyrant are deluded by its propaganda. Christians cannot tar everyone with the same brush. Christians cannot hate either their conscious or their ignorant enemies. The Kairos theologians caution that love is not always easy. Nevertheless, "we must also remember that the most loving thing we can do for both the oppressed and for our enemies who are oppressors is to eliminate the oppression, remove the tyrants from power and establish a just government for the common good of all the people."<sup>96</sup>

In fact, it is out of this command of love that one gets a

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<sup>95</sup>ibid., pp.18,19.

<sup>96</sup>ibid., p.20.

sense of the heart of the gospel- the message of hope. The essence of Prophetic Theology is its message of hope which springs from the eschatalogical promise of the coming Kingdom of God, where 'all tears shall be wiped away and the lion shall lie down with the lamb.'

Whereas Church Theology has forgotten this hope, (because it was addressed to the oppressed- presumably it did not want to shock them or risk their disapproval by prophetically declaring the truth of coming justice and judgement) Prophetic Theology has not. Prophetic Theology is confirming, maintaining, strengthening and inspiring it.<sup>97</sup>

Some South Africans are despairing because they have false hopes that the status quo will be maintained, or that it can be adjusted and reformed. But the youth especially have real hope. "They are acting courageously and fearlessly because they have a sure hope that liberation will come. Often enough their bodies are broken but nothing can now break their spirit."<sup>98</sup>

The hope of the youth can be for everyone. "But", Kairos warns, "the road to that hope is going to be very hard and very painful. The conflict and the struggle will have to intensify in the months and years ahead because there is no other way to remove the injustice and oppression. But God is with us. We can only learn to become instruments of his peace even unto death. We must participate in the cross of Christ if we are to have the hope of

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., pp.20, 21.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p.20.

participating in his resurrection."<sup>99</sup>

So what does one do with this 'prophetic' word of hope? Well, since God sides with the oppressed, the Church must 'appropriate and confirm' this fact.<sup>100</sup> The Church has difficulty doing so, however, because she is divided. Some (Church Theology churches) prefer to sit on the fence, and worse, some (State Theology churches) actually are on the wrong side. To be effective, the Church must be unified. Therefore, everyone must 'gather around God and Jesus Christ' who are on the side of the oppressed.

This cannot be done in some starry-eyed, Romanticised manner. It must be done through concrete participation in their struggle. The Church is challenged to "move beyond a mere ambulance ministry to a ministry of involvement and participation".<sup>101</sup> "The Church is not called to be a bastion of caution and moderation...it has a message of the cross that inspires us to make sacrifices for justice and liberation. It has a message of hope that challenges us to wake up and to act with hope and confidence..."<sup>102</sup>

In the first place, this can be done through a transformation of Church activities. Baptisms, liturgies etc..(not to mention sermons) can all be changed so that Christians take every opportunity they have to corporately name the evil of South African oppressors; to speak about their share in guilt and repent; and to

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<sup>99</sup>ibid., p.21.

<sup>100</sup>ibid., p.22.

<sup>101</sup>ibid.

<sup>102</sup>ibid., p.24.

speak about God's sure liberation. In short "Church activities must be reappropriated to serve the real religious needs of all the people and to further the liberating mission of God and the Church in the world."<sup>103</sup>

Outside of Church activities, the Church can avoid becoming a 'third force'- someone who stands between the oppressor and oppressed. The Church must avoid even the appearance of evil. Church action should be completely unambiguous. The Church can stand with the oppressed by organising and running special campaigns, mobilising parish members to act in mass demonstrations of civil disobedience, and by providing unwavering moral guidance.

"It must help people to understand their rights and their duties. There must be no misunderstanding about the moral duty of all who are oppressed to resist oppression and to struggle for liberation and justice."<sup>104</sup> Though, of course "the Church will also find that at times it does need to curb excesses and to appeal to the consciences of those who act thoughtlessly and wildly."<sup>105</sup>

Once again, the question is 'Just how prophetic is Prophetic Theology?' From the last section, it was established that the Kairos theologians thought a prophetic theology should have a right ideology, which would be evidenced by its fidelity to the biblical position, its accuracy in situational analysis, and the wisdom of its proposed actions. Does this describe Prophetic Theology?

While the Kairos theologians have not stated what the philosophical/ideological hermeneutic informing their situational

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<sup>103</sup>ibid., p.23.

<sup>104</sup>ibid.

<sup>105</sup>ibid.

analysis is, it is easy to see that with two material categories (oppressed and oppressor) locked in inevitable conflict, they are employing pretty classic dialectical materialism, introduced by Hegel and developed by Marx. (It does not really matter whether they are Marxists or not, only that their ideological hermeneutic is the dialectic.)

Their claim is that the dialectical categories they use are supported biblically. However, this is simply not true. Jesus was indeed oppressed, and God hates oppression. But these facts do not give biblical authority to the dialectic, or these categories.

As mentioned previously, there is no reason to conclude that God *sides* with the oppressed. But whether he does or not, he clearly does not deal with human beings as though some were completely right, and others wrong. In Christianity, categorical evil and good might be applicable to beings in the spiritual or metaphysical realm, but humans are always a mix of both. Therefore, creating impersonal categories of 'evil' and 'good' and applying them to human beings is unbiblical. All are in the image of God. All are "wretched, poor, blind and naked", "there is none righteous, no, not one."

But the philosophical dialectic is bound to an unbiblical view of human nature, because this is the only way it can justify inevitable conflict. But insofar as the dialectic implies inevitable conflict, it claims that human difference is necessarily irreconcilable. This too must be rejected as unbiblical. It was exactly this doctrine which was enshrined in apartheid theology.

No matter who espouses it, it destroys the only possibility of justice, because it destroys dialogue.

Naturally there can be no place for dialogue in such a view, because dialogue would admit that there was a ground of commonality between the two 'sides'. It would admit that there was something valueable about both, and also something incomplete about both: both sides would need one another. But such a thought is anathema to the dialectician, because unless one is totally evil, the other cannot be totally good, and the justness of revolution would be done away with.

Which brings up another important point about the Kairos philosophy. Because of it, the Kairos theologians wind up with an unrealistic view of the capability of humans to establish justice. They cannot see negotiation or dialogue as helping, because they are convinced that 'real' justice can simply be established by the masses. ✓

But as long as people are what they are, hope in such utopic visions can only ever be illusory. The hope of Kairos' Prophetic Theology is a false hope. Even its use of eschatological imagery is false because the reason they use it is to inspire towards a vision which cannot be attained by men; and towards a sacrifice which is hardly the 'sacrifice of the Cross' it claims to be. 0  
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Where is the sacrifice in suffering to save your own life? Christ bore his Cross to defeat sin in all of its manifestations-structural included. But the cross that people who follow him bear cannot be, and must not be seen to be, the same thing as Christ's

Cross. We cannot suffer for release from our own sins. Only Christ- that is the point.

And if the sin is structural, we cannot suffer for release from others' sins, or even in 'love' 'for' them, so that all can be released from the whole thing. If there is anyone who wants to believe that this is possible, that is fine. But by definition they cannot call themselves Christian, because this is not Christianity: Christianity is built on the faith that Christ and he alone could get rid of our sin, reconciling man to God; he alone could break down the sin between us, reconciling man to man.

In summary, we have already seen that the Kairos theologians exhibited significant areas of historical and political blindness, making their situational analysis highly questionable. Moreover, they also showed considerable weakness theologically. The problem at root was an impractical and untenable philosophical base<sup>106</sup>,

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<sup>106</sup>I realise that the word 'dialectic' seems very popular in all kinds of disciplines, from philosophy to political science, to religious studies, theology, literature and sociology. It is often used in a more 'dialogical/paradoxical' sense, but this is a false usage, since the word implies conflict by definition. (check Webster's or the Oxford) Keeping this in mind, there is then the problem about dialectical materialism itself. In the third world, Marxism is very compelling because it is true that whole categories of people are systematically exploited by specific groups of other people who are more powerful. In the present age, it is monetary, rather than military might which claims the right of way. However, the subsequent claim of Marxism that happiness is contingent on overthrowing the exploiters is a lie, because it rests on what is not true: namely, the unspoken but foundational assumption that men are essentially righteous, and that they have it within their power to create a paradise.

However one might want to justify Marxism (it talks about exploited workers, which capitalism ignores), the fact is that revolution is a necessary component, but it is based on a ridiculous argument: if the oppressed have paradise locked in their hearts, then there must be some external reason why they can not live it. Instead of locating responsibility in the self, Marxism places blame on the other. I am not free, because you are sitting on me. If you get off, my life would be perfect. Of course, you won't get off of your own free will (I know this because I wouldn't either if I were you). Therefore, I must throw you off. My responsibility is to throw you off, so that your exploitative and repressive actions will no longer hinder the goodness of my life.

If the reason you accept Marxism is because it seems to have a realistic view of life otherwise ignored by more capitalist views, don't be fooled. Besides, maybe Marx's 'insight' into the existence of a hitherto invisible proletariat was big news when he received it, but you would have to be pretty dense if you couldn't recognise exploitation at the bottom of mass poverty without Marxism. Better to leave the Marxism, and stay free



which became an ideological hermeneutic through which they first read their situation, and then their Bible.

Since the Kairos Document stands on such shaky ground, philosophically, theologically, politically and historically, it does not really matter whether they do or do not support revolution/violence. Whatever action proposed from such a dubious base would be highly questionable. ✓

It seems then, that 'Prophetic Theology' is not so prophetic after all, raising the question of whether or not it is even possible to have a 'correct' ideology. ✓

According to the Human Sciences Research Council Report<sup>107</sup>, the root of ideology is a clash between conviction and 'vital interests'. In other words, there is a feeling of guilt for not being able to meet a standard of behaviour one feels one ought to meet. There is a schism between 'is' and 'ought'.

To deal with this schism (rather than changing the behaviour, probably because it is preferred, even though it causes discomfort initially) an elaborate system of self-justification is developed. The more a person convinces themselves and others of this justification, the more it 'usurps moral authority'. It is not long before the system of justification becomes absolutised. At this stage it is ideology.

From there, the ideology develops a life of its own- it begins

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of the errors its philosophical categories cause wherever they are historically applied.

<sup>107</sup> Religion, Intergroup Relations and Social Change, pp.77-78.

to hold the mind that once held it. It has its own logic and dynamic, which are necessary, because it cannot admit any deviation. The HSRC explain that at some point the ideology becomes dysfunctional in terms of its primary purpose, but it is still invested with the normative authority.

For example, in South Africa the ideology of apartheid had normative authority, even long after it was clearly working against the happiness and well-being of the Afrikaner community it was initially set up to preserve.

But as to whether one can espouse a 'correct' ideology, it seems that the answer is negative, since the root of ideology is in self-deception, and self-deception never leads to clear perception or appropriate action. ✓

Theologically, it is impossible for Christians to hold a 'right ideology' because the ideology is always developed out of a process of self-justification. Since it is based in preservation of self and self-justification, ideology denies the message that justification can only be by grace. It makes a claim of self-righteousness, replacing God's Logos that all have fallen short, with its own mythos, which says 'all but me'.

Therefore, all ideology sets itself up against Christ; it is anti-Christ, and with such a thing, the Christian mind can have no communion. Just because such communion has gone on for centuries does not excuse the person who becomes conscious of the error now. Of course, everyone is unconscious about many of their own cultural assumptions and self-justifications- because some of them are ✓

hidden so deeply in the human heart and mind that they are hidden from the self.

Still, as far as it is possible to decide whether you will or will not align yourself with a particular ideology, the Christian decision which is prophetic must be against all such alignments. ✓

But wouldn't this make the Christian stance irrelevant in a concrete world? It would not make it clear, nor would it make it the sort of thing which masses could be easily rallied into supporting-- but it would certainly be relevant.

When asked 'shall I pay taxes?', Jesus responded 'who's picture is that on the coin?...then give to Caesar what is his, and to God what is His.' This episode has many interpretations, but I cannot help noticing that what Jesus really did was to turn the whole thing back onto the asker. His response is 'you decide'.

Glenn Tinder<sup>108</sup> explains that part of the nature of the prophetic stance is that it can only be maintained by individuals, because ultimately individual's must assume responsibility for their own prophetic orientation. Ultimately, individual persons stand before God and are responsible to him as individuals. They cannot hide behind group identities, even though it may be tempting to seek solidarity in numbers. ✓

God does not judge people by majorities, but as persons. This is the flip side- the responsibility side- of their infinite worth as persons. Moreover, just as the prophetic stance has nothing to do with justifying people before God on the basis of participation

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<sup>108</sup>The Political Meaning of Christianity, pp.8-15.

in a 'critical mass', or 'God's (more like *Geist's*) movement in history', the prophetic stance is not concerned with *credibility*.

Far from being otherworldly and irrelevant<sup>a</sup> (although it may appear to be at times), the prophetic stance makes itself relevant in a more radical way than any ideological alignment would permit it to be. It does not pick a side in a field of confronting interests; it stands right outside the field altogether, making the radical demand that one forgo all self-interest. a

This is not the same thing as sitting on the fence, or even standing <sup>o</sup> in the side lines. Those options are neither confrontational, nor conciliatory. But the prophetic stance is so confrontational that it confronts all sides at once with the declaration that they are all hopelessly wrong. Paradoxically, this declaration also applies to the one holding the prophetic stance- who is after all human. Therefore, the prophetic stance can have nothing to do with uncompromising condemnation of 'wrong', because it would mean condemning self. And the self has been redeemed in Christ. o  
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✓

Except for Christ, the self would be condemned. This is the grace of God. Because of this grace, the person who takes the prophetic stance has no choice but to go right back out into a concrete world, no longer warring with evil as though self were righteous, but fighting as a peacemaker.<sup>109</sup> No longer fighting

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<sup>109</sup>I always wonder why liberation theologians read the Sermon on the Mount as though all it said were 'blessed are the poor'...to which they always add, therefore revolution!! But Jesus also said the blind were blessed, for they shall see...I have not yet seen liberation theologians advocating healing services. And then there is the line 'blessed are the peacemakers...' which seems to escape their attention entirely.

from within the inevitability of a dialectic, but necessarily fighting the dialectic itself through the establishment of dialogue: fighting to free paths for dialogue between man and man, and between man and God.

It would be no surprise, then, if maintaining the prophetic stance were a very lonely affair. And yet, if one is in the Body of Christ, one is hardly alone: one is surrounded by one's brothers. Without the whole Body, no part would go anywhere. ✓

So, when truly prophetic people like Beyers Naude, Father Huddleston, or Desmond Tutu stick out like sitting ducks in a shooting range, it is because they are propped up by the support of countless numbers of less visible people.

What a remarkably independent  
 mind you have! Now you  
 are ready for, I should turn to  
 Hannah Arendt, Eric Voegelin\*,  
 Mircea Eliade, George Orwell  
 & say, Paul Ricoeur.

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