The church must become the people of Soweto

Manas Buthelezi’s existential-Christocentric understanding of the church

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I INTRODUCTION

One has heard talks like: what should the church do for the people of Soweto. The impression created in stating things this way is that the church does not live in Soweto since it has to move in from outside in order to minister to people who are other than itself. Does the church not live with the people of Soweto? Has the church deserted the people of Soweto so that it has to reach them from outside?¹

In 1968 Manas Buthelezi, a young black Lutheran pastor and theologian received his Ph.D. in the United States. Returning to his native South Africa he was challenged by the situation in his country to think in a new way in terms of theology. The Christian church, like the rest of South Africa, was divided colorwise. Buthelezi became one of the leaders of the emerging South African Black Theology movement². Nine years later he uttered the quoted words in his bishop’s consecration.

Buthelezi was born in 1935 in Mahlabatini, Zululand. Starting his career as a teacher in his early twenties, he later studied theology in South Africa and the United States, where he studied at Yale Divinity School (Master’s degree) and Drew University (Ph.D. 1968³). While working on his doctoral dissertation he also spent time at Lund University, Sweden. Buthelezi has taught theology in South Africa, the United States and Germany. He was ordained a Lutheran pastor in 1961, became the Bishop of the Central Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (ELCSA) in 1977 and retired in 2000.

Buthelezi has held several positions in different Christian bodies in both South Africa and international Christian organizations. He became the regional director of the Christian Institute in Natal in 1972, a position he held until 1975. Becoming more radical in his opposition to apartheid, Buthelezi was banned from attending social gatherings and instructing or lecturing to students in 1973 for five years under the Suppression of Communism Act. The ban also restricted people from quoting him. It was, however, lifted in six months time due to Buthelezi’s success in suing the magazine To The Point for publishing a libel against him. A few years later he again irritated the government by becoming the chairman of the Black Parents Association (BPA) during the Soweto uprising. BPA’s function included helping people to arrange funerals for the victims of the uprising and

¹ Service, 8.
² Per Frostin (1988, 92) has called him the “nestor of Black Theologians in South Africa”. The nickname was originally given to him by W.O. Deutch.
³ Buthelezi was the only black South African who held a Ph.D. in theology in 1975. (Mission Trends No.2 1975, 136.)
striving to replace violence with dialogue. The work continued even though the whole committee was arrested. In 1975 Buthelezi was elected the Associate General Secretary of the Federation of Evangelical Lutheran Churches in South Africa (FELCSA). He has also worked as the President of the South African Council of Churches (SACC) and a member of the Commission on Studies of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches (WCC). Buthelezi was asked to run for the presidency of the LWF in 1977 in Dar es Salaam but he refused.\(^4\)

According to Deane Ferm, Buthelezi was not as radical a figure in fighting social injustices in the late 1980s as he had been earlier. Writing in 1988, Ferm asserts that Buthelezi had lately not been as outspoken in standing against the government as his fellow Christian leaders such as Allan Boesak and Desmond Tutu.\(^5\) Ferm’s view would portray Buthelezi as a vocal leader of the black protest in the 1970s. He became more moderate towards the end of the 1980s.

Buthelezi worked and wrote in the midst of the racial conflict in South Africa. The Black Consciousness Movement and Black Theology\(^6\) paved the way for a new intensity in the opposition of the black community – and along with it parts of the white community – to apartheid. Within the context of apartheid, the focus of this study is on the credibility of the church. The aim is to discern what, according to Buthelezi, is required of a credible church in the apartheid society: what are the characteristics that an authentic church must have in order to be regarded as a part of the universal church. The relevance of the church to the people in the situation at hand is one aspect of the credibility of the church.


\(^5\) Ferm 1988, 22, 23. Ferm speculates whether Buthelezi’s relationship to his conservative cousin, Zulu Chief Gatsha Buthelezi partly brought about the moderation of his opposition.

Allan Boesak (1946-) was a pronounced spokesman against the apartheid system during the struggle for liberation and a minister of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Sendingerk/\(the\) Dutch Reformed Missionary Church. He is the author of many books and articles that deal with racism, liberation and the gospel. Boesak received a Ph.D. in theology in 1976 and became the president of the World Alliance of Reformed churches in 1982. (Ferm 1988, 14-18.)

Desmond Tutu (1931-) is probably the internationally best known South African leader of nonviolent opposition to apartheid. The Anglican theologian and minister fought for the liberation of his fellow black South Africans through speeches, political comments, articles and books. He won the Nobel Peace Price in 1984. In 1986 he became the Archbishop of Cape Town. (Ferm 1988, 64-68.) After the abolition of apartheid Tutu led the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) as its chairman. The TRC worked in the years 1996-1998 aiming at achieving a reconciliation that would be based on truth, justice and restitution. (Ahonen 2004, 178-180.)

In this thesis ‘Black Theology’ is used to refer to South African Black Theology if not otherwise announced. The term Black Theology is no longer used today; however, since the theology of the 1970s and 1980s is the target of this study, the term is in use here.
credibility of the church also has to do with the loyalty of the church to the gospel.\(^7\)

Buthelezi’s dissertation, several articles and the lectures held in Heidelberg in 1972 are the sources used for this study. The dissertation *Creation and the Church: A Study in Ecclesiology with Special Reference to a Younger Church Milieu* from 1968 is the oldest source. Many of Buthelezi’s later emphases are already introduced to some degree in it. Alongside the dissertation certain articles have played a central role in the analysis: three articles were included in *Black Theology – The South African Voice*, an anthology published in 1973\(^8\); *Christianity in S.A.* was published in *Pro Veritate* the same year; *Proclamation of the Gospel and Other Marks of the Church* was published in *Lutheran World* in 1976\(^9\); *In Christ – One Community in the Spirit*\(^{10}\) was addressed to the meeting of the LWF General Assembly in Dar es Salaam in 1977; *Service to the Down-trodden* is the sermon which Buthelezi held in his bishop’s consecration in 1977; six articles were published in the *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* during the years 1973-1979; *Church Unity and Human Divisions of Racism* was published as a part of a LWF documentation that dealt with the debate on *status confessionis* in 1983; *Some Theological Concerns Raised by the Unity/Renewal Study* is a presentation for the gathering of the WCC Commission on Faith and Order in Stavanger in 1985; *Change in the Church* was published in *Mission Trends*\(^{11}\). The Heidelberg lectures *Ansätze Afrikanischer Theologie im Kontext von Kirche in Südafrika* were held in English but edited by Ilse Tödt and Hans-

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\(^7\) A South African theologian W.D. Jonker wrote on the credibility of the church as follows: “One could argue that he gospel is something objective, a truth that can be proclaimed and believed quite apart from those who proclaim it. In that case the credibility of the messenger would have no real importance for those who are called to faith. But that would be fallacious. He could use the testimony of a man without any real faith in gospel to save somebody else. But that is not the way God usually works. As a rule the Spirit uses not only words of the gospel, but also the personal evidence of the quality of the messenger to persuade men to believe.” (Jonker 1979, 114.) The fact that Prof. Jonker as a Dutch Reformed minister offered the confession of guilt on behalf of his church eleven years later (see Item No 297), does not erase the significance of his words that illuminate the concept of the credibility of the church.

\(^8\) *Black Theology – The South African Voice* was published already in 1972 in South Africa by the name *Essays in Black Theology*. It was banned right after being published. The second edition of the anthology, which is used in this study, was published in London the following year. (Silvo 1987, 13.)

\(^9\) Buthelezi wrote the article together with Wolfram Kistner. Kistner is a Lutheran theologian, pastor and an opponent of apartheid born in a missionary family in South Africa (1923). Buthelezi and Kistner wrote the article while Kistner worked as the director of the Division of Justice and Reconciliation of the SACC (1976-1988).

\(^10\) The article *In Christ – One New Community* has almost the same content as *In Christ – One Community in the Spirit*. *In Christ – One New Community* is used when its phrasing is more pointed or otherwise better serves the analysis.

Jürgen Becken in German. The translation of the lectures is utilized occasionally but the above-mentioned sources, written in English by Buthelezi himself, play the major role. However, it is noticeable that the same themes reoccur in different sources. Most of the issues dealt with in the Heidelberg lectures also come up either in the dissertation or the articles.

The sources are written between the years 1968 and 1993. They thus follow the way of South Africa from the origin of Black Theology to the abolition of apartheid. Most of them date back to the heat of the struggle for liberation in the 1970s. Buthelezi has not published significantly since 1990.

Due to the nature of the sources, most of which are articles written to specific audiences in the midst of the liberation struggle, the focus of this study is not on the definition of the church but on its credibility in the given situation. The outlook of Buthelezi’s articles on the church is pragmatic and contextual. In his dissertation he also discusses the existential relevance of the church rather than its definition.

Systematic analysis is the method used in this study. Discerning and analyzing the concepts and terms that frequently appear in Buthelezi’s writings helped to outline the study and divide it into three main parts. Analyzing the concepts and argumentation uncovered the main lines of thought that construct Buthelezi’s understanding of the church. The influence of the social, political, ecclesiological and theological context on Buthelezi’s insights is taken into account in the analysis; Buthelezi is analyzed as a black Lutheran South African theologian and clergyman. Using systematic analysis this study aims at synthesizing a coherent picture of Buthelezi’s requirements for a credible church in an oppressive situation.

Chapter two offers an outlook on the context and works as an introduction for the discussion on the credibility of the church. Due to the contextual and holistic nature of Black Theology, background information on the socio-economic, political, ecclesiastical and theological context of South Africa is

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12 Buthelezi himself comments on the nature of one of his papers (Stavanger): "I have tried to allow the study to set in motion in me a theological reflection, however incomplete. Thus, at certain points I will simply raise questions. In any event a study is a process rather than a catalogue of answers.” (Stavanger, 175.)

13 "Our methodological approach will be such that the question of the definition of the church, as such, will be tangential to our discussion. We shall rather focus on the delineation of ‘the dynamics of human existence’ as an ecclesiological postulate.” (Creation, 30.)
needed in order to better understand the requirements Buthelezi sets for the church.

The wholeness of life, incarnation and liberation are chosen as the leading concepts through which Buthelezi’s understanding of the church is looked at and according to which the study is divided into three main chapters: *The church penetrated by the wholeness of life*, *The church incarnate suffers* and *Liberation in the church and society*. Especially liberation but also the other two concepts could have been themes for a whole thesis and thus here they are analyzed only to the extent that is needed for carrying out the task of this study. The intention is not to depict Buthelezi’s standing in comparison to other black theologians. However, references are made to certain key figures where it elucidates Buthelezi’s points or helps understand his context.

In Lund University, Stephen Munga and Per Frostin have published studies that deal with liberation theology and in which Buthelezi’s thought is in a central role. Munga’s dissertation *Beyond the Controversy: A Study of African Theologies of Inculturation and Liberation* was published in 1998. His work has been helpful for this study, especially because he has chosen to analyze Buthelezi’s thought as the representative of black liberation theology. He also deals with Buthelezi’s ecclesiological views in one chapter. However, the main focus of the dissertation is on the relation between the two different wings of African theology, namely the theologies of inculturation and liberation.

Frostin, who also supervised Munga’s work at the beginning, published a monograph titled *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa: A First World Interpretation* in 1988. His study elaborates on the distinctiveness of Third World theologies, especially Tanzanian and South African liberation theologies, and gives guidelines to a First World citizen who wants to interpret them. Frostin introduces the new methodology used by Third World liberation theologians. Like Munga, Frostin takes Buthelezi as an important representative of the early South African Black Theology. He also refers to other South African theologians, mainly Allan Boesak and Desmond Tutu. Frostin discusses Buthelezi’s ecclesiological ideas in the context of a wider description of the content of South African Black Theology. Munga’s decision to choose Buthelezi as the one South African theologian whose thought he would study and the central position Frostin gives to Buthelezi in his study are an assurance of the importance of Buthelezi’s position among the South African black theologians of the apartheid era.
The only previous study on Buthelezi’s thought carried out in Finland is Juha Silvo’s master’s thesis from the year 1987. Silvo wrote his thesis *Afrikkalainen vapautuksen teologia: Etelä-Afrikan musta teologia Manas Buthelezin ja Allan Boesakin tuotannon valossa* on South African liberation theology at the University of Helsinki. He studied the methodology and socio-ethical questions related to South African Black Theology concentrating on the writings of Buthelezi and Allan Boesak, but also offering an excursion to the thought of Desmond Tutu. Jaana Hallamaa, also from the University of Helsinki, studied the anthropology of the Dutch Reformed Church for her licentiate degree in systematic theology. Her study illuminates the counter pole of Black Theology in South Africa and thus elucidates the context of this study.

Despite the fact that the three above-mentioned studies have looked at the theology of Buthelezi, none of them has concentrated on any specific issue in his thought. Ecclesiology has been mentioned more or less broadly in all of them, indicating its importance in Buthelezi’s writings. The aim of this study is to take a deeper look at this issue.

Ecclesiology is an ever-momentous topic, the church being the visible body of Christ in the world. If the church is not credible, the gospel suffers damage. Buthelezi’s ecclesiological thinking is still relevant even though the apartheid era in South Africa is over: in the light of the course of events in the world today, the South Africa of the 1970s and 1980s can be called a microcosm of the world. The universal church has credibility questions to ponder if it wills to remain relevant in the lives of the poor AIDS-orphan in Uganda or the long-term-unemployed father in Finland. Also, Africa is a continent where the Christian church is growing today. Therefore, more urgently than before, the Western academic and Christian communities are invited to dialogue with the theology of the African continent. This study aims to contribute to the discussion on the task and relevance of the church in the broken world. The concepts of the wholeness of life, incarnation and liberation as aspects of Buthelezi’s understanding of the church will lead the discussion.

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15 “Ryke verskeidenheid binne eenheid. Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerkin teologinen antropologia.”
16 Boesak (1983a, xii) has called apartheid a microcosm of the situation in the world: “In a strange fashion, God has chosen the Church in South Africa to be in the forefront of a worldwide battle for justice, peace, human liberation and genuine reconciliation. After all, apartheid is but a microcosm of a worldwide situation.”
II SOUTH AFRICA FROM THE ARRIVAL OF THE WHITE SETTLERS TO THE BIRTH OF BLACK THEOLOGY

2.1. A historical overview of South Africa

In 1977 the leading figure in the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), Steve Biko, died in detention. The black community was outraged by Biko’s death in what it regarded as unjust circumstances. The white rulers, on the contrary, blamed Biko for his own death. Frostin argues that the opposite opinions, held by the government and the black people, illustrate that the black experience was “a contrast experience”: the two parties, black and white, comprehended the reality in ways that could not be accepted by the other. The relations between these two groups were problematic from the very arrival of the white people on the South African soil. Munga insists that black people never got a fully human status in the eyes of the white; thus “racial inequality is the essence of South Africa” produced by the white settler culture.

The following history section is written with a strong emphasis on the white history of South Africa. This is necessary since it was the invasion of the white people that step by step led to the establishment of apartheid, against which Black Theology and Buthelezi stood from the late 1960s onwards. The church history of South Africa also began by the arrival of European Christians. The intention, however, is not to undermine the history before the arrival of the Europeans or the history of the Africans. Moreover, the complexity of the race relations cannot be justified in this short overview.

The colonial history of South Africa began after Bartholomeus Diaz discovered the Cape of Good Hope in 1486. About a decade later the Portuguese and at the end of the century other European nations began to use the Cape region

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17 Frostin 1988, 93, 94, 97, 98.
19 There was opposition to apartheid also within the ranks of the white community and not all blacks were eager to fight the system: Silvo introduces the following division of the white community: nationalists, liberals and radicals. Liberals and radicals that opposed apartheid mainly came from the English-speaking community, whereas nationalists were mostly Afrikaners. But the boundaries are not rigid: Beyers Naudé is a prominent example of a radical Afrikaner opponent to apartheid. According to Silvo, in the black community at least two groups benefited from separate development and were thus not eager to oppose it: some of the homeland leaders and the black middle class in cities. Besides these groups there were also those blacks whose minds the apartheid system had turned against blackness. Even their fellow blacks have called them non-whites to depict their willingness to allow the white to define their being. (Silvo 1987, 27-30.)
20 Hope & Young 1981, 11.
for trade purposes, but it was not until the mid-seventeenth century that a permanent European, specifically Dutch, settlement was established. The Dutch immigrants later began to call themselves “Afrikaners” (Dutch for “Africans”\textsuperscript{21}) to differentiate themselves from other European settlers. In 1795 the British reached the Cape and clashed with the Dutch as well as the black population. The conflicts between the British and the Dutch culminated in the “Great Trek” in the 1830s and 1840s: 15 000 Afrikaners left the Cape for Natal, Transorangia and Transvaal.

In the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century diamonds and gold were found in South Africa. Diggers ran to the country, the white tightened their grasp on the economy and politics, and the blacks served the economy as cheap migrant labor.\textsuperscript{22}

The Anglo-Boer War, from the British perspective, or the Second War of Freedom, from the perspective of the Afrikaners, took place in the years 1899-1902. The British wanted to gain control over the natural riches and establish their colonial rule in South Africa. The Afrikaners fought to preserve the self-government of their republics. The war ended in the victory of the British, who then led the country under British imperial rule. The Afrikaners were assured certain rights, such as Afrikaans as the language in the schools in their regions. Despite these concessions, Afrikaner nationalism grew in intensity. The black population, on the other hand, most of who had backed the British during the war, were left out. They got no franchise, and the racial segregation was established in the form of rural reservations, later to be called Bantustans or Homelands, and division of cities according to skin color. Cheap labor was brought in from India and China, making the situation of African employees worse than before.\textsuperscript{23}

The Union of South Africa, including four provinces and a central government, was established soon after the war, in 1910. In theory, it was under the British control, but in practice the Afrikaners had more power in the newborn union. Laws guaranteed the subordination of the black, among them the Natives (Urban Areas) Act (1923) that limited the freedom of movement of the black. The Natives Land Act (1913) and its follow-up (1936) led into a situation in which the black majority had only 13\% of the land; the law ensured that they would not immigrate into white areas. The blacks were not citizens of South Africa anymore but of the black Homelands. Segregation was officially established in the form of

\textsuperscript{21} Following Buthelezi’s example, in this study “African” is used to refer to the black population.
\textsuperscript{22} Falola 2002, 197-199.
these laws. Rodney Davenport maintains that the period before the union was the time for the ideology of segregation to evolve whereas from 1910 onwards legislative measures brought the segregation “on the cover of the statute book, politically, territorially and residentially.”

The Afrikaner National Party won the election in 1948 and officially implemented apartheid (Afrikaans/Dutch for apartness/separateness) policy in the already racist South Africa. Apartheid, also called separate development, aimed at separating people into racial groupings in order for them to live their lives on different sides of the color bar. The system monitored all the aspects of life determining where one could live, move, be educated, work or whom one could marry. Apartheid can be divided into the so-called grand apartheid and petty apartheid; the former refers to broad policies of segregation that aim at creating two parallel communities, the latter to a discrimination on a micro level such as park benches or lavatories only allowed for the white. Apartheid, grand or petty, treated the non-whites (as it called the Native/Bantu, Colored and Indian populations) inhumanly but it also distorted the worldview of the white.

The government introduced numerous laws to ensure the implementation of apartheid. The Mixed Marriages Act (1949) and the Immorality Act (1950) were, for instance, launched to prevent the mixing of races and thus to back up the nationalist policy that equated race with nation. The Group Areas Act (1950) and the Native Resettlement Act (1954) gave the government the authority to remove people from their homes and move them to other areas. District Six in Cape Town and Sophietown in Johannesburg were examples of townships emptied of colored and black people respectively. The Population Registration Act (1950) demanded people to be classified by race. The Africans, Indians and Coloreds were obligated to carry a pass with them. The Suppression of Communism Act (1950) made it easy for the government to ban individuals or groups that it suspected of opposing its policies: “communist” assumed a broad content. Also Manas Buthelezi was banned under this law.

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26 The colored people shared a mixed heredity of African, ex-slave (largely Indonesian) and white origin. (Beinart 1994, 36, 37. Davenport & Saunders 2000, 32, 33.)
The events in Sharpeville on 21 March 1960 led first to the fading and then to the intensifying of black opposition to apartheid. 69 black people protesting against the pass laws in the small town of Sharpeville were shot dead by the police, many of them in the back. 186 more were wounded. The police blamed the protesters for intending to occupy a police station, and maintained that the officers were in danger. The protesters claimed the protest had been peaceful and non-violent. After Sharpeville a “state of emergency” was declared in the country: many black leaders were arrested, Nelson Mandela among them, others fled the country and black political organizations (African National Congress, ANC and Pan African Congress, PAC) were declared illegal. Also white people fled South Africa, as did foreign money.

The BCM saw daylight in this turmoil of the 1960s when black political parties were forced underground. It became a powerful movement that affected the self-understanding of many black South Africans and paved the way for their liberation from racial oppression. Young urban blacks, who had grown up in the apartheid reality, had reached a point where they wanted radical change. The origin of the BCM can be attached to the establishing of the South African Students Organization (SASO) in 1968. Steve Biko was among the university students who brought about the separation of SASO from a multi-racial apartheid-opposing student movement, the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS). They regarded NUSAS to be an ineffective and racially divided body with liberal talk and too little action.

The BCM called for a structural change in the society as well as in the attitudes of the black. The value of blackness and the importance of a positive black identity were held up. The movement emerged as a counter philosophy to the white apartheid philosophy. Allan Boesak describes Black consciousness as follows:

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28 Pass laws were laws that restricted the freedom of movement of the black, Colored and Indian population, who were forced to carry passes that indicated their ethnic origin and other personal data and consequently restricted them from entering white areas without permission. (Falola 2002, 202.)

29 De Gruchy & De Gruchy 2005, 61, 144.


Munga (1988, 235, 236) names Christian black leaders of earlier time (e.g. Albert Luthuli) who wanted to see peaceful change in South Africa. De Gruchy (De Gruchy & De Gruchy 2005, 144) maintains that some homeland leaders collaborated with the apartheid regime in order to work for the best of their people.

31 Munga 1998, 238.
Black consciousness may be described as the awareness of black people that their humanity is constituted by their blackness. It means that black people are no longer ashamed that they are black, that they have a black history and a black culture distinct from the history and culture of white people. It means that blacks are determined to be judged no longer by, and to adhere no longer to white values. It is an attitude, a way of life.

Viewed thus, Black Consciousness is an integral part of Black Power. But Black Power is also a clear critique of and a force for fundamental change in systems and patterns in society which oppress or which give rise to oppression of black people.\(^2\)

While the government talked about the black population as ‘non-whites’ and being black meant being oppressed, in the BCM ‘black’ was not attached with a negative content. As Boesak affirms, blackness was no longer a thing to be ashamed of. Black consciousness was an attitude of carrying one’s blackness with pride. The BCM broadened the concept of ‘black’ to include the Indians and Coloreds alike, since blackness then did not point so much to ethnicity as to being socially, economically and culturally oppressed in a white-dominated society. ‘Black’ became a symbol of opposing the prevailing system and offered a basis for identity.\(^3\)

The second major protest after Sharpeville that struck South Africa was at least partly caused by the BCM, which had ensured the young of their dignity as black people. It began as the Soweto uprising in June 1976: black students protested against the use of Afrikaans as the language of tuition in high schools. But once the township was in chaos and the protests had spread to the rest of the country, where black, Indian and Colored students joined the protests, the initial reason had blurred. Soweto became a general protest against apartheid. Police used force against the protesters: people were killed, injured, arrested and detained without trial. The police actions sped up the protests and made the initially hesitant older black population join the students. The protests continued for over a year coming to an end in September 1977 with the death of Steve Biko and the following arrests of black leaders and the banning of seventeen organizations. Soweto brought international attention to South Africa. It also revealed the failure of a separate development, especially in cities, and the hidden violence that governed the country.\(^4\)

After many other incidents and many people whose lives the apartheid policies influenced, the new President Frederik de Klerk, a former National Party

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Ahonen (2003, 62) defines the Black consciousness as “an ideology of psychological and political change, based in a conception of double oppression.”\(^2\)

Boesak 1977, 1.


leader who was regarded as a conservative, took measures to dismantle apartheid: in 1990 the banned organizations were legalized and political prisoners were released. The new South Africa got its first black president, Nelson Mandela, in a free election in 1994.\textsuperscript{35}

2.2. The church in South Africa

De Gruchy divides the churches in South Africa into Afrikaner churches and English-speaking churches. Roman Catholics and Lutherans are left out as a group of their own because for a longtime they remained inactive in resisting apartheid as compared to the English-speaking churches. Other scholars situate the Lutherans in different ways in the ecclesiastical picture.\textsuperscript{36} The main features of the division into Afrikaner and English-speaking churches, however, are widely accepted and reasonable as they help one grasp the bipolar ecclesiastical situation in respect to apartheid.\textsuperscript{37} African Independent Churches form one more group of churches in South Africa.

The arrival of the first Afrikaner church began the church history of South Africa: the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC or NGK for its Afrikaans/Dutch name Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk) reached the shores of South Africa in the 17\textsuperscript{th} century following the Dutch settlers. It mainly ministered within the Afrikaans community. The NGK split in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century as the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk (NHK) cut off due to disagreements between those on the Great Trek and the church hierarchy in the Cape. The Gereformeerde Kerk ("Dopper Kerk") further split off from the NHK. In the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century separate ‘daughter churches’ of the NGK were established for the Colored (Sendingkerk), black (N.G. in Africa) and Indian people (the Indian Reformed Church).

The Afrikaner churches, according to de Gruchy, were the breeding ground for Afrikaner nationalism: they offered an educated leadership, a spiritual setting for life and a place for Afrikaner traditions to live on. De Gruchy notes that the

\textsuperscript{35} De Gruchy & De Gruchy 2005, 206, 222.
Ahonen (2004, 171) maintains that the year 1990 was also revolutionary in the lives of the churches. For instance, the NGK that had promoted separate development now redefined its Kerk en Samelewing –document to state that apartheid, when it works as an oppressive system, was to be rejected as sin on the basis of the Bible. However, Ahonen notices that the document did not condemn apartheid as such to be sinful – the addition: when it works as an oppressive system, was thus remarkable. The NGK also declared one church as its ideal, but concrete models for achieving it were not formulated.

\textsuperscript{36} See Silvo 1987, 32 fn 37.
\textsuperscript{37} De Gruchy & De Gruchy 2005, 18-40, 67-100.
theologians of the Dopper Kerk offered the theological foundations for Afrikaner nationalism. Afrikaner history was considered to be “sacred history”, the Great Trek as the Exodus of the Chosen People and the Boer republics as the Promised Land. The NGK also embraced the nationalistic Afrikaner theology.\textsuperscript{38}

The NGK took credit for the emergence of separate development in South Africa. It officially rejected racism but promoted separate development, which it considered to be a source of blessing and the will of God testified by Scripture. Strong opposition to the policies of the NGK arose within its membership, a well-known example of which is Beyers Naudé whose role in the antiapartheid movement will be looked at later.\textsuperscript{39}

The English-speaking churches are a rather loose grouping that had been in cooperation with each other over the years through the ecumenical movement and who shared an unsympathetic stand towards apartheid. They also constituted a majority in the South African Council of Churches (SACC), which strongly opposed apartheid in the late 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Despite their official rejection of apartheid a contradiction between the ecclesiastical statements and practices of individual congregations was evident.\textsuperscript{40}

The British churches, which belonged to the group of the English-speaking churches, came to the Cape to minister to the British population, but also as a part of the missionary movement, a fact which is seen today in that the membership of these churches is mainly black.\textsuperscript{41} African scholars have criticized missionary work for its ties with colonial policies and its blunting impact on black initiative.\textsuperscript{42} A widely told African anecdote illustrates this perception of the relationship between the colonial powers and Christian missions:

When the white man came to our country he had the Bible and we (Blacks) had the land. The white man said to us “let us pray.” After the prayer, the white man had the land and we had the Bible.\textsuperscript{43}

Despite the criticism, African scholars have also recognized the achievements of missionary work. On the side of preaching the gospel missionaries were in charge of many social projects, like building and running schools and hospitals. Many

\textsuperscript{38} De Gruchy & De Gruchy 2005, 1, 8, 20, 21, 29, 31, 32. De Gruchy 1995, 89. Note the similarity between the Afrikaner situation and struggle and the later black struggle.
\textsuperscript{40} De Gruchy & De Gruchy 2005, 84, 85, 92. The name English-speaking churches was given to this grouping by different sources outside these churches.
\textsuperscript{41} De Gruchy & De Gruchy 2005, 11, 85.
\textsuperscript{42} Munga 1998, 233.
\textsuperscript{43} E.g. West 2002, 23.
black Christian leaders who stood against racial discrimination had sat on the stools of mission schools. Missionaries also often took sides with the black, defending their rights. This caused friction between the missionaries and the settler communities, British and Dutch alike.\(^{44}\)

The first Lutheran German immigrants arrived already in the 17\(^{th}\) century. Two centuries later also Lutheran missionary organizations began their work among black people.\(^{45}\) De Gruchy notices that the Lutherans were more preoccupied with the unity of the Lutheran church than the racial problems in the country. However, he also says that the Federation of Evangelical Lutheran Churches in South Africa (FELCSA)\(^{46}\) and black Lutherans regarded the unity of the church to have a straightforward connection with the social reality in the country: invisible unity was not accepted as an easy way out from the problems that ethnic discrimination raised.\(^{47}\)

In 1977 the Sixth General Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation gathering in Dar es Salaam took a stand against social injustice in South Africa by declaring the situation in the country a status confessionis: the LWF statement affirmed that there are times when political systems become so oppressive that the church has to resign from them in order to confess its faith. The statement imposed on the white South African member churches a requirement to reject the apartheid system and establish a real unity with the black churches. A rejecting approach to apartheid became a part of the Lutheran confession of faith. Due to their failure to satisfactorily realize the goals of the Sixth General Assembly the white churches were suspended from the LWF in the Seventh General Assembly in Budapest in 1984.\(^{48}\) The once passive role of the Lutherans in relation to apartheid was changing.

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\(^{45}\) As a fruit of mission work several unconnected black Lutheran synods were born. In 1966 numerous South African and Namibian (then South West African) Lutheran synods and churches formed the Federation of Evangelical Lutheran Churches in South Africa (FELCSA). The formation of this umbrella body helped bring the churches closer to one another. In the 1970s attempts to unite black and white Lutherans into one church failed, but four black synods united to form the Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Africa (ELCSA) in which Buthelezi later served as a bishop.

\(^{46}\) A consultation organized by the FELCSA and held in Geneva in 1975 underlined the importance of political involvement: “Christian responsibility includes politics... political noninvolvement and indifference in a society of oppression and brutality is as much a sin as murder, for this contributes to the growth of unjust practices” (Hope & Young 1981, 142). The consultation also rejected Western theology and its concentration on the sole “spiritual freedom” as inadequate for South Africa.


A crucial milestone in the struggle of the South African churches for the abolition of apartheid in the 1960s was the Cottesloe Consultation (Johannesburg, December 1960) that took place after Sharpeville and gathered most of the churches in South Africa to discuss their stand on apartheid. It resulted in a three-part declaration that among other things renounced unjust discrimination, called for interaction between racial groups and interracial worship services and offered practical resolutions to pressing issues such as justice in trials. The delegates also discussed the problems that had occurred in the attempts of the NGK and other churches to cooperate. They insisted that the churches should discuss their criticism of one another privately before going public with it.49

The withdrawal of the Transvaal and Cape synods of the NGK from the resolutions of the Cottesloe consultation weakened its impact. In 1961 the NGK also resigned from the WCC. The rejection of Cottesloe by his church was one of the reasons why the then NGK minister and Afrikaner Beyers Naudé left his ministry and became a leading figure in the “confessing movement” that grew out of the disappointment towards the government and the churches in handling the race question. He launched a journal Pro Veritate (Latin: “for the truth”) in 1962 and was active in the founding of the Christian Institute (CI) in the following year. He also served as its first general secretary. The CI was a central body in the church struggle for black liberation during its 16-year lifespan until it was banned in the aftermath of the Soweto uprising.50

Another central ecclesiastical institution working for the abolition of apartheid was the South African Council of Churches (SACC)51. In the late 1960s the then rather ineffective council began to change into a means of prophetic action to reform society. It grew, radicalized and became increasingly black in the 1970s. In 1968 the SACC published a document or a confession of faith entitled A Message to the People of South Africa, in which apartheid was declared a heresy and the separate development rejected. Prime Minister John Vorster responded quickly to A Message warning against people “who wish to disrupt the order in

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51 The SACC is the successor of the South African General Missionary Conference (1904) and the Christian Council of South Africa (1936). It was renamed SACC in 1968.
South Africa under the cloak of religion." De Gruchy points out that the correspondence between the Prime minister and the church leaders is a stark example of how both sides of the church struggle used the Bible. The dialogue denotes the relations of the SACC with the authorities and most of the whites of the country: it was regarded to be too radical an institution. On the other hand, the international ecumenical bodies and some blacks called for more radical measures.

A Message was brought to a second level when the SACC and CI together launched the Study Project on Christianity in Apartheid Society (Spro-cas). The project was initiated to bring the confession into practice in the lives of the churches and to search for alternatives for the future of South Africa. The SACC also ran many other programs and projects in the years of fighting racial oppression.

2.3. South African Black Theology – a contextual liberation theology

Whereas Black consciousness offered a counter-philosophy, Black Theology could be called a counter-theology. Black consciousness and Black Theology were born in the same situation of racial exploitation and were in interaction with each other from their very origin. Neither of them was an elitist movement; both evolved at the grassroots’ level of the community. Boesak defines Black Theology as follows:

Black Theology is a theological reflection of black Christians on the situation in which they live and on their struggle for liberation. Blacks ask: What does it mean to believe in Jesus Christ when one is black and living in a world controlled by white racists? And what if these racists call themselves Christians also?

Boesak’s views are used here to introduce Black Theology because he was one of the first academic black theologians in South Africa who along with Buthelezi shaped the methodology of Black Theology. Also, his Farewell to Innocence – A Socio-Ethical Study on Black Theology was the first systematic work on South African Black Theology. Frostin splits the Black Theology of the 1960s through 1980s into two stages divided by Biko’s death in 1977 and the bans following it.

54 Munga 1998, 238.
56 Boesak 1977, 1, 2.
57 Silvo 1987, 8, 9, 12.
Buthelezi and Boesak are the two leaders that Frostin mentions being “of specific interest in the first phase of the South African black theology.” Of course, there were other important figures as well, of whom at least Desmond Tutu deserves to be mentioned. The men of the first phase led the theological wing of the black movement at its early stages in the late 1960s and in the 1970s. In the 1980s other theologians introduced new emphases, including younger Christians leaning towards the abandonment of absolute non-violence.

In *Farewell to Innocence* Boesak introduces the situation and experience of the people and their existential questions as keys to doing theology: the existential situation determines the theological agenda and sets the framework for theology. But even as the black situation is the starting point, it is not a source of revelation per se. Although God is understood to reveal himself in the situation, the situation or blackness is not elevated to a divine stage. Boesak criticizes the American black theologian James Cone for overemphasizing the black situation as the judge of sound theology. According to Boesak, the Word of God must be the ultimate judge of Black Theology. Black Theology should be universal and ecumenical: its context is blackness but it aims at the liberation of both the black and the white.

Liberation from the oppressive situation is a central issue. The gospel is in fact equated with liberation. Liberation is not regarded to be a part of the gospel but to penetrate the whole gospel, starting with the Exodus and proceeding to Jesus’ words in the synagogue in Luke 4. Boesak affirms that “The gospel of Christ is the gospel of liberation.”

Black Theology reflects critically the praxis of liberation in the light of the gospel. Further features of its methodology are here sketched by looking at the so-called new

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58 Frostin 1988, 92.
59 Frostin 1988, 92-94.
60 Luke 4:18-19: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor." (NRSV.)
61 Boesak 1977, 17.
63 Frostin (1988, 11) reminds that ‘liberation theology’ is used in varied ways: some take it to denote the theology originating in Latin America, whereas others also include liberal First World theology under the umbrella-term of “liberation theology”. Frostin takes the new paradigm as the constitutive measure of “liberation theology”. What he calls liberation theology is, thus, not defined by the content of a given theology but by the method used. Even while different
paradigm for theology defined in the 1970s and 1980s by the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT), a group of theologians coming from different contexts of oppression or poverty. South Africa was represented by Boesak and Tutu among others. In its first conference the EATWOT stated:

> We reject as irrelevant an academic type of theology that is divorced from action. We are prepared for a radical break in epistemology which makes commitment the first act of theology and engages in critical reflection on the praxis of reality of the Third World.

EATWOT searched for a new method in doing theology putting special emphasis on epistemology. Because of the “radical break in epistemology”, it denied the possibility of liberation theology being evaluated or judged according to the epistemologies of the West, even those of progressive theologies. For the EATWOT members praxis and engagement in the struggle for liberation became central determinators of epistemology. Third World theologies were depicted as interpreters of the Third World experience, that is the experience of oppressed Third World citizens fighting for liberation. The emphasis of Black Theology on experience is hence shared with theologies that arise from other contexts of oppression.

Frostin summarizes the new paradigm with five characters. First, the interlocutors of the new paradigm are “nonpersons” (a term launched by Gustavo Gutierrez). It is thought that the poor perceive better than the privileged what are theologians emphasize different aspects of the paradigm, the poor and their liberation are always in the spotlight.

64 Seven EATWOT conferences were arranged in the years 1976-1986: 1976 Dar es Salaam; 1977 Accra (regional: Africa); 1979 Wennappuwa (regional: Asia); 1980 Sao Paolo (regional: Latin America); 1981 New Delhi; 1983 Geneva (a conference for both First and Third World theologians); 1986 Oaxtepec, Mexico. About fifty theologians coming from various Third World contexts contributed to the work of the EATWOT, among them Gustavo Gutierrez, Leonardo Boff, Allan Boesak, John Mbiti and Desmond Tutu. Manas Buthelezi’s paper *In Christ – One Community in the Spirit* was read in Dar es Salaam, although he was unable to participate in person due to a political ban. (Frostin 1988, 2, 3.)

The term Third World is not uncontroversial. Frostin (1988, 4) mentions Peter Berger as an example of those critical of the use of this term. These critics claim that no such entity exists. Frostin sees them being worried of the simplification of the variety of Asian, African and Latin American realities. However, the EATWOT members consider the term to be adequate due to the common experience of oppression in the Third World. Fabella (2003, 202) notes that the Third World is currently understood to include the marginalized minorities of the First World. It is “a supra-geographic denotation, describing a social condition marked by social, political, religious, and cultural oppressions that render people powerless and expendable.”

65 EATWOT I 1978, 269.

66 Frostin 1988, 2-6.
the important questions for theology and are therefore given a central position in doing theology.  

The second point is the difference in the perception of God in liberation theology as compared to Western theology. Whereas the existence of God is a question in progressive Western theology, the problem in the Third World is not the production of evidence of God’s existence but the capitulation of people to oppressive measures. The question is: who does God side with? Discerning true God from idols becomes a central task in the new paradigm. Because of their existential situation, the poor are in a better position than the powerful to perform this task. Elina Vuola remarks that liberation theology is oriented towards the questions of the nonpersons, not the nonbelievers. The first and second points of the paradigm overlap: the nonpersons as the subjects of theology are interested in what God does in their situation rather than being troubled by the question of his existence.

Frostin’s third characteristic of the new paradigm is the analysis of the context, literally: the analysis of conflicts. Since theology is not made in a vacuum but in a context that always affects the theologian and her/his way of comprehending theological issues, the context has to be analyzed in order to do valid theology. Boesak also points out the importance of the context. He defines Black Theology as a contextual theology committed to liberation. A contextual theology takes the traditional culture seriously, even when it discusses it critically, but does not stop there: the present struggle and situation of the people get a central standing on its agenda.

Fourthly, the new paradigm uses tools from social sciences in contrast to the old Western paradigm that borrowed its tools from philosophy. Social sciences help theologians grasp who the poor they are talking about are; a social analysis helps to define the interlocutors of theology. Supporters of the new paradigm admit the relationship between Marxism and liberation theology. However,

67 Frostin (1988, 6, 7) writes that Gutiérrez compares “progressivist” Western theology (he takes Schleiermacher’s theology as the norm here) and liberation theology: Western theology tries to give answers to “cultured critics” whereas liberation theology talks to and with the poor, the “nonpersons.” It is also worth mentioning the difference between progressivist and liberation theology in their approach/attitude to the poor. This Frostin does when he lays out the new paradigm: progressivist theology sees the poor as an ethical question. For liberation theology this is not enough; the poor are given “an epistemological privilege.” They are not the objects of theology but the subjects who actually define the making of theology.

68 Frostin 1988, 7.
70 Frostin 1988, 7-9.
Frostin reminds that Marxism is perceived as a tool rather than a norm. De Gruchy maintains that black theologians in South Africa were not willing to adopt Marxism as a tool for doing theology, even while they understood the challenge that Marxism set and the appeal it had to young urban blacks who were involved with the BCM. Frostin points out that Marxism played a bigger role in the second phase of Black Theology than in the first phase that was led by Boesak and Buthelezi.

Interaction between theology and praxis is the fifth aspect of the new paradigm. Frostin talks about doing theology as a “hermeneutical circulation”: action and theory are bound together in a hermeneutical cycle. Liberation theology is understood to be secondary in respect to praxis that is defined as a commitment for liberation struggle. Theology is a process and has to be checked and corrected in respect to the praxis. However, theology can also affect the reality it describes, thereby being an instrument of change. In addition to the dialectics between praxis and theology, there is also a dialogue between those who do theology in the academy and those who live in the reality of oppression.

In the EATWOT various Third World theologies interacted and influenced each other. The connection between North American and South African Black Theology is often brought forth. Stephen Munga, however, notes that admitting that North American Black Theology influenced its South African cousin does not mean they are the same. They were born in different contexts even though ‘blackness’ and oppression related to it connects them. According to Marjorie Hope and James Young, Buthelezi, who studied in the universities of Drew and Yale in the United States, maintains that North American Black Theology was a mere matter of curiosity for him during his stay in the United States whereas his

Ahonen (2003, 63) describes the difference between North American and South African Black theologies as follows: “While American Black theologians, reacting to the Black Power, had emphasized the unfairness of their oppressors in inter-human relations, the South African Black theology gave an expression to a theology of liberation in which the key issue was, in accordance with Black consciousness, the defeating of slave mentality.” A clear difference between the contexts of the two Black Theologies is the fact that in South Africa the black population constitutes the majority, whereas the black people of North America form an ethnic minority.
Black Theology was born in the face of the challenge he countered once he got back home to South Africa.\textsuperscript{77}

Black Theology can be viewed in the context of liberation theologies as has been done. The debate between two different styles of African theology offers another context for defining Black Theology. The attitudes of theologians of inculturation (also referred to as African Theology) and liberation (a representative of which Black Theology is) toward each other have not always been conciliatory.\textsuperscript{78} In his address on North American Black Theology, John Mbiti for example declares that Black Theology cannot become African Theology. The breeding ground of the latter, according to Mbiti, is Christian joy, whereas the context of Black Theology is oppression. He does not deny that Black Theology can contribute to the situation in North America or to some extent to that of Southern Africa, but it is not a theology for the African context.\textsuperscript{79}

Buthelezi discerns the different branches of African theologies in quite a different way. Understanding his approach to doing Black Theology helps one understand his emphasis on the wholeness of life, incarnation and liberation that will be analyzed in this thesis. As an advocate of “the anthropological approach” Buthelezi emphasizes the African as the subject of theology. By introducing the anthropological approach he aims at elaborating a methodology for Black Theology. He criticizes the so-called “ethnographical approach” of being too superficial and of idealizing the past. What Buthelezi calls the ethnographical approach comes close to Mbiti’s African Theology, but it is noteworthy that Buthelezi refers to Western Africanists as representatives of the approach he criticizes.\textsuperscript{80} They miss the mark in concentrating on the res indigene whereas Buthelezi places weight on the \textit{causa efficiens}\textsuperscript{81}. External things, for example

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{77} Frostin 1988, 226, fn 37. Hope & Young 1983, 144.
\item \textsuperscript{78} There are also other ways to divide the African theological field. About the discourse on African theologies see Frostin 1988, 13-19; Munga 1998, 82-104.
\item \textsuperscript{79} Mbiti 1979, 481, 482.
\item \textsuperscript{80} See Parratt 1995, 169.
\item \textsuperscript{81} Buthelezi mentions Bengt Sundkler, Placide Tempels and John Taylor as representatives of the ethnographical approach in Toward, 57, 58.
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{81} Aristotle talked about God as the \textit{prima causa efficiens}, the first cause, and Thomas of Aquinas elaborated the idea. Aquinas (1993, 299) states: “We must unequivocally concede that God is at work in all activity, whether of nature or of will. But some misunderstand this, mistakenly attributing every natural activity to God in such a way that things in nature do nothing at all by their own power”. When Buthelezi refers to the black human being as a \textit{causa efficiens} he seems to draw attention to the position of the human being as a creative source, a co-creator of God, that affects her/his surroundings: “What we [in the ethnographical approach] miss is the man, the \textit{causa efficiens} of the African world view” (Creation, 282).
music or administration, being indigenous do not necessarily make a church or theology indigenous.

The focus of interest of the ethnographers is not so much the human being than a theory, and so the African becomes an object of theology rather than a maker of it. Buthelezi introduces the ideas of Placide Tempels as an example of the inclination of the ethnographers to aspire to dominate the being of the African. He quotes Tempels:

It is we [Europeans] who will be able to tell them [Africans], in precise terms, what their inmost concept of being is. They will recognize themselves in our words and will acquiesce, saying, “You understand us, you know us completely, you “know” the way we “know”.82

According to Buthelezi, Tempels’ assertion shows that for the European missionary the African person was “only a means to an end”83 as the Europeans tried to reconcile their own guilty conscience by producing an indigenous theology. Someone from outside determines who the African is and what is indigenous for him. Buthelezi calls for the African himself to be the author of the indigenous African theology.

The African should possess the freedom to think for himself in his own way that is not forced within a set framework of norms of Western theology.84 Buthelezi states that in order for the African to produce an indigenous theology, he should have the right to produce heresies. He quotes Tshongwe: “When our seminaries can produce heretics, not through ignorance but conviction, then I would say the African is beginning to think.”85 ‘Heresy’ stands for ‘the act of choosing’. Buthelezi points out that the ecclesiastical dogma is a product of the freedom of theological thought: “Yet in essence – if you allow me some semantic

82 Tempels 1969, 36.
83 Toward, 67.
84 Leonardo Boff calls for the same kind of theological freedom in Latin America as Buthelezi does in Africa. Boff writes: “This new Church, as in all renewal movements, first appears on the periphery. Given the power structure at the center, the periphery is the only place where true creativity and freedom is possible. Faith is born and made present through personal witness; it is not being watched over by the institution.” (Boff 1985, 62.) Boff thus suggests that authentic expressions of faith are born in freedom, in a distance from the supervision of the institution. In the case of South Africa, Buthelezi calls for freedom for those who are in, one could say, the periphery of the society to produce their expressions of faith. Boff further predicts: “It is to be expected that the old Church will distrust the new Church on the periphery with its gospel freedoms. It will call it a parallel Church, with its own magisterium, disobedient and disloyal to the center!” (Boff 1985, 63.)
85 Toward, 69.
indulgence – ecclesiastical dogma is nothing but a corporate ‘heresy’ made from pre-existing sets of theologoumena.\(^{86}\)

According to Buthelezi, the African person that African or Black Theology should be interested in is not found in the past. The past cannot serve as a legitimate source for the “African worldview”. The modern African should decide for himself, how much and what of the past he wants to keep. It is not the history what should define the African or his theology but he should define what the history means today. Buthelezi criticizes the ethnographers for, contrary to his anthropological approach, trying to reconstruct a “true African” by clinging to the past and neglecting the present. The “true African” is found in Africa today.

Without actually saying it, the implicit suggestion they seem to be making is that the old traditional insights represent more what is truly African than the insights of the modern African. The “true African” is the one who is described in the books of the ethnographers rather than the one whom we see in Johannesburg, Durban, or Cape Town trying to make ends meet in the Influx-Control legislation. Just as modern Europe is a conglomerate of cultural and spiritual aberrations, the modern African is a cultural caricature of the “true African” who is the African of the “good old days.”\(^{87}\)

Indigenous theology should meet people where it finds them.\(^{88}\) Black Theology arises from the existential situation of the people.

Stephen Munga talks about African Theologies of inculturation and liberation in his dissertation years after the debate between Mbiti and North American Black Theology or Buthelezi and the ethnographers. He wants to see a way beyond the controversy as the name of his study suggests. According to him the two streams of African theology can help each other to sharpen the processing of their respective problems but should not be forced to emerge into one.\(^{89}\) Munga hence represents a view that acknowledges the need of both branches of African Theology.

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\(^{86}\) Toward, 69.
\(^{87}\) Toward, 64.
\(^{88}\) Toward. Also see BT or AT; Creation, 206-304.
III THE CHURCH PENETRATED BY THE WHOLENESS OF LIFE

3.1. The wholeness of life as a postulate for ecclesiology

The concept of “wholeness of life” is central to Buthelezi’s understanding of ecclesiology. It is also a notion deeply rooted in African culture and tradition. A linguistic example that Buthelezi uses to illustrate an African perception of life is the Zulu word *impilo* (life). *Impilo* denotes at once physical “healthiness”/“wholeness” and religious and spiritual “life”. Hence the word embraces an idea of the oneness of physical and spiritual human existence. Buthelezi translates *impilo* as “wholeness of life”. In most of his production Buthelezi prefers the English translation. In this study ‘*impilo*’ and ‘wholeness of life’ are used interchangeably.

Buthelezi addresses the traditional African religion and life in several articles. In the traditional African community religion was not separable from the rest of human existence; the natural and supernatural worlds constituted one whole. Religion was present in every breath a person took: “Far from being a department of life, religion was life.” Everything that happened in the community happened in front of God. The African did not encounter God in highly sophisticated theories, but *life* was the stage where humanity met God and experienced his presence existentially. God’s existence is not tied to the conceptualization of faith but one comprehends it through experience as one gets involved in life. Viewed from this perspective, life has a “sacramental character”: in the everyday life the natural and transcendental worlds interact as God grants his gifts through the already given structures of life. The two worlds do not absorb each other, but rather “the world around us becomes alive with

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90 It can be argued that one cannot refer to the African way of life or culture as a coherent entity. This study, however, follows the example of Buthelezi in referring to the ‘African’ life, religion and so on. Also, in this kind of a broad sense and in the historical context the use of ‘African’ can be considered to be a counter-pole to the European/white. Nevertheless, the definitive word ‘African’ should be rather considered as an umbrella term than an exact and decisive expression. Everything that Buthelezi calls African must not be expected to hold true throughout the vast continent. The use of ‘African’ in this study rather refers to the sub-Saharan part of the continent, and mostly arises in Buthelezi’s context of Southern Africa.
91 Tödt uses the German word ”Gesundheit” (Ansätze, 44).
92 Ansätze, 44.
94 This quotation is a pointed example of Buthelezi’s understanding of life. It also shows how Buthelezi at times uses the exactly same phrases in different texts, a fact that reveals the centrality of the issue.
95 Creation, 123.
God’s gifts, which can also be mundane like food or health, are mediated to people through the sacrament of life.\footnote{Creation, 123.}

Buthelezi also pays attention to the salience of human relationships in African tradition and the ideal of African communality. They influence his conception of the wholeness of life and are reflected in his understanding of the church.\footnote{Creation, 122-124. Religion being life, not a separate entity, is also discussed in: Ansätze, 44; Problem, 120-121; Proclamation, 28; Meaning, 99.}

In the traditional community “life was a wholeness shared in fellowship with others.”\footnote{Buthelezi discusses the Hebraic concept of “corporate personality”, the meaning of which comes close to his understanding of the African extended family as a tight community, and maintains that ‘corporate personality’ is in the background of the New Testament notion of the church as the body of Christ. About Buthelezi on “corporate personality” see e.g. Creation, 106-108; Grounds, 150; Pologyny, 59.} The fellowship was not restricted to the living but it also included the ancestors. Ancestor worship is not to be understood as idolatry. The position of ancestors rather reveals the omnipotence of the Creator: neither the living nor the dead can flee from him. Buthelezi draws a line from the fellowship between the dead and alive to the Christian notion of the communion of saints.\footnote{Creation, 147.} The centrality of human relationships and ancestors mirror the same holistic worldview as the indivisibility of the profane and the sacred: the dead and the living are parties to the same, one reality. These two aspects of African tradition show how the concept of the wholeness of life strongly draws from the African worldview.

However, it is not only an African but also a traditionally Christian and biblical concept. John Parratt points out that Buthelezi’s understanding of human life as one whole is promoted in both the New and Old Testaments. It is a

\begin{quote}
Bonganjalo Goba (1973, 69) wrote on corporate personality in a paper Corporate Personality: Ancient Israel and Africa given at a seminar on black theology in 1971: “What we discover in the concept as it manifests itself in Israel and Africa is the unique idea of solidarity, a social consciousness that rejects and transcends individualism. Apart from this, one discovers a unique sense of dynamic community, a caring concern that seeks to embrace all, a love that suffers selflessly for others.” Through his paper Goba opened the theological discussion on the matter. According to de Gruchy (De Gruchy & De Gruchy 2005, 151, 152), the weakening of communality and solidarity in South Africa, brought up by urbanization, racism and other social phenomena, challenged Goba to reinstate the appreciation of the sense of community that is also embraced in the notion of corporate personality. De Gruchy continues: “This is very important for understanding black theology, for black solidarity is of its essence. It rejects any attempt to divide the black community along ethnic or denominational lines.”

\end{quote}
profoundly Christian idea that God is the origin of all the gifts in life and that both spiritual and material gifts contribute to the experience of a full-scale life. Although, according to Parratt, the wholeness of life has not usually been on the agenda of Western theology, similar traces of emphasis may be found. Martin Luther’s appreciation of mundane things seem to have influenced Buthelezi’s thoughts on the indivisibility of life. Frostin notes that Buthelezi’s emphasis on the wholeness of life is in line with “the earthiness of Luther”. It might also be that Buthelezi interprets the Lutheran tradition through the concept of impilo. For example, Buthelezi understands Luther’s teaching on two kingdoms as pointing to a holistic worldview: “Luther did not think in terms of a world of God and a world which is outside the sovereignty of God. The expression ‘two kingdoms’ or ‘realms’ was merely a linguistic representation of the realities of man’s corporate existence before God.” Buthelezi explains his argument by describing the historic setting. Luther lived in a society that was conceived as one corpus christianum and within this context he used the two kingdoms doctrine to make sense of the relationship between faith and the world. It was a given fact in Luther’s time that God was connected to all life, and therefore his talk of two kingdoms did not suggest a division into secular and sacred segments or the rejection of God from the “secular”. In the end, the Lutheran tradition interacts in Buthelezi’s thought with contextual, existential South African fabric. African tradition appears as the primary source for the concept of the wholeness of life. Frostin rightly declares that “Buthelezi’s concept of the wholeness of life – even though it is elaborated in dialogue with Western theology – is firmly rooted in African soil.”

101 Frostin 1988, 139. Also Parratt (1995, 164) maintains that Buthelezi is clearly a representative of the Lutheran tradition, even as he operates in a new situation.
102 Creation, 120-121.
103 Creation, 120-121.
104 Frostin 1988, 139.
In the light of Buthelezi’s strong emphasis on \textit{impilo} and the African traditional understanding of life as a source for his holistic theology his criticism of the ethnographical approach to theology (introduced in chapter 2.3.) seems contradictory. While African tradition becomes a stepping-stone to his holistic understanding of the church that is partly built on the pillar of the wholeness of life, he criticizes the ethnographers for concentrating on the past instead of the current situation of the people. It seems that he does not follow his own principles. Parratt also notices the contradiction. According to him, Theo Sundermeier has insisted that the sharp differentiation between the anthropological and ethnographical approaches is somewhat false and that they are closer related to one another than Buthelezi suggests. Both seek the African identity in its wholeness, one concentrating on cultural alienation, the other on social and political alienation. Although Parratt appreciates Buthelezi’s corrective and opposition to any sort of “Homeland’s theology”, he maintains that Buthelezi’s division might be too sharp and his approach closer to the approach of African theologians outside of South Africa than what he suggests.\footnote{Parratt 1995, 171, 172.} It is noteworthy, however, that Buthelezi’s criticism of the ethnographers does not deny the worth of the past in itself. The \textit{present} must be the starting point for doing theology but the \textit{African} has the right to choose what he wants to take from the past into the present situation. The emphasis is on the African person as the \textit{causa efficiens}.\footnote{"There is a danger that the 'African past' may be romanticized and conceived in isolation from the realities of the present. --- it is misleading to give the impression that the African world view was something so static that it would have remained the same up to our time, had the West not disturbed African life. --- It is too presumptuous for one to claim to know how much of his past the African will allow to shape his future, as soon as he is given the chance to participate in the 'wholeness of life' which the contemporary world offers." (Creation, 277, 280.)} Silvo also points out that Buthelezi does not want to push tradition aside but use it selectively. Along with the African tradition Buthelezi utilizes parts of Lutheran theology (Silvo explicitly points to the theology of creation) to find answers to the situation at hand.\footnote{Silvo 1987, 81, 82.}

As Buthelezi’s affiliation to the notion of the wholeness of life indicates, his theological insight rejects the separation between the sacred and the profane: “human existence is a solidarity which defies the neat categorization of the sacred and the profane.”\footnote{Creation, 1.} The idea penetrates his production.\footnote{Creation, 1.} The traditional
understanding of life could enrich Christian ecclesiology and Christianity in general and redress diseased conceptions of faith. Christianity must reflect a holistic understanding of life and so the wholeness of life becomes a prerequisite for an authentic church and for ecclesiology: “Our aim was to characterize the ‘wholeness of life’ as a postulate of ecclesiology.”

Buthelezi wants “to place ekklesia back to where she belongs, namely, the sphere of human existence, instead of some Platonic sphere.” The church is a part of the rest of reality, a concrete aspect of human life that can only exist in a certain place and form. It has no relevance outside the concreteness of human existence. Philosophical speculations foreign to life are not the building material for the church and Christianity; the church should not be conceptualized and situated in an abstract philosophical/theological sphere. Buthelezi shuns any attempts to separate the Christian community from the rest of life: “The church cannot escape the world because it is in it.” The theology that has ruled South Africa has had a tendency to isolate faith/church into its own sector. Doing so it has annulled the church and the gospel, since “if Christian life is other than human life, the incarnation of Christ is then of no significance.” In line with the African understanding of religion Buthelezi considers the structures and policies of the society to be the only place where people meet God and receive his gifts. It follows that the church must exist in the midst of those structures in order to be a meeting place for the Creator and the creature. All this shows that he is keen on keeping the church down to earth, or as Frostin puts it: “Emphatically he wants to rule out any attempt to spiritualize the concept of the church.”

The created reality can be described by different concepts/categories. In his dissertation Buthelezi has chosen to use the categories of ‘creation’ and ‘church’. Different categories are nevertheless only an aid in perceiving the reality. In the end, all the structures of life, be it church, creation, or world, are part of one and the same life.

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109 See e.g. Grounds, 150, 151: “Seen from the angle of the sovereignty of God and occasional Christian experience, life is a unique entity that defies any artificial division into parts.” See also Proclamation, 26-29.
110 Creation, 306.
111 Creation, 31.
112 Creation, 74, 163, 164. Also see: Toward, 56.
113 Creating, 8.
114 Grounds, 155.
115 Frostin 1988, 144.
Buthelezi’s basic theological motivation for the promotion of the wholeness of life is creatureliness. The emphasis on creation is characteristic to Lutheran theology. Frostin notices that Buthelezi’s interest in creation, however, differs from the often-conservative traditional interpretations that have, for example, led to a rigid understanding of fixed creational orders which in turn has backed the idea of a separation of the political and spiritual spheres/kingdoms from each other. Buthelezi’s approach to creation, on the contrary, emphasizes the oneness of life under the sight of one Creator. Because they were created by God, human beings are always in relation to him. Life is always coram Deo.

The dignity and worth of an African, like any other God-created human being, derives from the fact that she or he is created in God’s image. The ‘divine image and likeliness’ (Gen. 1:26) draws attention to the dynamism of the human-divine relationship. It is not foremost an ontological definition of man, but rather a description of how the human being was created and what that implies for the relation he has with the Creator.

Buthelezi urges redemption not to be highlighted at the expense of creation. As Creator, God had begun his work among the African peoples prior to the missionary era. The missionaries did not bring him with them but rather brought a verbal message of this God who had once created the African and been on the continent ever since. According to Buthelezi, the missionaries did not see God’s creative work in the patterns of African life, or at least such an understanding was not reflected in their actions and attitudes. Instead, the moral codes of Western Christianity were regarded as an unquestionable part of the gospel and implemented in the African society. If the missionaries had considered creation to mean God’s active presence in the lives of Christians as well as non-Christian and regarded it as a basis for a constant relationship between God and humanity, the approach to local cultures would have been different. Creation so understood “becomes a dynamic and contemporary event, rather than something which is relegated to the prelapsarian past.”

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118 Creation, 30. Meaning, 100.
120 Creation, 58.
Since human dignity stems from the reality of creation\textsuperscript{121} and not from one’s position in regard to Christian faith, Christians have no monopoly on the dynamic creational God-man relationship:

We are nowhere in the Bible told that God loves Christians as men more than he loves non-believers. As a matter of fact, one of the most important verses which describes the deep dimension of God’s love in the New Testament refers to the “world” as the object of God’s love (Joh. 3:16). In the Johannine literature, “world” means fallen man.\textsuperscript{122}

In other words, God loves his creatures, whether members of the church or not. Because he was created in the image of God, a human being is human even as a sinner, and further, because someone is human, he is redeemable.\textsuperscript{123} The creation can hence be understood as the basis for redemption in a sense that it reveals the value of an individual and the reason why God’s will is to free him. It offers a basis for the equality of all people regardless of the fact that one has received the gospel of Christ before the other. Those inside the Christian community do not have a special status.

The relationship between creation and redemption does not only address the inner life of an individual. In Buthelezi’s view creatureliness assures a possibility of concrete redemption or liberation from the consequences of sin on a social level: “Even as a slave and when radically oppressed, man has always been redeemable from the social consequences of sin. He is redeemable because he was created in the image of God.”\textsuperscript{124} Sin is defined as the opposite of creation. To sin is to withdraw from enhancing the wellbeing of the neighbor. Redemption includes liberation from the social grievances generated by sin, oppression, racial injustice and other wrongdoings in one’s relation to the neighbor.\textsuperscript{125} Buthelezi’s approach is practical but deeply theological. Things that he talks about in

\textsuperscript{121} Also Tutu and Boesak consider the doctrine of creation as proof of the meant for equality of people. Boesak 1983b, 3, 4: “Racism is sin. It denies the creatureliness of others. It denies the truth that all human beings are made in the image of the Father of Jesus Christ. As a result, it not only denies the unity of all humankind, it also refuses to acknowledge that being in the image of God means having ‘dominion over the earth’.” Tutu 1983, 44: “What is extraordinary in that this assertion that human persons are created in the divine image is meant to apply to all human beings at a time when it would have been understandable if the author had somehow indicated that it applied only to Jews. It is all the more remarkable then that no ethnic, racial or other biological factors are mentioned as significant in the make-up of human beings.”

Buthelezi’s emphasis on creation is thus shared with other theologians of his context. However, according to Ellingsen (1993, 8, 10) most of the official statements made by churches in opposition to apartheid appealed to Christology, and it was exceptional to cite the doctrine of creation. Majority of the churches that referred the doctrine of creation as their justification against separate development were Lutheran.

\textsuperscript{122} Creation, 58, 59.
\textsuperscript{123} Creation, 56-59. Meaning, 98.
\textsuperscript{124} Meaning, 98.
\textsuperscript{125} Creation, 88. Meaning, 98.
theological terms are seen and experienced in his own environment. The discussion on creation indicates how he uses experience to justify theological arguments.

Parratt ties Buthelezi’s thoughts on creation and redemption together with the concept of the wholeness of life. The human being was created to share in this wholeness and later redeemed to be able to return to the wholeness of life. In both phases he is created by God. Neither of the events aims at an abstract, spiritual outcome. Both embrace the whole of human existence, material and spiritual, in the here and now.126

3.2. Alienation from the wholeness of life

Buthelezi uses Reverend J. Mthethwa’s question “But God, why did you create us?” to demonstrate the alienation of the African from the wholeness of life. He quotes the line in his dissertation, in the Heidelberg lectures, and in several articles. It illustrates the existential anxiety of the contemporary African, a descendant of the colonial and missionary era. Mthethwa’s question is a mirror of the situation the African experiences: political, economic and ecclesiastical oppression. Also the historical image of the African self is colored by oppression: according to Buthelezi, the African has been depicted as an object shaped by others instead of being an active subject creatively influencing the processes that affect his life.127 These circumstances provoke the question of the worth of oneself as a black person: why did you make me black in a world where blackness means inferiority?


Whereas the doctrine of creation backs Buthelezi’s understanding of the notions of wholeness of life and the related equality of human beings, the NGK’s teaching on creation points to a very different direction. According to Hallamaa (1988, 76-80) also the NGK regarded people as equal in relation to God on the basis of creation. However, the church also taught that in relation to each other people were not meant to be equal since God created people of different levels in regard to talents, and respectively intended the tasks given to humanity to be realized in various ways depending on the amount of talent of the individual. Hence, the unity of humankind is not based on equality but on the fact that people are parts of the one diverse creation.

It is noteworthy that also the German Evangelical Church explained their support of the National Socialism by the doctrine of creation (Ellingsen, 3).


Also Frostin notes that the question “But God, why did you create us?” gets a central position in Buthelezi’s texts and recurs often. Frostin takes this to suggest ”that the problem must have a structuring function in his theological concept --- obviously Buthelezi finds it to be an adequate expression for the black experience and a subject for theological reflection.” (Frostin 1988, 137.)
A practical example of this alienation is the existence of migrant labor. A “migrant laborer” is “a man in two worlds and a settler in none.” When the Africans were turned into a source of labor that could be moved around as to best suit the economy, the traditional family and along with it the social system were destroyed. Men moved between their work place and home in the rural areas. A “migrant Christian” accompanied the migrant laborer. Buthelezi describes the migrant Christian as someone who also has two worlds: the traditional and the Christian communities. He needed both: the former as his cultural and biological point of reference and the latter because it was the setting for the spiritual values he had chosen. The African mind was stigmatized by the awareness of belonging nowhere. Buthelezi refers to Mthethwa’s text who “puts his finger on the burden of alienation borne by African Christians; a burden of knowing and experiencing that you belong nowhere.” Theologians from the Third World have called this kind of poverty anthropological. Anthropological poverty delineates a situation of alienation that affects the whole human being.

When arriving on the African soil the church was not integrated into the society and Weltanschauung it encountered but rather intended to shape the African anew. Being a “Christian man” was accompanied by being a Westernized man. The missionary approach thus did not aim at creating a Christian African. The African was rather expected to change and leave his own culture for a

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128 Creation, 152. Problem, 119.
129 Creation, 151, 152, 159. Problem, 119-122.
130 Creation, 137.
131 A Cameroonian theologian, Engelbert Mveng launched the concept of anthropological poverty. He maintains that poverty in the Third World context differs from poverty in the Western world. The anthropological poverty that the African experiences is a state in which people have lost “their identity, their dignity, their freedom, their thought, their history, their language, their faith universe, and their basic creativity, deprived of all their rights, their hopes, their ambitions”. The current state of affairs is a product of a long history of slavery and colonization. He takes South Africa until the mid-1990s as an example of anthropological poverty that is exposed upon black people in a form of neo-slavery, the Africans being excluded from sharing material wealth or power on their continent. (Mveng 1994,155-157.) Parratt explains anthropological poverty to point to the disparagement of the humanity and integrity of a person. It further leads to the belittling and erasing of parts of one’s culture. He maintains that a lot of anthropological poverty deriving from the demonization of traditional cultures is due to the Christian missions. Missionaries often misunderstood local cultures and religions, although there also were exceptions. (Parratt 2004, 5, 6.) Buthelezi’s understanding of the alienation from the wholeness of life is in line with Mveng’s description of anthropological poverty. This kind of poverty must be erased in order for the human being to enjoy the God-created wholeness of life.

132 "Unwittingly, man – and in this case, the African – was regarded as a kind of raw material which Christianity was to mould into a ‘Christian man’ and which ‘western’ culture had to mould into a ‘Civilized man’” (Creation, 68). "Das Christentum wirkte wie eine Vorhut westlicher Kultur; folglich „christianisierte” und „zivilisierte” man praktisch in ein und demselben Arbeitsgang das zu „formende” „Material”, den schwarzen Menschen" (Thesen, 536).
Western culture, a fact which broke the wholeness of life. The criticism is therefore aimed at Western cultural imperialism that dwells in the shade of the church. In a similar mode Kofi Appiah-Kubi, in the preface to the report from the Pan-African Conference of the Third World Theologians, called for the right of the Africans to be African Christians: “We demand to serve the Lord in our own terms and without being turned into Euro-American or Semitic bastards before we do so. --- Our question must not be what Karl Barth, Karl Rahner, or any other Karl has to say, but rather what God would have us do in our living concrete condition.” Buthelezi was not present in the conference but the words above demonstrate the same concern about the alienation of African people from the wholeness of life that Buthelezi had, and attest that the concern was shared among theologians of the African continent. 

According to Buthelezi, the fact that the Christianity and the church the white man brought to Africa in the 18th and 19th centuries did not encompass wholeness of life enabled the emergence of the twofold, polarized situation of the African who lived between the mission station and the traditional African community. He names secularism and pietism as generators of the dichotomy characteristic to European Christianity. However, they had only been the last blow to the erosion of the wholeness of life in the European society, a process that had begun by the breaking down of the feudal system and the Reformation’s criticism on the papacy. When the medieval corpus christianum was replaced by secularism in the period following the Reformation, the holistic perception of reality was broken. The church and the secularists both opposed what the other represented. Everyday life became fragmented due the two poles being distanced from each other; religion was isolated into its own segment. The teaching of grace consummating the nature in Scholastic theology had backed a holistic approach to life and an understanding of the church as an institution influencing the whole of society, but in secular Europe the nature was considered to get along without the

133 Historical factors have caused the African to develop a ‘masochistic complex’ --- The degree to which one is ready to go through this psychic mortification virtually becomes the criterion for ascertaining the level which one has reached in the realisation of the image of a ‘civilized and Christian man’. The point of orientation of the ego becomes the outside farther-image of a missionary or ‘Westerner’. It is easy to confuse this psychological inversion and depersonalisation with conversion and sanctification. The social counterpart of this inversion has been the bourgeois socio-cultural Church life pattern around the mission station.” (Meaning, 101.)

134 Appiah-Kubi 1979, viii.

135 It is noteworthy that Buthelezi does not oppose “secularization”, that is, criticism on the power of the church in society or “an attempt to liberate cultural life in its various forms from the domination of the church” (Creation, 129). He opposes “secularism” that denotes the rejection of religion as a part of life. See Creation, 127-133.
church and its grace. According to Buthelezi, reformation theology did not offer a substitute for medieval theology on the wholeness of life as it was soon “frozen in the ice-box of Orthodoxy”\(^\text{136}\) in which Luther’s appreciation of everyday life played little if any role. Pietism emerged to correct Orthodoxy but in terms of the disconnectedness of the different poles of life, it did not succeed since it paid more attention to the inner life of an individual than to the social aspect of life. The world was thought to be changed through the change of individuals but actual activity to directly change the world was considered worthless. The mission church that landed in Africa from the Europe of secularism and in which a kind of missionary pietism played a strong role, ended up as “a religious island in a secular ocean”\(^\text{137}\). A religious name (European or biblical) and religious (European) clothing marked the shift of an individual from the secular African ocean onto the island of mission station Christianity.\(^\text{138}\)

Economic oppression coupled the oppression of the identity of the African person. Buthelezi considers the absence of material wellbeing, that is, one form of God’s gifts, to lead to the alienation from *impilo*. A human being does not live by bread alone, but neither does he live by word alone. In order for humanity to experience the wholeness of life that God intended for it, it needs both spiritual and material gifts:

> There is no generic difference between preaching to man the saving Gospel of Christ and serving man in response to those other necessities of life which promote his wellbeing within the given life structures and contribute towards his realisation of the wholeness of life.\(^\text{139}\)

On the whole, any idealization of poverty is unsound. An idea of materially poor people getting to heaven easier than others should be discarded.\(^\text{140}\) Poverty so understood is not a merit, but a sign of an unfair society. Buthelezi criticizes the

\(^\text{136}\) Creation, 134. 
\(^\text{137}\) Ansätze, 50. 
\(^\text{138}\) Ansätze, 47-50, Creation, 133-135, 158. 
\(^\text{139}\) Grounds, 153-155. 
\(^\text{140}\) “The popular view that those who are materially destitute make better candidates for heaven should be abandoned in our century of affluence” (Creation, 143).
church for having encouraged the poor to be content with what they have and announcing material goods as trivial or even contrary to growing as a Christian. His criticism is directed to both monastic and reformation ideas of poverty, while he himself understands ‘poverty’ to be “a state of displacement from this meeting-place with God, the place where he comes to distribute gifts to his children.”

The quotation seems to suggest that the poor actually cannot meet God since the connection between the poor and God is broken due to their plight. In the light of the rest of Buthelezi’s production, however, this does not hold true: if God is on the side of the poor and oppressed in their struggle for liberation, it is contradictory to imply that he does not meet the poor. Also, Buthelezi urges the church to become poor if its members are poor. It is required for the church to be relevant and truly minister to the down-trodden people. The question thus arises, whether God primarily encounters the rich or the poor. Should poverty be regarded as a mark of a true church in a poor society or is it an obstacle for being in an active relation with God? If God is on the side of the poor, might it not be harmful to attain wealth? Still, God sides with the oppressed in the struggle to

141 “Let me illustrate what I mean by the realisation of the wholeness of life and the promotion of the wellbeing of man. From time to time historical Christianity has ingeniously discerned some spiritual blessing in the occurrence among believers of such social ills as poverty and disease. This insight has ranged from radical monastic glorification of poverty as an ethical ideal to the mild Protestant view of poverty as a blessed occasion through which God conveniently brings his spiritual gifts to the victim and stimulates the hearts of his saints to the making of material gifts of charity.” (Grounds, 154.)

Jussi Hanska discusses the attitudes of the monastic orders to ‘real poverty’ in the 13th century. For example, according to a Dominican brother Guillaume Peyraut, those who are tried are the real inheritors of God whereas those that succeed well on earth are but bastards. Poverty was seen as a virtue and the poor were consoled by the idea of abundant life after death. Richness on the other hand was considered sinful; only strong people could cope with the temptations that possessions bring with them. The poor were to be content with their situation and they would be redeemed. These notions support Buthelezi’s criticism. However, the poverty that the brothers chose for themselves did not necessitate extreme material penury. This points to the fact that the issue is more complex than it first seems. (Hanska 2002, 90-95, 97, 100.) A quotation from Francis of Assisi points to the direction that the ideal of poverty did not aim at a situation where one would suffer but at liberation from unnecessary anxiety. Poverty does not appear as a source of misery but as its opposite: “Sancta paupertas confundit cupiditatem et avaritiam et curas huius saeculi” (Francis of Assisi 1978, 303).

Antti Raunio notes that the reformation understanding of poverty differed from the medieval notion of ideological poverty. Renaissance’s negative approach to poverty influenced reformation theology. Luther’s thesis of justification by faith alone annulled the saving quality of alms. Although Buthelezi’s accusations thus do not find direct support, Lutheranism has also been accused of being socially passive and concentrating on the individual. According to Raunio, Max Weber and Ernst Troeltsch, for example, considered Lutheranism not to be capable of developing a new social ethics. (Raunio 2002, 132-134.)

142 Grounds, 154-155.
143 “It is not enough for the church, for an example, to do something for the poor and the oppressed in this country; the church must also become the poor and the oppressed.” (Service, 8.) The idea will be looked at deeper in the chapter on incarnation.
144 Service, 8.
abolish oppression and poverty. The same tension can be found in other liberation theologies. The intention is always to liberate the suffering. The poor strive to become well-off. God is also always thought to be close to the suffering, oppressed and poor and to side with them against the oppression they experience. The question remains, whether God is still close to them once they have reached their goal or whether they have become the new oppressing class.

In the case of Buthelezi, the statement of poverty displacing people from the meeting-place with God should be studied in the light of the concept of the wholeness of life. If humanity was first created to enjoy the wholeness of life and is then being redeemed through Christ to access it again, material poverty logically is one of the obstacles on the way of redemption. Thus the wholeness of life is the basis for the assertion on displacement. The assertion seems to refer to the ideal situation where everyone has an access to *impilo*. However, as will be seen in the discussion on incarnation, in the current situation the church is called to share the poverty and the struggle of the oppressed in order that the *people* could reach *impilo*. But after all, the ideas of poverty hindering the meeting of human beings with God and God being on the side of the poor cannot be thoroughly reconciled.

Motivation for Buthelezi’s understanding of poverty can be searched for in biblical witness, and in existential experience. Parratt sees a connection between Buthelezi’s understanding of poverty as alienation, and the proclamation of the 8th century BC prophets. The prophets of the time were ‘poor’, meaning oppressed by those in power. They were also thought to be close to God, an idea that is similar to the paradigm of liberation theology. Poverty was not idealized (like in later in church history) but its abolition was the goal.\footnote{Parratt 1995, 173, 205, 206.}

3.3. The relationship between the church and the world

On the one hand, solidarity between the church and the world and, on the other hand, the mission of the church to the world constitutes the dialectics of the relationship between the two categories in Buthelezi’s thought.

As the concept of the wholeness of life has already foreshadowed, Buthelezi considers there to be solidarity between the church and the world. These two categories do not exist parallel to each other but overlap. God shows his grace
through earthly things, for example, when a sinner receives a blessing in the water of baptism or in the bread and wine at the Eucharist. Also, a fallen human being is transformed already during the earthly journey; the transformation is not restricted to heaven. And as seen above, the redemption from sin includes a redemption from concrete social wrongdoings. In these instances the ‘world’ is accepted to be present in the church and in God’s acts.

In his dissertation Buthelezi discusses two kinds of solidarity between the church and the world, namely solidarity in sin and solidarity under the lordship of Christ. Later in an article for the Commission on Faith and Order he writes:

Yet the church *empirically shares the brokenness in the humanity of its members.* --- By virtue of being in the world the church shares the seeds of alienation which typify human relations. Therefore divisions in the church tell a deeper and more fundamental story than just the historical occurrences of schism in the church. They *reflect sin, which still prevails even among those who are members of the church.* The prayer of Jesus must be seen in this context of Christian anthropology. *It follows that the church needs the same divine grace of renewal as the world in and to which it ministers.*

In other words, the church is deeply in the world. Sin is as real within the church as it is outside of it. The church is a part of a fallen humanity sharing with the world the experience and reality of sin and the alienation deriving from it. Buthelezi uses Luther’s notion of *simul iustus et peccator* to explain the solidarity between the church and the world. A member of the church, just like a non-Christian, is a sinner in as far as he is a human being, a fact that illustrates the *simul peccator* aspect. The church should not become “the old Adam”, something that would happen if it denied the cohesion it has with the world. The old Adam considers himself to be only *iustus* and not *peccator*, but Buthelezi reminds that both aspects are present: the church is “a communion of ‘forgiven sinners’.”

Also alienation generated by sin is experienced beyond the borders of the church. The consequences of not being able to participate in the wholeness of life are the same despite one’s religious conviction. A Christian African shares with his non-Christian brothers and sisters the same plight – for example hunger, disease or bad weather – a lot of which is due to the economic, political and even ecclesiastical destitution that has been forced on the continent. Despite these daily experiences Christians have not always reconciled themselves to the fact that the church is in the world: Buthelezi talks about the attempts of the Christian to

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146 Grounds, 98, 99. See also Creation, 113.
147 Stavanger, 178. Italics mine.
148 Creation, 170, 171.
escape from the world into “his spiritual ecclesiastical ghetto”\textsuperscript{149}. However, he will not be able to flee life.\textsuperscript{150}

The church and the world do not share only sin but are also tied together “under the lordship of Christ”\textsuperscript{151}: Christ is the lord of the whole world just as God the Creator is the lord of all creation. Christ’s lordship on earth was penetrated by suffering and led him to share the alienation from the wholeness of life with humanity. Referring to Martin Luther and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Buthelezi exposes the idea of service as one cornerstone of the life of the church. “Corporate solidarity under the lordship of Christ”\textsuperscript{152} can be realized through the service of the church in the world. It is enforced through the church’s social work and Christian involvement in society. The social work of the church can, however, also be turned into a means of control, particularly in poor societies. The call for the church to express the \textit{solidarity} through service is in line with Buthelezi’s emphasis on the need for the church to become incarnate in the lives of the people and the structures of their community; incarnate service avoids the problem of paternalistic control. The church must discern the method for service by looking at the context where it finds itself. It does not have special knowledge that would not also be open to the rest of the world.\textsuperscript{153} Buthelezi does not later write explicitly about solidarity under the lordship of Christ, but the ideas of service and giving oneself for others are core ideas in many of his texts, as will become apparent in the following chapters.

Although it is important that the church is in solidarity with the world and in the world, there is something \textit{unique} about the church. While Buthelezi defies a dualistic outlook of the church and the world and perceives the world/creation in a positive light, he does not justify everything in the world. Ideologies of the world, like racism in South Africa, and some aspects of culture are unsound and idolatrous. Discussing the ideologies of the world, Buthelezi claims that the church must not let the currents of the world define or modify it, or it will become the world. Although emphasizing the unity of all the aspects of human life he

\textsuperscript{149} Grounds, 151.
\textsuperscript{150} Creation, 155-157, 162. Grounds, 151.
\textsuperscript{151} Creation, 173.
\textsuperscript{152} Creation, 173.
\textsuperscript{153} Creation, 186, 189, 191-193, 203, 204.
"When it comes to the specific method of doing this, the church should not wait for a special divine revelation and insight specially given to her as church, but she must get a cue from the circumstances in the existing structures in as far as she is also part of those structures." (Creation, 204.)
maintains that the church is not to be the world, but to remain loyal to its mission as a sign of the cross and to refrain from flirting with the world. In this sense the solidarity between the two needs to remain critical.\footnote{Grounds, 148. Sign, 143. Unity, 16.}

The uniqueness of the church does not originate from the phenomenon of people gathering together nor is it a result of the act of faith: people gather together for many reasons and can believe, for example, in the idol of racism. The special thing about the church is the “acceptance of God’s acceptance”\footnote{Creation, 94.} Christianity is a reaction to God’s action of accepting the sinner. For faith to be saving it is to be directed toward God in Christ; the saving Christ event is a proof of God’s acceptance and the basis for the uniqueness of Christianity. In line with the notion of the wholeness of life and the related solidarity between the church and the world, Buthelezi presses that the salvation event is not a possession of the church. Jesus died outside Jerusalem, the Jewish religious metropolis, in the ‘world’. The salvation event took place in the world and was meant for the world.\footnote{Creation, 94-97, 168.}

The emphasis is on the openness of the church towards the world: the church has received God’s blessing when it has accepted God’s acceptance but the blessing is meant for the rest of the world as well.\footnote{”We might forget that we have a responsibility to inspire hope among not only those who are struggling in the Church, but those too who toil in life situations not ordinarily regarded as Christian” (Grounds, 151).}

The uniqueness of the church that stems from the nature of the gospel of Jesus Christ is verified in carrying out the mission the gospel imposes on the

\footnote{Raunio (1998, 170, 171) introduces Heinz-Dietrich Wendland’s concept of critical solidarity. According to Raunio, Wendland understands ‘solidarity’ to point to the actualization of the Christian love for the neighbor in society. The oneness of the church and the world realizes itself in the acceptance of world by the church; this kind of solidarity between the two prevents the church from escaping into the future or the past. Wendland stresses that the solidarity has to remain critical towards the institutions of the world as well as towards the church itself.}

\footnote{One theological inspirer of Buthelezi’s inclination to avoid dichotomy between sacred and secular can be found in his references to Gustaf Wingren. Wingren emphasizes the world as the stage for the salvation event: “Wingren has made the observation that the salvation event which is the content of the message of the church took place outside the religious center of Jerusalem. It took place in the world, in the sphere of the ‘secular.’ Not an apostle but a stranger, Simon of Cyrene, under compulsion, carried the cross of Christ; a criminal at Jesus’ side and not a disciple received the promise of the Kingdom. Both the death and resurrection were enacted before pagans, Roman soldiers, and not before a crowd of disciples who, as a matter of fact, had run away and were in hiding. Thus, this event in Jerusalem, which is to be proclaimed to all people ‘beginning from Jerusalem’ is, as much as any could be, an event in the world; from the first moment we are firmly in the world.” (Creation, 166. Almost the same text: Change, 197.)}

\footnote{Buthelezi understands solidarity in a similar way, on the one hand, emphasizing the unity between the world and the church, but on the other hand reminding his readers of the need to be critical towards the ideologies of the world.}
church. It could be said that the *iustus* aspect of the church is expressed here. The church has a special role to play in and as a part of God’s creation. The church stands open to the rest of the world with the message of God’s acceptance. In the article *Christianity in S.A.* published in 1973 Buthelezi sets out his point of view:

> What is it that is unique in the Christian Gospel? It is the love of God in Jesus Christ that transforms strange neighbors into loving brothers. It is very often said that points of racial contact are points of friction. What is unique about the Gospel is that it changes points of contact into points of fellowship. It follows that there can never be Christian fellowship without human contact. Any deliberate elimination of points of human contact is a calculated sabotage of the essence of Christian fellowship.\(^{158}\)

According to the quotation the key to understanding the uniqueness of the gospel is discerning its unifying power: God’s acceptance of the human being leads to his acceptance of others.\(^{159}\) The message of the gospel is therefore antithetical to apartheid. One reconciles and brings people together, the other tears apart.\(^{160}\) *Fellowship* is at the heart of Buthelezi’s understanding of Christianity. Without fellowship Christianity loses its content: “since without the ideal of Christian fellowship Christianity becomes an empty religion.”\(^{161}\)

In his paper to the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches in 1985 Buthelezi again discusses the mission of the church. After a short and in a sense introductory section he moves on to discuss the “role of the church in the renewal of the broken human community”.\(^{162}\) He states as a matter of course that the church is the salt and light of the world. The question lies in how the church is to play its role in the renewal process and on what theological grounds. Buthelezi’s idea of the core of the gospel in this essay is about the same as what he wrote in *Christianity in S.A.* twelve years earlier. In the paper to the Faith and Order Commission he writes: “Christ’s gospel of reconciliation is God’s prescription for healing brokenness in the world. There is no renewal which is as radical as that of transforming rebellious humanity into a community of children of God.”\(^{163}\) Here again the unifying aspect of Christianity is considered to be the essence of the gospel. Love for one’s enemy as a fundamental Christian value is

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\(^{158}\) *Christianity*, 4.

\(^{159}\) “God’s acceptance of the sinner is known as forgiveness, and the sinner’s acceptance of God’s forgiveness is faith. Man’s acceptance of God’s gift also includes accepting all things which God accepts.” (Creation, 113, 114.)

\(^{160}\) “Apartheid is the antithesis of what the gospel is about. Whereas the gospel creates a possibility and occasion for even enemies to be reconciled, apartheid has, in fact, torn apart potential friends. For that reason, to resist it and to expose it is doing more than rejecting a given public policy: it is giving witness to the heart of the gospel.” (Witness, 417.)

\(^{161}\) *Biblical*, 57.

\(^{162}\) *Stavanger*, 178.

\(^{163}\) *Stavanger*, 179.
also involved in the discussion and leads to the same direction: bringing scattered, hostile people together.\textsuperscript{164} As this study progresses it becomes obvious that Buthelezi does not talk about a cheap reconciliation. Rather, he talks about a reconciliation that is costly, a reconciliation that is tied to incarnation and liberation.\textsuperscript{165}

Parratt points out that while Buthelezi’s concern is the racial problem in his country, his call for brotherhood of Christians is a challenge to the whole church. The themes of brotherhood and fellowship that emerge as important topics in Buthelezi’s understanding of Christianity situate his thinking in a wider ecumenical context and pose a challenge to Christians in and out of South Africa, in situations in which solidarity between people is broken.\textsuperscript{166}

The call for the brotherhood of believers is based on the experience of the lack of that sort of solidarity. Buthelezi’s argumentation, is on the one hand, based on God’s love in Christ as a facilitator of solidarity and, on the other hand, on the situation in Christian South Africa that does not reflect the ideal of solidarity. Experiencing the evils of society defines the questions that theology ponders. In a context where natural human contacts are restricted by laws and attitudes, fellowship becomes the key issue. But even while the context defines the direction of theology, it does not define the content of the gospel.\textsuperscript{167} Along with the notions of fellowship and solidarity the gospel includes the idea of incarnation. It will be looked at next.

\textsuperscript{164} Stavanger, 179.
\textsuperscript{165} "Through incarnation the salvation event took place within the sinful situation of the people. In this way salvation became the moment of unity of the saving God and the sinner. The identification was so complete that Christ was counted with the sinners and had to die like a sinner on the cross. It follows from this that the unity of the Church only exists in a given situation when the Church no longer enjoys privileges which people do not share". (In Christ 78, 40.)
\textsuperscript{166} Parratt 1995, 164.
\textsuperscript{167} In an interview published in Hope & Young 1981, 144-145, Buthelezi describes his way of doing Black Theology: "I find it exciting to do theology where the action is. The situation prescribes what you are doing. This atmosphere of hate and polarization prescribes what theology does. As new things emerge, you have to experience what is happening." The interconnectedness of praxis and theology is highlighted but the necessity of theology is not questioned nor is theology subordinated to the praxis. The praxis offers the setting within which theology works.
IV THE CHURCH INCARNATE SUFFERS

4.1. Incarnation as a characteristic of a true church

Buthelezi’s perception of a credible church is influenced by the doctrine of incarnation. The demand for the church to be incarnate is a logical follow-up to his holistic and existential understanding of reality, which the notion of the wholeness of life reflects.

Emphasizing incarnation as a source for theological inspiration is characteristic to liberation theology. David Bosch thinks that the theology of incarnation has been by and large underdeveloped in the Protestant churches, whereas Eastern churches, Roman Catholics and Anglicans have been more articulate on the matter. Liberation theology, however, brought incarnation up as an important issue across denominational borders. Liberation theologians urge Jesus’ humanness to be taken seriously and see him suffering in the world with the suffering people. Incarnation turns from a sterile doctrine into a model of life. Jesus’ life and humanness are given a central standing in the framing of theology. Bosch further mentions that the ecumenical movement has paid more attention to incarnation since 1980 (Melbourne CWME conference).

Despite the generally uninterested attitude of Protestant churches to develop the theology of incarnation further, it was of importance for the founders of the Lutheran and Reformed traditions, Martin Luther and John Calvin. As Bosch also noted, the Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church maintains that in modern times incarnation has been an inspirer for “reflection on the theology of history, the involvement of God in contingency, kenosis, and vulnerability.”

Buthelezi is one of the modern theologians who have found the power of incarnation as one of their keys to doing theology. He regards the incarnation of Christ as a model for the incarnation of Christians and the church. Just as Christ adopted full humanity, the church is to adopt the human reality.

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168 Bosch (1991, 513) writes: “In this model, one is not interested in a Christ who offers only eternal salvation, but in a Christ who agonizes and sweats and bleeds with the victims of oppression. One criticizes the bourgeois church of the West, which leads toward docetism and for which Jesus’ humanness is only a veil hiding his divinity. --- The Western church has been tempted to read the gospels – in Kähler’s famous phrase – as ‘passion histories with extensive introductions’, “

170 ODCC 1997, 825.
171 ODCC 1997, 825.
As the following quotation proves, Buthelezi maintains that Christ is only revealed in the Bible as Christ incarnate. Buthelezi’s statement is somewhat one-sided if one takes into consideration for example the Gospel of John and its teaching on the pre-existence of the Word. Nevertheless, Buthelezi gets his point through: similarly to Christ, the church can only be known to people through life and through being involved in the concrete realities of life. A Christian life becomes congruent with human life:

If Christian life is other than human life, the incarnation of Christ is then of no significance. The identity of the Christian life is not something abstract; it is a concrete reality which is embedded in our social, economic and political relations. Through the Bible we know Christ only as incarnate; hence it follows that we can identify Christian life only as it enshrines itself in our politics, economics, and social policy. It is either here or nowhere. 172

According to Buthelezi, talk about incarnation or Christian life that does not appreciate ordinary life but instead escapes into a spiritual sphere is unsound. His pragmatic emphasis emerges in the social situation of the nation and church in South Africa: in times of crisis philosophical talk without reference to praxis is seldom relevant. Theoretical conceptions of the church, even when theologically orthodox, do not build the church if they have no contact surface with the people and their concrete living circumstances. They remain irrelevant to the people, that is, to those who should constitute the church. 173

A holistic outlook on life and a willingness to appreciate the ordinary interconnects the concepts of incarnation and the wholeness of life. A docetic teaching about incarnation would be a horror for Buthelezi, just as a one-sidedly spiritual conception of the church and Christian life would not receive his appreciation. Yet one should not regard Buthelezi indifferent towards the dogma. In an interview with the journal One World he was asked how would he explain the worth of him spending time in theological work, for example, in the WCC Faith and Order Commission. The bishop answered that the active social role of the church should be coupled with theological reflection. The actions of the church must have theological motivation in order for the church to “keep its head above the troubled waters”. 174

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172 Daring, 7, 8.
173 “I might add that any definition of the ministry and identity of the Church, no matter how theologically orthodox, that is so theoretical as hardly to graze the surface of its fundamentally human and concrete profile, is not worth the paper it is written on.” (Proclamation, 27.)
174 “I come from a troubled country. I am also part and parcel of the church, whose task among other things is to try to keep its head above the troubled waters. By this I mean that the church should not only play a diaconal and prophetic role, but also be in a position to analyze and define
That followers of Christ should live like him means that they should become human, that is, incarnate in the existential reality of the neighbor. When the members of the church carry the crosses of the people among whom they live, when they let their hearts be burdened by the sorrows of the people, when they share the reality of the people, the church can be said to be incarnate. Hence, Buthelezi stresses the human aspect of Christ’s incarnation in order to make his fellow Christians, the church, understand what true discipleship means: it is taking one’s neighbor seriously. In Buthelezi’s texts incarnation often reflects this aspect. His Christology and ecclesiology are colored by a socially active and pragmatic approach to the Christian message. The cross, the incarnation and the life of Christ are stressed as an example for the church and a Christian person. At his Episcopal consecration Buthelezi states:

There is something wrong in a situation where the church can afford to live in comfort and enjoy social and political respectability while a large portion of its members suffer and enjoy none of those things. That would mean that the church has become irrelevant.

It is not enough for the church to “help the people of Soweto.” Like Christ it has to “become the people of Soweto, sharing their suffering and indignities.”

Elsewhere Buthelezi talks about the church being the people: ”If the church is one and the church is the people of God, how can it come that the church is free while the people are not?” He uses the word church in different meanings, but the outstanding definition in his articles is that the church is – or should be – the people of God as also the quotation suggests. Even though written in a form of a question, it points out that people, the believers who follow Christ, constitute the body of Christ. Without the people there cannot be a church. The question in the quotation is not so much whether people are the church but rather whether there is one church.

It might seem contradictory that Buthelezi, on the one hand, defines the church as being the people and, on the other hand, urges the church to become the people. How can the church become what it is? However, both statements point to
the same direction. They both oppose an understanding of the church as a neutral institution working among the poor and ministering to people from the outside. Buthelezi uses different words, “to be” and “to become”, to define his incarnational understanding of the church. In the light of the emphasis set on incarnation, the church being the people is the primary statement. In Soweto the church has to realize this, and become what it is meant to be. Buthelezi’s call for the church to become the people is relevant also outside Soweto.

The ideas of the church needing to become the people and, on the other hand, the church being the people can be examined through Tillich’s concepts of the latent and manifest stages of the Spiritual Community. According to Tillich the Spiritual Community is latent until it comes across the central revelation, that is, the “basic Kairos” that happened once and for all as “kairos” during which the Spiritual Community encounters the central event anew existentially. Tillich takes non-Christian groups as examples of “latent”. However, in South Africa Tillich’s model can help to understand the reality within the institutional church. The church is latent before it manifests itself by realizing its true being: it is the people.

Leonardo Boff points to a similar need as he expounds on his model of the new church, “a church from the poor”. In Boff’s new church the poor are given the preferential option, a general principle in liberation theology at large, and the premises of the poor determine the agenda of the church. The church will still be universal but its attention is first paid to the needs and hopes of the poor and only then to the wider community. Boff states: “we are no longer speaking of a Church for the poor but rather a Church of and with the poor.” Boff and Buthelezi respectively declare that the poor of Latin America or the black people in Soweto are no longer targets of charity or guidance for the church. They are the church.

Whereas the need for the church to become human is outstanding in Buthelezi’s production, the divinity of the incarnate Son of God gets less attention. Even so, Buthelezi shows no interest in voiding the divinity of the incarnate Son of God. According to him, “incarnation means that God moves to the level and circumstances of the ordinary”. The affirmation contains the idea that the one who became incarnate is by definition God. The pre-existence of

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180 Tillich 1978b, 153.
181 Boff 1985, 7-11.
182 Proclamation, 28.
Christ appears to be the basis for the argument of following Christ: if God became human, his followers are to be ready to do the same. Thus, his comment, “through the Bible we know Christ only as incarnate”\textsuperscript{183}, is somewhat precipitate. The aim of the article was probably to rather wake people into understanding their Christian calling to serve the oppressed than to make a negative statement on the doctrine of pre-existence.

\subsection{4.1.1. Incarnation of the gospel}

Another aspect of the incarnation of the church, concurrent with its adoption of the economic, social and cultural standing of the people, is its task to make the gospel relevant in the life of the people. In the church and through it, the gospel is to become incarnate in the reality of South Africa; it must be preached so that it reaches people’s every day life. The incarnation of the gospel is congruent with Buthelezi’s contextual/anthropological approach to theology and with the basic trend of Black Theology\textsuperscript{184}. Buthelezi illustrates the need for the gospel to incarnate in a given context with the following story:

One of its [an African community’s] members had become a Christian and then a preacher. The Africans were unable to understand why he had deserted them to follow the white missionaries. But one day when they saw him preaching, they thought they had discovered the clue to his puzzling behavior. One of them said, “Now I understand. He has become a mad man. Look at him. He is talking alone, behaving exactly like someone who has lost his mind.”\textsuperscript{185}

In order to reach the people the gospel should be told to them in words and manners that they are familiar with. The indigeneity of the church and its theology becomes a prerequisite for the success of its mission:

The church, which is a creation of the gospel message addressed to the whole world, does not consequently lose its solidarity with the world. One word that perhaps sums up the salient features of this solidarity is “indigenous.” The indigeneity of the church is a presupposition of its mission in the world.\textsuperscript{186}

The church should declare the gospel in the world in words understandable to those who are listening to them. Furthermore, the gospel needs to become concrete through action. It is wrong when “we have come to emphasize the spoken word as the medium rather than the drama of life itself, as if Christ saved

\begin{footnotes}
\item[183] Daring, 8.
\item[184] The emphases of Black Theology and Buthelezi’s anthropological approach are introduced in chapter 2.3.
\item[185] Proclamation, 28.
\item[186] Toward, 56. Buthelezi states the same already in his dissertation: ”The indigeneity of the Church is the presupposition of the possibility of its mission in the world” (Creation, 207).
\end{footnotes}
us by making certain statements rather than by becoming an actor in that drama.”

Buthelezi tells about a student wondering how Christians can continue proclaiming that God is love and almighty and on the side of the oppressed, while the blacks suffer at the mercy of the oppressors. The problem that he sees behind the doubt of the student is the spiritual-dualistic interpretation of the gospel that prevailed in South Africa. The correct way to see the gospel is to consider it holistically. The gospel should be lived out in active participation in the life of people. Consequently, the incarnation of the gospel and the incarnation of the church in the circumstances of people partly emerge.

For the Bible to be a means of liberation, it has to become significant for the readers in their particular situation. Reading the Bible in South Africa, in the midst of the apartheid reality, should not mean simply chanting the verses but applying them in practice, dynamically interpreting the message in interplay with the realities of life. South Africans do not live in the first century: the “biblical-situational-indigenous elements” of the Bible should be rephrased to represent 20th century South Africa. In the early 1970s Buthelezi writes that the Bible has, for the first time, began to talk directly to the black people, meaning that the Bible is being read from the black point of view, reflecting upon their aspirations and experiences and allowing them to shape anew the understanding of their own spiritual existence. The blacks have started to hear God’s voice straight from “God’s mount”, a fact that is reflected in the awakening of Black Theology.

The discussion on incarnation shows that Buthelezi emphasizes the human aspect of the church. The right action of people becomes an indicator of the authenticity of the church. How God’s Word or the sacraments constitute the church is less central an issue. The sources used for this study being mainly articles might affect the conclusion. Buthelezi’s aim appears to be to challenge the distortions in the church contaminated by racism. His approach to the problem is to urge Christians to follow their Lord by living their life like he lived his: the Word should become incarnate in the members of the body of Christ.

187 Proclamation, 28, 29.
188 Biblical, 56, 57. Proclamation, 27, 28.
189 Biblical, 56.
191 Compare with Jonker in fn 7, page 4.
4.1.2. The failure of the church to incarnate

The incarnation demanded by Buthelezi was not realized in the structures and ministry of the church in South Africa:

The modern history of Christianity in South Africa is a sad tale of gradual erosion in the expression of the spirit of Christianity itself. The institutional expressions of Christianity, the church and the ministry, are there but they are becoming to a lesser extent the visible incarnation of that which counts for the uniqueness of Christianity, vis-à-vis, the religion of our forefathers. 192

In other words, the outward signs of Christianity have remained, but the content is not authentically Christian anymore. Instead of incarnating into the society as the body of Christ with a message of reconciliation, the church has molded itself according to the ideologies of the world. The church as an institution does not necessarily represent the gospel. The quotation draws attention to the content of the institution: the gospel has to be incarnated in the institution in order for the institution to represent the Christian church. Buthelezi seems to accept that since the church is in the world, certain structures are needed. But these structures are not divine in themselves, nor need they be kept unchanged. 193 A lot of what has been discussed about incarnation in Buthelezi’s thought deals with the incarnation of the church and the gospel in society and the context of the people. Here a new aspect is brought up: the incarnation of the gospel within the church.

According to Buthelezi, the problem in apartheid South Africa is that the church is an incarnation of racism rather than that of the gospel; the institution is filled with a foreign ideology. In Buthelezi’s words the church is “the incarnation of one of the most rabid forms of racism” 194, a fact which makes it even worse than society at large. The content is perverted and unchristian. Buthelezi does not deny, though, that there are also other kinds of attempts among Christians, working towards the realization of the brotherhood of the followers of Christ. 195 Those who work for unity and fellowship are loyal to the unique message of Christianity. But large parts of the church in South Africa have failed to embody the unique gospel. At least partly they have remained blind to the distorted state of

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192 Christianity, 4.
193 “Therefore there should be change within and through the church.” (Change, 198.) According to Buthelezi, the orientation of the church is misunderstood if social change is not considered to belong to its agenda. Buthelezi himself calls for the church to work as an instrument of change in the surrounding society, just as the church itself is to be open to changes in its structures. An understanding originating from the Middle Ages of an unchangeable, timeless church as compared to the changing secular world is buried. (Change, 196-198.)
194 Prospects, 376, 377.
195 Prospects, 377.
affairs: “the average white Christian still does not see any contradiction between professing Christian discipleship and rejecting the black man in his daily life.”

While the church at large, and especially the white church, can be accused of not being an incarnation of the gospel, charity and missions are practical examples of the failure of the church to incarnate in the society around it. The point of view changes from the incarnation within the church to the incarnation of the church in the world, although the two go hand in hand. The diaconal structure of the church reflects the lack of the latter. The church is in a situation where it helps the afflicted from the outside, and in doing so has been a great help to many. But that is not the right model of action. It might keep people alive, but it does not really change their situation. Attention is paid to the institution as the subject, whereas it should be on the people and on encouraging their potential to organize themselves. One could say that the current diaconal system does not help people to achieve the wholeness of life. In fighting for a real liberation of the people the church should tackle the root causes of the crisis.

Buthelezi does not promote charity without incarnation. Whereas becoming incarnate in the life situations of others means making oneself vulnerable to the same extent that the other is vulnerable, “true service should mean giving a certain proportion of yourself to others.” It is a true sharing of oneself and one’s rights. The church is not called to carry out mere charity work. One can do charity, give away what one does not need oneself, without being touched. But when the church identifies itself with the people, when it becomes the poor and exploited, it will be touched.

As the discussion on missionaries and the wholeness of life already foreshadowed, missionaries are another example of the failure of the incarnation of the church in the surrounding world. Buthelezi discusses the problems that missionaries have brought along in his dissertation and later in many articles. He calls for “the spirit of incarnation” among those interested to work abroad. What could be called a socio-economic dimension of incarnation is one aspect of the requirement. A missionary should adopt a living standard similar to that of the local church employees. If a missionary lives on a higher living standard than local workers, the work done does not serve the church in fighting the situation of

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196 Christianity, 4, 6.
197 In Christ, 78, 39, 40.
198 Service, 8.
199 Service, 8.
oppression. Quite the contrary, such missionaries worsen the situation and thus “missionaries must share in the struggle of the people or forget about the whole thing.” Missionaries also failed the incarnation of the gospel within the church, as they brought “a truncated and de-incarnated gospel which contained more words than life” to the continent of Africa where religion had traditionally been an inseparable part of daily life. The failure of the gospel to incarnate in the church led to a failure of the church to incarnate in society: the new religion was isolated to Sunday morning gatherings rather than experienced in the everyday-life. It did not reach “the totality of people’s aspirations.”

4.2. Suffering as a dimension of ministry

For Christ the incarnation meant suffering for the sake of others. The cross was not the sole moment of suffering in Jesus’ life: “His whole life was a life of suffering and of bearing other people’s burdens.” Buthelezi here relates to other liberation theologians who have drawn attention to the fact that Christ suffered throughout his life, not only on Good Friday. Liberation theologies hereby assert that Jesus is also present in the agony of the oppressed. He knows their plight. Buthelezi further explains the origin of Jesus’ affliction: when a person cares about other people’s troubles and lets them influence his life, he ends up being hurt. Sharing in other people’s suffering was what Jesus did and what Christians are called to do. Because living for Christ means living according to the example of Christ, the church is called to bear other people’s burdens:

The Bible does not promise Christians undisturbed peace. Vicarious living means allowing the unrest and violence of the sinful world to disturb our Christian peace. Christ wept when he saw the city, Jerusalem, because he allowed his inner peace to be disturbed by what he knew was to befall Jerusalem. In this way Christian presence in the world becomes redemptive. It is Christian fellowship in a deep sense.

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200 In Christ78, 39-40. See also Afrikaner, 534: “Nach Meiner Meinung muss jeder, der bei uns arbeitet, auch bereit sein, so zu leben wie wir. Er muss unsere Lebenserfahrung teilen.”

Buthelezi should define his case better when he talks about the need for missionaries to live according to the situation of the local people. The question arises whether it is enough to require from the missionaries a living standard similar to that of the local workers or whether also the local workers should adopt the living standard of the poorest members of the church. Buthelezi’s point in saying that the church has to share in the struggle of the people is sound. But where are the limits?

201 Proclamation, 28.

202 Proclamation, 28.

203 Violence, 53, 54.

204 See footnote 167.

205 Violence, 54.
Buthelezi’s emphasis on the human aspect of the church does not allow a picture of a Christian church as an exclusive inner group that enjoys the peace Christ gives it. Quite the contrary, the church incarnate is called to become hurt side by side with the people, walk together with them on the way of suffering. That is the way to a redemptive experience of fellowship, which maybe could also be called ‘peace’. Incarnation becomes a prerequisite for a redemptive impact. Paradoxically, to be able to have a redemptive impact on people’s lives, the church, like its Lord, has to embrace their oppressive life circumstances.

Suffering in love together with suffering people does not include the acceptance of an oppressive or painful situation. Buthelezi’s texts do not give suffering an intrinsic value but depict it as a means to change the situation, as a model of struggle. He makes a clear difference between oppressive and redemptive sufferings. Frostin maintains that for Buthelezi “the point of distinction between the two types of suffering is to elaborate a *theologica crucis* without legitimizing suffering.”

4.2.1. Oppressive and redemptive suffering

Using biblical language, Buthelezi insists that oppressive suffering is a consequence of sin, because sin imposes death on people. Oppressive suffering results from the damage that sinful people inflict upon themselves and others. Individuals as well as society are caught up in a vicious cycle of doing wrong and in suffering. The more they sin, the more injustice increases. The apartheid system in South Africa is an example of oppressive suffering on the level of society.

The difference between oppressive and redemptive suffering is that the victim accepts oppressive suffering as his destiny and is thus trapped in an awkward situation. Oppressive suffering leads to self-pity and fatalism, thereby disarming the victim. But even if one had accepted one’s state to the extent that a person could enjoy his life in the oppressive situation, oppressive suffering

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206 “To live for Christ means in the first place to live like Christ. It is axiomatic to say that Christ is the exemplar of the life after and through him. The Bible tells us that in order to save humanity the divine Christ became man, and in order to be a truly saving man the human Christ suffered. Therefore for Christians to dare to live for Christ means to be truly human even to the point of suffering in the interest of others.” (Daring, 7. Italics mine.)

Buthelezi’s urge to discard the worth of suffering per se distinguishes his theology of the cross from that of Luther’s. Luther understood suffering as such in a more positive way: “Suffering proves to be the surest way to God, or rather in suffering God meets us (W. VI, 223, 15ff.; LW 44, 46; W. XXXI, 2, 386, 32ff.; LW 17, 160f.)” (von Loewenich 1976, 119). The different contexts of the two theologians appear to affect their emphases. If Buthelezi had praised suffering, his struggle against apartheid would have lost at least part of its credibility.

207 Frostin 1988, 143, 144.
remains suffering: “When suffering attains the capacity of dimming the victim’s perception of it, it becomes oppressive.”

Buthelezi maintains that a lot of the suffering of the black people in his country is oppressive, and “to liken the suffering of black people to that of Christ is not just theologically mischievous but a gross manifestation of a callous Christian conscience.” Oppressive suffering is not Christian, nor is it favorable to God. This seems to be central in the understanding of suffering in Black Theology. Boesak discusses 1. Peter 2:18 on slaves and masters in Farewell to Innocence stating that the aim is not to glorify suffering nor to promote slavery. He continues by declaring suffering in all instances evil and uses Buthelezi’s definition of oppressive and redemptive suffering to clarify his case.

Although suffering is not regarded as a virtue in Black Theology, it can serve the interests of redemption. According to Buthelezi suffering for the sake of others and their wellbeing is redemptive. His Christological emphasis is clear: “It (redemptive suffering) is suffering after the model of Christ’s suffering. Christ became man and suffered in order to save human beings from the bondage of sin.” Buthelezi seems to make a distinction between two stages of incarnation: Christ became incarnate to save human beings, and to “be a truly saving man” he suffered for the sake of others. The same applies to the church. As discussed earlier in this chapter, it is called to incarnate, to become human, in the reality of people. Furthermore, Christians who want to live for Christ have to be “truly human even to the point of suffering in the interest of others.” Buthelezi’s argument of redemptive suffering is based on the biblical testimony of Christ. Because Christ is not only the savior of sinners but also the example to his followers, Christ’s suffering serves as a concrete action model for Christians. Since oppressive suffering is declared not to be Christian, while redemptive suffering is doing what Christ did, a question arises whether Christ is only present in redemptive suffering or also in the agony of those submitted to oppression as their destiny. Buthelezi does not cover this question.

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208 Violence, 52.
209 Daring, 9.
211 Boesak 1977, 93-95.
212 Daring, 9.
213 Daring, 7.
214 Daring, 7.
Redemptive suffering is motivated by love. Buthelezi quotes the Gospel according to John: “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends (Jn. 15:13).” Love appears in an active light; it is something that one does. “The redemptive power of suffering” frees a human being from thinking of one’s own wellbeing and safety and turns one’s focus to the other. In love one is ready to stand pain and agony in order to set the other free from suffering. This kind of self-determination was also involved in Christ’s suffering: he was prepared to endure agony in order to achieve his goal, the redemption of people.

Whereas oppressive suffering leads to self-pity and submission, redemptive suffering leads to self-esteem of the victim and liberation from oppression. Buthelezi names the BCM as an example: “Black consciousness is an instance of how the black people have transmuted their present suffering into the medium of liberation towards self-esteem.” Therefore, redemptive suffering for the sake of others is a form of acting against oppressive suffering and its causes. One sort of suffering thus challenges another sort of suffering.

The main distinction between the two forms of suffering seems to lay in the attitude of the sufferer. A submissive and passive stance to oppression would inevitably lead to what Buthelezi calls oppressive suffering, while active willingness to change the situation and fight injustice would transform the suffering into its redemptive form. Therefore, it appears that suffering cannot be classified by its outward expressions, but that the same actual suffering can, at least in certain cases, be either oppressive or redemptive depending on the inner motivation of the sufferer. Also, it seems to be possible that suffering is oppressive and redemptive at once; as an example of this one could take a black non-violent antagonist of apartheid who is oppressed by the system (oppressive suffering) but aims at abolishing racism (redemptive suffering). If the fact that someone else inflicts oppressive suffering on him remains despite his motivation to endure it, both forms of suffering would coexist.

Boesak can further elucidate on what grounds black theologians rejected oppressive suffering. Explaining 1. Peter 2:18, Boesak refers to M.H. Bolkenstein, according to whom the intention of Peter’s advice to slaves was for the good of the gospel: the goal was to prevent negative attention on the gospel that might

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215 Violence, 53.
216 Daring, 9.
217 Daring, 10.
have occurred had Christian slaves began to riot. Peter’s letter was a situational address and his writing should not be generalized as propagating slavery.\(^{218}\) In the situation that Peter’s letter addressed, oppressive suffering was accepted in order for the gospel not to fall into disrepute. The black theologians in South Africa, Buthelezi and Boesak alike, promote redemptive suffering for the same reason that oppressive suffering is accepted in 1. Peter: in their view, the credibility of the gospel, and consequently also the credibility of the church, calls for a disapproval of oppression and a readiness to suffer for that end.\(^{219}\)

### 4.2.2. The cross, love and kenosis

The cross, Christian love and the call to humble oneself are notions that further illustrate Buthelezi’s insight on suffering. The cross is a central theme and a symbol of suffering in his production. He has adopted a strong theology of the cross from his Lutheran tradition even though not all the emphases of his theology of the cross are the same as Luther’s. In discussing the marks of the church Buthelezi and Kistner mention Luther’s teaching on the ”holy possession of the sacred cross” that according to the writers imply that Luther expects Christians to suffer ”in order to become like their head, Christ.”\(^{220}\) But whereas Luther strongly emphasizes the sinfulness of human actions and the people’s inability for right acts,\(^{221}\) Buthelezi’s articles stress the need for people to struggle for the abolition of alienation and injustice. The way of the cross is an action model for the Christian church.\(^{222}\) Buthelezi thus emphasizes the need for people to do good

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\(^{218}\) Boesak 1977, 94.

\(^{219}\) Boesak “Dealing with apartheid means dealing with the integrity of the Gospel, the credibility of the witness of the Church in the world, the essence of the common confession of the Christian Church that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Boesak 1983a, xi).

Buthelezi: “For me the ultimate in ‘right preaching of the gospel’ is vicarious suffering or a vicarious presence in the heart of the struggle for others” (Proclamation, 29).

\(^{220}\) Proclamation, 23. Quotation from On the Councils and Church, (Luther 1539, 164). This is one of the texts where Luther is explicitly referred to, whereas in many texts aspects of his understanding of the cross are implicitly present.

Luther 1539, 164: “Seventh, the holy Christian people are externally recognized by the holy possession of the sacred cross. They must endure every misfortune and persecution, all kinds of trials and evil from the devil, the world, and the flesh --- by inward sadness, timidity, fear, outward poverty, contempt, illness, and weakness, in order to become like their head, Christ.”

Von Loewenisch (1976, 118) summarizes Luther’s understanding on the requirement of the Christians to become like Christ: “Christians must become like their Master in all things. They must therefore take Christ’s disgrace upon themselves. The Christian life is one of lowliness (W. XXXI, 2, 36, 38ff.; LW 16, 52; W. XLIII, 672, 27ff.; W. XLVI, 109, 38ff.; LW 6, 147), just as surely as Christ lived here on earth in the state of humiliation (W. II, 600, 10ff.; LW 27, 385).”

\(^{221}\) See e.g. WA I, 356, 16-17; 361, 23-24; 364, 2-3.

\(^{222}\) See e.g. Violence. Stavanger, 180, 181.

Stavanger, 180: “The cross transformed the universal state of suffering from mere blind fate into an active force for redemption.”
works in order for justice to prevail and leaves Luther’s thoughts on the incapability of human beings to do anything good with less attention. Buthelezi’s strong ethical emphasis can be partly due to his context.\(^{223}\) In any case, both highlight that suffering is a part of the life of a Christian/follower of Christ.\(^{224}\)

Referring to Paul’s letter to the Corinthians (11:24ff) Buthelezi ponders on the costly Christian discipleship:

Paul wants to teach us that it costs something to be a follower of Christ. Our suffering may not be exactly like this, because every generation has its own crosses, its own hideous calvaries, and its own persecuting Neros. But in each instance we are called to be “not ashamed of the gospel”. Many people believe that to be Christians they have been called to withdraw to some spiritual ghetto. But the Bible teaches that we are called to be Christians in this hostile, unjust, and inhuman world.\(^{225}\)

The Christian discipleship is defined by the notions of the cross and suffering. Buthelezi’s words resemble the writings of Bonhoeffer whose context of doing theology, Nazi Germany, had similarities to that of apartheid South Africa. In both countries theologians who opposed the system searched for a credible Christianity in the midst of a crisis.\(^{226}\) Also Bonhoeffer maintains that Christians are not called to stay in the solitude of a monastery but rather among their enemies, just as Christ lived and died surrounded by enemies. It is the place where Christians are called to work and to where they should bring God’s peace.\(^{227}\) Similarly Buthelezi’s quotation above entails that the crosses of the church are placed in the context of daily life. The church is called to live in the reality of the people, in the brutal world where the calvaries and neros of the day exist. What the cross concretely means in a given situation thus depends on the context; the oppressive institutions of the day define the crosses that need to be carried. In this sense there is an existential and contextual aspect to the meaning of the cross. The

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\(^{223}\) See e.g. Christianity, 6, where Buthelezi reminds the black that they are responsible for the conversion of white Christians from their alienation.

\(^{224}\) For Luther, see e.g. WA 7, 548, 12-16.

Von Loewenich (1976, 118, 119) on Luther’s view: “The Christian life is a discipleship of suffering (W. V, 177, 15ff.). It demonstrates its lowliness in that it leads into suffering (W. V, 108, 38ff.). Christ’s suffering is still repeated daily in our lives (W. III, 167, 24ff.; LW 10, 139). --- But our suffering is God’s will. God does his alien work when he leads us into suffering. But thereby he aims at his proper work, even when we do not recognize it (cf. W. XLI, 600, 25ff.; LW 8, 29). Through suffering we shall arrive at the Sabbath of the soul (W. VI, 248, 1ff.; LW 44, 77).”

Buthelezi’s approach to the cross and suffering is more pragmatic: his urge to discard oppressive suffering does not allow him to talk about suffering as God’s will in any other respect than when it works as a means of helping the oppressed neighbor. Buthelezi’s experience-based approach to theology again influences his insights.

\(^{225}\) Relevance, 272.

\(^{226}\) See de Gruchy 1984, 9, 10.

\(^{227}\) Bonhoeffer 1987, 10.
The cross symbolizes the demand to get engaged in the very reality of the oppressed and exploited.

The cross contains a double meaning for Buthelezi. Sometimes the aesthetic crosses that Christians carry obscure the brutal reality of the cross as a means of execution. It is not a pretty piece of decoration. The cross is cruel. But God transformed this brutal means of killing into “a vehicle of divine love and restoration to new life.”

The cross is also and foremost a symbol of love. The statement “God is love” is more or less the basis for Buthelezi’s conception of Christianity, an assumption based on both the Old and New Testaments. The moment on Calvary is a proof of God’s love. On the cross his love saved humanity. Buthelezi points out that the brutality of the cross did not save human beings; the saving force was the love that was willing to tolerate the violence for the sake of others. God revealed himself in the suffering. His love became manifest through the cross. Even the suffering of God on the cross is not worthy in itself: but when it is endured out of love for the liberation of others, because of the other, it is precious.

Therefore, also Christian love is an active force rather than a passive acceptance of anything that comes across. Buthelezi, for instance, urges the black to love the white oppressor but does not require it on a sentimental level. Love is more about will and action than about feelings. The blacks should be “creative and creating” in loving the white South Africans. Loving someone does not mean that one enjoys spending time with him or that one would be loved back. Buthelezi defines Christian love as follows:

To love and forgive one who hurts you does not mean to feel happy and enjoy his company while he continues to hurt you. It simply means not to count it against him. It means not to itemize or take stock of his wrong doing as you try to live with him each day.

In other words, to love is to see things in a positive light in respect to the one loved and to work for the best of the other, even if he offends you, but without handing over one’s human dignity. Loving in this sense may include suffering.

The image of marriage illustrates the nature of Christian love. The spouses do not always behave nicely to each other, or appear as saints in the eyes of the

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228 Violence. 51, 53.
230 “Be it as it may, white people, whether they like it or not, are our brothers. We owe them not just passive love, but creative and creating love.” (Christianity, 5.) See also: Bangkok, 156. Six Theses, 55, 56.
231 Unity, 20.
other. But the decision to stay together even during hard times makes marriage possible. Buthelezi talks about the spouses becoming crosses to one another. When one carries one’s spouse and children as a cross, one walks the way of Christ who told his disciples to take up their cross and follow him. The same should be the case in the Christian community: one is to forgive others and hold to them even at times when they turn into burdens and crosses. Dealing with other Christians can be much harder than dealing with the enemy, because the latter can be pushed away whereas sticking together with the former requires endurance.\textsuperscript{232} It requires Christian love that is found in the shade of the cross.

Buthelezi, however, does not prompt to push the enemy away but supports the Christian ideal to love him. When he talks about love for the enemy, his white Christian sisters and brothers can be comprehended as a part of that group. Buthelezi maintains that the power for such love arises from faith in Christ. Faith that expresses itself in love contains such a power that even oppressors holding political authority are frightened at times. The love of the oppressed leaves them naked: they cannot hide their evil aims and motives.\textsuperscript{233}

There are similarities in Luther’s theology of love and Buthelezi’s views on redemptive suffering. Comparing the two illuminates the relationship between the cross and love. Luther interpreted the commandment of love to urge one to turn away from oneself towards the neighbor. In the former \textit{ordo caritatis} model the commandment had been understood to refer to oneself as well. Luther considered this to be deceptive and to encourage people to search for their own wellbeing, something that he regarded to be against Christ’s motive in giving the commandment. In Luther’s view the wellbeing of the neighbor was to be the basis for action. If one’s life was oriented towards the good of the neighbor, one would realize the original creational order that aims at passing love to others. Luther maintained that all that exists, exists for others. When creatures share love or anything good with each other, God works through them.\textsuperscript{234} Buthelezi also highlights the neighbor as the object of love. As already discussed, according to him the motivator of redemptive suffering is love for others. One is ready to bear suffering for the other to be free.\textsuperscript{235} How Luther describes God’s self-giving \textit{agape} love is parallel to Buthelezi’s description of redemptive love for the

\textsuperscript{232} Unity, 20.
\textsuperscript{233} Witness, 418.
\textsuperscript{234} Raunio 2001, 156-166.
\textsuperscript{235} Daring, 9.
neighbor. Also, as Luther understands God’s love to be directed to that which is nothing, creating something out of the nothingness, so Buthelezi talks about love for the oppressed in the form of vicarious suffering as an event that can hold them up from their plight and equip them with self-esteem.

Kenosis as an important aspect of incarnation deepens the understanding of the course of a Christian life that is marked by cross-bearing and love. When Buthelezi calls the church to be an instrument of restoration in the world, kenosis is brought forth as one of the models for action. Christ’s self-emptying is an example for the church. Humility, which is a central aspect of kenosis, is a characteristic that only “strong people and those of high moral fibre” can obtain. Humility is thus not a sign of weakness but rather that of strength. It includes voluntarily pushing one’s merits and status aside.

Giving up one’s own interests should be total: Buthelezi criticizes “resource sharing” and emphasizes “total divestment” instead as a model for the church. The aim is not to make people deliver the crumbs they do not need themselves. “Total divestment” presupposes that the whole existence of the person is in question; the values that guide one’s life are being challenged. Crumbs are not enough, because one is called to give oneself for others.

Living for others emerges as a central theme in Buthelezi’s articles. It includes the already discussed suffering for the sake of others, but also the actual losing of one’s own life, the kenosis of one’s merits. Buthelezi’s call to the church is demanding: “The church like its individual members has to lose its life in order

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237 See e.g. Stavanger, 182.
238 Silvo suggests that Buthelezi earlier placed more emphasis on creation theology and the indigenousness of theology, and later adopted a "kenosis ecclesiology": "Vimeismissä kirjoituksissaan Buthelezi on omaksunut selkeästi kenoosiskristologian, jonka pohjalle hän rakentaa kenoosisekkelisologian, missä kirkon, kuten sen yksityisten jäsenten, on luovuttava elämästäan voidakseen löytää sen. Vaikuttaa siltä, ettei Buthelezi ole lainkaan lähtenyt enää seuraamaan indigeeniä luomisesta lähtevää kehityslinjaansa vaan on ottanut luterilaisen ristin teologian lähtökohtakseen ja vienyt sen johdonmukaisesti äärimmilleen." (Silvo 1987, 152.)
239 Stavanger, 181.
240 Stavanger, 181.
241 Stavanger, 183.
to find it." The church should not search for recognition from the world. Even if those people that the church has helped up from their suffering stand against the church once they have achieved more prominent positions in society, the church has to remain humble. The church is a sign of Christ in the world, but if it tries to find prominence – not for the people but for itself – it will lose its role as a sign. A church that is worried about its own standing easily becomes an end in itself and ceases to be the sign of its Lord. Buthelezi warns of the threat of a neo-Constantinian era. In other words, he advises the church not to build its own honor and security, but to render itself as a suffering servant to the purposes of God for the best of the people.

But to lose its life is not an aim in itself for the church. Like oppressive suffering, kenosis has no intrinsic value for Buthelezi. Kenosis gets its meaning when it is utilized as a strategy for serving others. This was the way of Christ: “Like Christ, we go down in order to bring others up. The incarnation of Christ, without the ascension and consequent raising up of humanity with himself, would be only a cosmic disaster.” Buthelezi’s writings aim at all times at concrete changes in the lives of people. Giving up power per se can be an escape from liability, and thus Buthelezi prefers to talk about sharing power. Kenosis involves giving up oneself and one’s own good for service, but it does not mean yielding power. The question still remains of what exactly does losing one’s life mean for the church. It will be looked at in chapter five.

Buthelezi argues that due to their position as God’s children Christians have a capacity for kenosis. It is an aspect of life in Christ. The ability is, however, not produced by force, but it is the work of God’s agape love in his children. “It is either there or not there. Just as we cannot manipulate people to love one another, it is impossible to program people to lead kenotic lives.”

The three characters, namely the cross, love and kenosis, demonstrate the kind of suffering the church is called for. Christian suffering is always motivated by unconditional love that is an active willingness to serve the other. It includes an unselfish, kenotic attitude and readiness to carry the cross in order for the other

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242 Sign, 142. In another context, years earlier, Buthelezi states in a similar mode: “A living church must be open to the future and all its risks. A church that is to save its life must be prepared to lose it. The church does not live for itself, but it lives for its Lord who was prepared to lose its life for the world.” (In Christ78, 37.) This confirms the importance of "losing one’s life" for Buthelezi.
243 Sign, 142, 143.
244 Stavanger, 182.
245 Witness, 418.
246 Stavanger, 182-183.
to flourish. Christian suffering is existential in that it means getting engaged with the oppressive reality of the other. It is never promoted for its own sake but for the sake of God-created people and their liberation.

4.2.3. Bodily presence

Buthelezi’s demand for Christians to minister through their body is still another aspect of suffering as a part of the ministry of the church. The importance of bodily ministry is at times forgotten in the church:

> Very often Christians move into situations in order to be heard rather than to be felt. They say a lot of words some of which are pure garbage. There is more to communication than firing a barrage of words. You can communicate a living message even through your silent body. After all the body and not the mouth is the seat of life – the temple of the Holy Spirit, according to the Bible.247

The quotation highlights the importance of ministering through being physically present. Coming from the Lutheran tradition with an emphasis on the Word and its right preaching but living in a country where words have often lost their meaning, Buthelezi takes a critical stand on solely pouring out words in an oppressive situation.

He talks of a physical and prophetic presence. Both are action models for Christians and the church. In certain situations a physical presence is, however, a more efficient way of ministering to the world. There are times when no words are heard, but even then the body can continue proclaiming the gospel by being present in the situation, by the side of the suffering.248 When the prophecy ceases or is silenced, physical presence remains an option, maybe the only one, for the church:

> Beyond prophecy lies the cross. Suffering is power beyond words. You can shut your ears to words, but you can never escape the impact of a redemptive life, because it simply bangs itself on you. Redemptive life is power beyond words. This consists in putting your life at stake for the welfare of others.

This is the model of Christ: he suffered silently on the cross. First came words and prophesy, then quiet suffering.249

Physical presence in the life of a suffering person is redemptive whereas suffering alone is the worst possible experience. Buthelezi reasons that to sentence a person to solitude would be the most terrible punishment one could receive,

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247 Presence, 5.
248 Presence, 5, 6.
249 Violence, 53.
because when a human being is isolated from human relationships, the meaning of his existence fades. Christ felt the agony of suffering alone on the cross and shouted: “Elohi, Elohi, lema sabaktani?” But when someone shares one’s suffering a part of the burden is taken away: “It tends to open a window of liberation through the granite wall of suffering.”\textsuperscript{250} For this reason \textit{fellowship} is “one of the greatest gifts Christians can impart to those around them.”\textsuperscript{251} It is to be noted that Buthelezi suggests that fellowship should be shared also with those around the church and not limited to Christians only.

Fellowship as the sharing of a redemptive physical presence with others has a sacramental character. Buthelezi insists, referring to the Bible and quoting Matthew 25 on the Last Judgment, that being physically present with the exploited is to be “sacramentally present with Christ.”\textsuperscript{252} When one shares the moment with the poor, one is in contact with Christ himself. Buthelezi then takes the discussion to a concrete level: “Nobody can deny that in our country we have many of these ‘least important,’ --- Among them there may be our imprisoned neighbours, banned relatives and politically detained acquaintances.”\textsuperscript{253} Buthelezi’s discussion on a physical presence is an example of how he does theology: he talks about the reality of the people and relates the gospel to a concrete situation in order to illuminate it.

Buthelezi does not reject his Lutheran background in emphasizing the bodily aspect of preaching at the expense of words but rather interprets the meaning of the right preaching of the gospel, elaborating on what it means today. “To speak of ‘right preaching of the gospel’ as a mark of the church without defining these crucial concepts is likely to generate more smoke than light.”\textsuperscript{254} The right preaching of the Word is looked at through the model of Christ who became incarnate and accepted ordinary life. Spoken words have received too pronounced a position so that “the drama of life” is no longer regarded as a medium of the gospel although Christ did not save human beings by elegant statements but by playing a role in that drama. Thus Christians are to minister through their bodies. To preach the gospel should mean “a vicarious presence”

\textsuperscript{250} Presence, 6.
\textsuperscript{251} Presence, 6.
\textsuperscript{252} Presence, 6.
\textsuperscript{253} Presence, 6.
\textsuperscript{254} Proclamation, 27.
(incarnation) and “vicarious suffering”: “in certain situations it is the only form of preaching the gospel which can be regarded as a mark of the Church.”

4.2.4. The church incarnate is bound to suffer

Due to Buthelezi’s strong emphasis on suffering as an aspect of the life of the church in South Africa and, on the other hand, his refusal to cherish suffering as a value in itself, it can be claimed that for Buthelezi it is not suffering, but the readiness to suffer when needed, that is the sine qua non of an authentic church. The church should be able to assess when suffering is needed because of the nature of the gospel it has received and the gifts it gets as the children of God. What the church is called for in these situations is not suffering for its own sake but a struggle for the wellbeing of the oppressed, which then might, and most likely will, involve suffering.

Even if Buthelezi often notes suffering as something that might be needed, his call for the church to incarnate in the social, economic and political structures of society necessitates suffering, since in any society there are people who are more oppressed, poorer or otherwise in a worse situation than others. As the church is called to fight for these people, it will be bound to struggle and suffer. In Buthelezi’s context the suffering of a true church is a necessity, because standing against apartheid meant standing against the ruling class that had the power to make others suffer.

The incarnation of the church in the suffering of people seems to require two things: first, fighting for the liberation of the people and, secondly, adopting the lifestyle, status and rights of the suffering.

The first prerequisite is easy to accept: the church has to stand against exploitation in any given time and place despite the problems it might cause her. For Buthelezi there are no two spheres, secular and sacred, when it comes to the action of Christians for the best of the neighbor.

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255 Proclamation, 27-29.
256 “Christians are, by definition, furnished with the capacity for stripping themselves of their exalted status in order to minister even to the scum of the earth. They are in a position to submit themselves to others in service.” (Stavanger, 182.)
257 See e.g. Daring, 7: “Therefore for the Christians to dare to live for Christ means to be truly human even to the point of suffering in the interest of others.” or Service, 8: “Indeed serving the downtrodden may mean sharing in their suffering.”
258 “To wipe tears from the face of a weeping brother means at the same time to wet your own hand. This is the meaning of the cross. This is to take up one’s cross and follow Christ.” (Violence, 54.)
The second prerequisite is more complicated. By adopting the poverty and agony of the people, does the church not give away its power that it could use to change the situation? Buthelezi does not aim at this. He calls for the church to use its power to empower others. But it seems contradictory to adopt the lifestyle of the powerless in order to empower them. For Buthelezi it is not so, because his model for action is Christ. “Faith in Christ is the essential power base for Christian commitment. That is why even powerful political oppressors feel threatened by Christians who dare to live for Christ under those circumstances.”

The power Christ grants his followers is meant to be used in service. Christ, as the example, gave away everything, even his life, and simultaneously gave life to the sinner. Buthelezi subscribes to the way of the cross, even when it appears as folly in the eyes of the mighty of the world.

Another question that the second requirement gives rise to is: who are the ones that the church should identify itself with? If the church is to identify itself with the afflicted, should all the people in the church family become suffering in order for the church to be authentic? Should wealthy Christians give up their possessions in order to fight the repressive economic system? Of course, the church cannot be an institution independent of people. But the absolute fallaciousness of the freedom of a church in an oppressed country can be questioned. One could think that if the institution receives a position to act freely, also the people will benefit from it. Or if the church dies away with the dying people, it will not be able to help them to stand on their own feet and fight for their cause. Buthelezi, however, follows the way of the cross and argues that the existence of a privileged group within the church would have a negative impact on the credibility of the church.

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259 See e.g. For Life, 35, 36: “It is against the Christian spirit to accumulate power around one’s person; it is in the Christian spirit to empower others.”
260 Witness, 418.
261 See e.g. Stavanger, 181: “In the final analysis the transforming power of the cross in the world is a perception of faith rather than always an object of sight. There is thus no guarantee that the world will always be able to discern the role of the church as a force for the world’s renewal.”
262 “Es fördert ein Gefühl der Überlegenheit auf seiten des Missionars und verewigt einen Minderwertigkeitskomplex bei dem schwarzen Mitarbeiter. Unter diesen Umständen würde es mehr schaden als nützen, einen Missionar zu haben, weil es ihn aufgrund seiner politischen Privilegien sofort in eine führende Stellung in der Kirche bringen würde.” (Der Platz, 75.)
V LIBERATION OF THE CHURCH AND SOCIETY

5.1. Buthelezi’s understanding of liberation

Buthelezi sets more weight on the concrete liberation of the oppressed people than on the salvation of the soul, that is, liberation as a passport to heaven. In his fight against sin, or human alienation from one another and from God, Buthelezi represents the voice of the church of the oppressed blacks of South Africa. The bondage of sin that he discusses is experienced and seen around him: it is present in the structures of the society that impose inequality on the community and tear it apart. It is manifested in the distorted self-portrait of the black and the white. He hopes for the gospel and Christian struggle to liberate the blacks from dehumanization and oppression, and the whites from their false perception of reality and from oppressing. As will be seen, in line with the already covered concepts of the wholeness of life and incarnation, he discusses a holistic liberation, leaning at times towards a more this-worldly emphasis.

Many of the black South Africans were Christians in the 1960s, but they still needed to be liberated from subjugation. Buthelezi calls for a political, economic and social liberation of the blacks that would change the situation of the racial inequality and the refusal of the whites to see black people as equal human beings. Since God, according to Buthelezi, only encounters people in the midst of concrete structures of life, liberation from political, social and economic oppression would not only mean that the poor would become full participants in society but also that they would be provided “with the passport to the meeting-place with God.”

Liberation in its social dimension alone is inadequate: also the spirit needs to be liberated. Buthelezi talks about the liberation of the spirit or self-articulation. The setting free of black creativity leads into a process of liberation of the black self. When the self is freed from outward domination, one is liberated to govern one’s own life, find one’s desires, and plan one’s future. Buthelezi uses an example of a cow which is taken to be slaughtered to illustrate the struggle for liberation. The animal embodies a creative source of energy. If it was to succeed in getting loose, its energy, then running around, would be likely to frighten the spectators. The liberation of the black spirit is as likely to create fear in the white

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263 Grounds, 155-156. Also see AT or BT, 34.
people who watch the process. Nevertheless, the captured spirit needs to be set free.

When discussing the liberation of the black, Buthelezi approaches blackness from two different angles: the blacks need to be liberated from the oppression related to their blackness into realizing the worth of their blackness. This is characteristic of Black Theology. Also Boesak examines blackness from two angles and calls for a *metanoia*, a conversion, of the black and the white alike to a new understanding of blackness.

Buthelezi states: “If the Gospel means anything, it must save the black man from his own blackness.” The gospel thus must save black people from exploitation and oppression that is due to the color of their skin. The negative blackness that people have to be liberated from can be understood to consist of a twofold negative attitude: a derogatory definition of black people made by white people and a negative attitude adopted by the black people about themselves. Buthelezi then urges the black to proudly affirm their blackness: if an outsider tells one “You are black” it has a very different impact than if one declares oneself “I am black”. The latter symbolizes liberation; it is a representation of self-articulation. Blackness becomes a God-given feature, equal to other skin colors.

The liberation of the black spirit is related to the liberation of history and the past. The history of Africa had until then been mainly written from the perspective of the whites. Black historians should now write the story of their people.

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*Silvo states that the inner liberation of the black is primary to Buthelezi, and that the outer liberation is bound to follow: “Vapautuminen on Buthelezille ensisijaisesti sisäistä vapautumista, mutta hän näkee tämän johtavan väistämättä toimiin itsetoteutuksen ulkoisten esteiden poistamiseksi. Buthelezin mustan olemisen tulkinnassa kuvastuu BCM:n lähestymistapa, joka tähätä mustien sisäiseen vapautumiseen ehtona mielekkäälle toiminnalle yhteiskunnassa.” (Silvo 1987, 69.) Parratt (1995, 170) also sees the integrity of the human identity as the core of salvation for Buthelezi, a fact that supports Silvo’s understanding. However, the inner liberation of the black self must not be highlighted on the expense of the social, economical and political dimensions of liberation. In the light of Buthelezi’s emphasis on the wholeness of life and the unity of different spheres of human existence, the inner and outer liberation are organically tied together.

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“This is the situation in which black people find themselves. Slavery, domination, injustice; being forced to live a life of contradiction and estrangement in their own country --- To ask blacks to love themselves is to ask them to hate oppression, dehumanization, and the cultivation of slave mentality. --- All this represents, once more, a process of real *metanoia*, conversion: for blacks, in order to become reconciled with themselves, but also for whites, to become reconciled with *themselves* and to accept blackness as authentic humanity.” (Boesak 1977, 29, 30.)

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*AT or BT, 35.

In a similar mode Boesak (1977, 27) declares: “When blacks speak of the affirmation of their blackness, this does not mean a resigned acceptance. It is an affirmation: **Black is Beautiful!**”
Knowing and appreciating one’s roots bestows on a person the power to take responsibility for the future. On the contrary, depriving one of a history erodes a person’s self-respect and resistance against oppression.\(^{268}\)

The emphasis on the liberation of the black spirit proves the centrality of the existential aspect of liberation in Buthelezi’s thought. Two important ideas are related to the existential meaning of liberation, namely, the concept of ‘situation’ and the existential questions of the people. The situation is the starting point for liberation. It dictates what are the concrete issues that liberation has to deal with and determines the circumstances in which the liberation struggle takes place. The situation is also the starting point for theology that responds not to questions made by theologians in their ivory towers, but to the questions that arise in the situation of the people.\(^{269}\)

Buthelezi’s understanding is endorsed by the insights of other Third World theologians. As the discussion in chapter two showed, their approach to theology is often situational and existential in the same sense as Buthelezi’s. In accordance with Buthelezi’s views, Desmond Tutu argues that liberation theology “happens because people cry out, ‘Oh, God, how long?’ ‘Oh, God, but why?’”\(^{270}\) Liberation theology exists because of the human suffering that makes people ask these existential questions. People who encounter extensive suffering in their life continue to ask these questions because, according to Tutu, they do not usually doubt the existence or goodness of God. If they did, the questions would not be adequate: “There would just be a brute fact of their suffering forming part of the givenness of a truly harsh reality.”\(^{271}\)

When Buthelezi discusses the situation and the question-answer dialectics, he refers to Paul Tillich. Tillich’s correlation method is one of the frames of reference that Buthelezi exploits in his understanding of the existential gospel that relates to everyday life.\(^{272}\) According to Tillich’s correlation method the question has to arise in and from the situation of the people; their existence is the question, whereas the answer is found from the Christian revelation. Systematic theology should begin by analyzing the situation, and proceed to demonstrate how the Christian truths revealed through the events that are recorded in the Scriptures

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\(^{268}\) Creativity, 16. Mutual, 73. Presence, 7.
\(^{269}\) AT and BT, 23, 24. AT or BT, 33. Proclamation, 27.
\(^{270}\) Tutu 1979, 63.
\(^{271}\) Tutu 1979, 63.
offer answers to the existential questions of the people. Tillich disputes three earlier methods of theology, of which Buthelezi mentions the supranaturalistic method and its deficiency when he discusses Tillich’s method of correlation. The supranaturalistic method, according to Tillich, does not appreciate the situation of the people. It rather takes the Christian message to be a set entity that has “fallen into the human situation like strange bodies from a strange world.” The correlation method, on the contrary, includes the idea that the Christian revelation is always entangled with culture; the revelation is never in a pure form. According to Miikka Ruokanen, the correlation method holds that the transcendent only reveals itself through the finite. Some features in culture point to the infinite that is hidden in the real world. The method takes the finite structures of human life seriously. When looked at in the light of the wholeness of life and incarnation, it is logical that Buthelezi joins Tillich in opposing a supranaturalistic understanding of the gospel, and relates to the situational-existential approach. Also the South African context encourages Buthelezi in this direction.

Black people in South Africa search for the meaning of their existence as black human beings in the face of oppression that denies them the right to co-govern society with their white countrymen. For Buthelezi, this situation is of foremost importance: in Tillich’s footsteps he charts the needs of the people on the basis of their social, political and economic circumstances.

It cautions the preacher and minister to stop preaching a ‘pie in the sky’ religion, but instead to come down and toil with the black man spiritually and existentially in the sweat and dust of the daily life. As soon as this objective has been realised, the whole world will know us as human beings and not merely study-curiosities to adorn the pages of doctoral dissertations.

Buthelezi further maintains, again following Tillich, that the gospel can answer the question that arises in the situation of the black African. The gospel can liberate him existentially: “It [the gospel] must answer his basic existential question ‘Why did God create me black?’

273 Tillich 1978a, 62-64.
274 The so-called “supranaturalistic”, “humanistic” and “dualistic” methods. The first one is of interest for the discussion here.
275 Change, 201. Buthelezi talks about "kerygmatic theology", but the content is the same as that of the supranaturalistic method.
276 Tillich 1978a, 64, 65.
277 Ruokanen 1987, 132.
278 AT or BT, 35.
279 AT or BT, 35. Also see Change, 201, 202; Meaning, 93, 94.
When the concept of ‘gospel’ is looked at from an etymological point of view it stands for ‘good news’. Buthelezi and Kistner talk about Tillich’s definition of ‘good news’ that includes the aspect that it is always relevant to one’s situation. The content of the ‘good news’ and the existential situation of the receiver have to correlate. The statement of God’s love for every individual is good news to the black people who have been treated as second-rate citizens and who live in poverty while seeing others live in abundance. The gospel is the answer to their question and becomes liberating news.\textsuperscript{280}

By preaching the gospel the church can assure people of “a way out” from their destructive situation. It is a pledge for a better future.\textsuperscript{281} An inclination to create hope is built in the gospel:

\begin{quote}
The Christian Gospel is designed to fill man with hope in order that he may realise that life is worth living and that he has a role to play in improving the quality of the life of his fellow-men – in particular, by filling them with the same hope which has sustained him.\textsuperscript{282}
\end{quote}

In other words, the gospel generates hope, which in turn generates action for the best of the neighbor. The gospel is not a static statement but a dynamic moment. It penetrates the life of the oppressed, or the oppressor, and makes a difference. Because of its content and its dynamic interference with and transformation of the existential situation, the gospel is a force that can reconcile, liberate and unite.

5.1.1. Liberation of the oppressor

The white, including white Christians, need to be liberated along with the black. Buthelezi accuses the majority of white South African Christians for putting their effort into building a political system that is incompatible with the gospel and that defames Christian love. The doctrine of separate development or apartheid is against the core of the gospel, that is, against the power of the gospel to turn strangers into friends. By refusing to recognize the blacks as equal and, on the other hand, accumulating most of the material wealth available into their own pockets, the white have drawn God’s wrath upon themselves. They have appeared as bearers of Christianity but simultaneously segregated themselves from any daily contact with their black Christian brothers and sisters. They have eroded the faith that they themselves once introduced to the Africans. The \textit{behavior} of white

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{280} Biblical, 56. Proclamation, 27.  \\
\textsuperscript{281} Proclamation, 27.  \\
\textsuperscript{282} Grounds, 147, 148. 
\end{footnotes}
Christians has caused credibility problems for the gospel, and it is doubtful whether they are capable of proclaiming the gospel or talking about God’s love because of the way they live.  

Experience as a source for knowledge is present in Buthelezi’s discussion of the white. He approaches theology from an inductive perspective; praxis judges the truth of theological knowledge. Since the whites have not managed to live according to the gospel they teach, they are in need of liberation.

The description of the situation of the white is a portrayal of their alienation from true humanity and the wholeness of life. As the history of South Africa reveals, the white immigrants excluded the black from their life, thus creating a barrier between ‘us’ and ‘the other’. This barrier was also introduced to the church and justified by the theology of the NGK. The picture of what is human blurred; the white system did not see an equal human being inside a brown skin. The alienation of the white from true humanity led to wrongdoings. Boff talks about Christians who are loyal to a distorted institution and hence full of goodwill while they cause tremendous damage to people: “Pascal noted that evil is not so perfectly achieved as when it is done with good will and purity of heart”. In their alienation the oppressors may not comprehend the maliciousness of the situation.

In the spirit of liberation theology Buthelezi urges the black not only to play active parts in their own liberation but also in the liberation of the white:

He [the black] needs to see his own blackness as a gift from God instead of the biological scourge which the white man’s institutions have made it. Then the white man will be liberated from the urge to reject the black man because his rejection will be irrelevant and inconsequential.

In other words, the liberation of the white will become unavoidable once the black no longer accept the white rejection. The reasoning here seems somewhat idealistic. The question arises whether all the oppression in the world would disappear if the victims would refuse to be victims. Nevertheless, there are examples where the self-affirmation of the victim has started the process of liberation: for example, the struggle of the black in South Africa and the United States.

Buthelezi also urges the black to actively convert the white:

283 Bangkok, 155, 156. Christianity, 4-6. Six Theses, 55.
284 Boff 1985, 56.
285 Bangkok, 156. Parts of this article were included in the article Six Theses: Theological Problems of Evangelism in the South African Context.
As a black Christian, I feel obliged to thank white Christians for having realized that God did not send them to white people only, but also to me, black as I am. In saying this, I hope that white people will also be generous enough to reciprocate this sentiment of mine as I feel moved at this hour that God has also sent me as a black person to tell them the Good News that God died in Christ to liberate the white man from his urge to oppress the black man. This means to say that the Gospel preached by the white man needs to be complimented by the Gospel through the black man. 286

The message of the need for the evangelization of the white is clear. In the article Buthelezi does not, however, explain how the death of Christ liberates the oppressor of his or her “urge to oppress”. The creational motif discussed in chapter three as a source for racial liberation is more explicit. But how does the death on the cross liberate from oppressing? It could be that Buthelezi talks about liberation in the sense of sanctification; it could be that a Christian is already saved and what is at stake has nothing to do with the salvation of the soul. Yet Buthelezi’s emphasis on the wholeness of life and the holistic gospel points rather to an interpretation that there is no liberation without good fruits. Justification then is necessarily interwoven with sanctification; one does not exist without the other. Christ’s death on the cross liberates the oppressor, because it shows him the way of love and the cross. The death of Christ would then have a double effect in terms of liberation. First, the classical meaning of salvation as an outcome of Christ’s sacrificial death is implied in Buthelezi’s quotation, and secondly, that salvation compels one to follow Christ’s example.

Thomas Weinandy discusses Christ’s redemptive suffering in his book Does God Suffer? One of his points can elucidate our discussion. Christ’s death on the cross evokes reconciliation between a human being and God. Christ made his sacrifice out of love for the Father and for humanity. Weinandy takes notice to this bidirectional, twofold and comprehensive act of love. It made Jesus’ sacrifice creditable. By being ready to suffer death and give up his life, Jesus showed his earnestness and the depth of his love to the Father and to humanity. 287 If the salvation event, or the cross, carries such a message of unconditional love for the sinner, could someone who has been liberated by this love of Christ’s oppress one’s neighbor? Buthelezi holds that accepting Christ necessitates the accepting of other Christians. The acceptance of God’s acceptance must be followed by one’s

286 Christianity, 6.
287 Weinandy 2000, 223.
acceptance of those others who God also accepts. If that is not the case, as it was not in South Africa, there is something wrong.288

5.1.2. Faith and works

Because Buthelezi takes the gospel as a whole, he does not ask the typical Lutheran question of the relationship between faith and works. For him it seems to be self-evident that faith embraces works and action. Buthelezi imagines God asking the black: “Black man, where were you when the white man abandoned my Gospel and went to destruction?” Then the black man explains to God how he was only a “kaffir” and thus had no courage to proclaim the gospel to his “baas”. God continues: “Was Christ’s resurrection not sufficient to liberate you, black man, from that kind of spiritual and psychological death? Go to eternal condemnation, black man, for you did not muster courage to save your white brother.” It is implied that the white man has gone to the same condemnation.289

The dialogue between God and the black man suggests that Buthelezi holds deeds crucial for the salvation of the soul, and that the mere act of faith is not adequate: faith without deeds is not a possibility.290

Furthermore, Buthelezi states that a church that has taken sides with the oppressors should not be sure about getting an invitation to the triumphal feast at the end of the battle. The oppressed who have then been liberated might not want to present such an invitation. This can be seen as referring to the Last Judgment. Those once struggling have been given the right to judge. Understood this way, it is a strong statement in favor of the importance of works, or one could say a holistic faith, in regard to the salvation of the soul.291

But what is the condemnation Buthelezi is pointing at? He refers to Matthew 25:34-40 in at least two articles. His focal point in the use of these verses from the Bible, however, is not the Last Judgment but the here and now: “Have

288 “God’s acceptance of the sinner is known as forgiveness, and the sinner’s acceptance of God’s forgiveness as faith. Man’s acceptance of God’s gift also includes accepting all things which God accepts. --- man accepts his neighbour as the one for whose welfare all his efforts in this life are directed.” (Creation, 113, 114.)

289 “There is something wrong when the preaching of the gospel is accompanied by the injection of an element of social divisions which make it difficult for those who have accepted Christ to accept one another.” (Mutual, 72.)

290 From Bonhoeffer see e.g. The Cost of Discipleship: “The idea of a situation in which faith is possible is only a way of stating the facts of a case in which the two propositions hold good and are equally true: only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes.” (Bonhoeffer 1963, 69.)

291 From Luther see e.g. WA 32, 423, 34 - 424, 4.

291 In Christ, 333.
we learnt to see the face of the crucified Christ behind the painful expression of their faces and twitching bodies?” This indicates that Buthelezi is not so interested in speculating about eternal life than discussing what it means to be a Christian church in the world.

It could be asked whether Buthelezi places works above faith and pushes the vertical dimension in the margin while concentrating on horizontal affairs. It is to be remembered that Buthelezi’s wrote most of the articles in the heat of the liberation struggle. Had he written a thousand-page study on dogmatics, salvation may have been dealt with in a different way. Taking this as the sole excuse would, however, be unfair towards Buthelezi.

Buthelezi and Kistner back up their emphasis on the horizontal aspect of the church by interpreting Luther, quoting and paraphrasing Luther’s *On The Councils and the Church*. They consider the horizontal aspect of the church to be important to Luther. The reformer regarded “the marks of the second table” of the Ten Commandments, that is, things related to interpersonal relationships, important for the definition of the church. The second table differentiates from the first table in that it is not exclusively limited to the true church; carrying out the commandments of the second table alone does not prove the authenticity of a church. Nevertheless, if they are neglected, the commandments of the first table cannot be carried out either: for a church to be authentic it has to practice “the marks of the second table”. The situation of Christianity in South Africa is an example of what happens when the gospel is perceived merely as a spiritual message: if the second table is not taken seriously, faith and religion break away from the rest of life. The spiritual conception of the gospel has enforced apartheid by leaving aspects of life other than spirituality out of the sphere of faith.

Frostin comments on the criticism of “horizontalism” that Buthelezi along with other black theologians met, and maintains that it missed its target. According to Frostin, Buthelezi’s stress on human relations arises from his perception of God as the Creator of all human life. Buthelezi does not aim at abandoning the vertical God-human –relationship, but rather rejects the vertical-

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292 Presence, 6. Also Mutual, 75, deals with Matt. 25:34-40.
293 Proclamation, 23-26.

Buthelezi and Kistner quote e.g. the following from *On Councils and the Church*: “How can he speak lightly about the works of the Holy Spirit in the first table – about comfort, grace, forgiveness of sins – who does not heed and practice the works of the Holy Spirit in the second table, which he can understand and experience, while he has never attempted or experienced those of the first table? Therefore it is certain that they neither have nor understand Christ or the Holy Spirit, and their talk is nothing but froth on the tongue.” (Luther 1539, 147.)
horizontal perception of reality. He turns the criticism towards the critics themselves: Have they rightly understood what it means that God is the Creator? Comprehending the insight of God as Creator would forbid religion from being restricted to a compartment of life. Buthelezi’s outlook thus does not work within the classical division between horizontal and vertical. Assertion of “horizontalism” would actually already break the holistic worldview by admitting that horizontal matters are separated from vertical matters so that they can be talked of as entities of their own. Buthelezi’s approach to faith and salvation is holistic.

Silvo notes that Buthelezi discusses the relation between atonement and liberation only once. According to Silvo, Buthelezi and Boesak both presume that atonement happens only among the liberated. Their outlook coheres with that of the BCM. Silvo quotes Buthelezi:

Atonement/Reconciliation [Versöhnung] between a master and a slave is not an atonement/reconciliation. --- First the oppressor has to be liberated from his urge to oppress. Alike the oppressed have to be liberated from the feeling that their being oppressed is something “normal”. --- Atonement/reconciliation between God and man presupposes God’s saving act. Forgiveness starts from the fact that something happened first: preaching of God’s Word and faith in the proclaimed Word. Forgiveness follows. It is alike with the atonement/reconciliation. One cannot begin with the atonement/reconciliation, before one has gone through other things.

This quotation further ties faith together with works. Reconciliation presupposes liberation from oppression. However, it is noteworthy that Buthelezi discusses reconciliation between people, and only uses reconciliation between God and humanity as an example of what reconciliation in human relations demands. Therefore, he avoids saying that liberation from oppressing and being oppressed is a prerequisite for reconciliation with God. The discussion rather offers a model for Christians and the church by demonstrating what it means to follow God’s way.

The analyses of both Frostin and Silvo point to a functional understanding of the church; the authenticity of a church can be discerned by looking at its fruits. While works get a central position, grace and mercy are more or less implicit in Buthelezi’s writings. There is a similarity between Buthelezi’s Christian struggle in apartheid South Africa (especially in the beginning of his theological career)

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294 Frostin 1988, 142.
295 Silvo 1987, 144.
296 Es bleibt, 463. (Translation mine.)
and Bonhoeffer’s message in Nazi Germany: when grace is reduced to “cheap grace” it loses its meaning in situations of emergency.

5.1.3. Victory at the end

Despite the long-lived and seemingly desperate situation the struggle for liberation is not hopeless. Quite the contrary, Buthelezi’s texts withhold a strong hope and determination: “Victory at the end of the struggle is always a matter of certainty although its actual shape and moment cannot always be determined beforehand.” A struggle in the name of Christ for the liberation of the oppressed will always end victoriously. Christian resurrection hope is directed both to the life after death and to the reality at hand.

Buthelezi maintains that the victory should already be a reality in the world. Suffering and victory belong together in his thinking. Easter and the resurrection symbolize victory, as compared to death which is a symbol of suffering. Death is not the end nor is suffering the fate of the oppressed people. After Good Friday followed Easter morning; just like calvaries are present in society, also victory awaits to be realized in the here and now. Suffering leads to victory. The comprehension of victory as the follow-up for suffering highlights the notion that Christian life should be centered on the example of Christ whose life followed the same pattern.

Buthelezi notes that while the cross has power beyond words, there is a power beyond the cross: the resurrection hope. For him Christianity is, after all the suffering, a fountain of hope.

Buthelezi promises victory for those who have stood on the side of the oppressed in the struggle for their liberation. The church is not a self-evident participant in the victory. Buthelezi’s texts appear to echo the Lutheran teaching of the ecclesia large dicta and ecclesia proprie dicta in the South African context. The argumentation points at an understanding of a sort of an ecclesiola in ecclesia: those in the church who side with the poor constitute the true church. They can be sure about a victory at end of a concrete liberation

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297 Bonhoeffer 1963, 47.
298 In Christ 78, 42.
299 In Christ 78, 42. Grounds, 150.
300 Violence, 53.
301 “Those who are not one in the struggle cannot be one in the celebration of victory at the end of the struggle: or in the celebration of victory that we already can anticipate here and now. A Church that is not one with the oppressed when it comes to taking sides with them in their struggle against the forces of oppression cannot hope to be welcomed by them when they celebrate victory at the end of the struggle.” (In Christ, 333.)
struggle and about their participation in the victory after death because they have accepted God’s acceptance by accepting the others as their sisters and brothers and loving them by struggling for the abolition of the oppressive system. Belonging to the institutional church has no significance as such.

5.2. Liberation of the church

Racism is “a divisive heresy”\textsuperscript{302} and “the golden calf of the church”\textsuperscript{303} that tears the church apart. Buthelezi asserts that race\textsuperscript{304} as such is a beautiful gift God has given humanity but racism turns it into an idol giving race the status of the ultimate. As a heresy\textsuperscript{305} racism is craftier than traditional heresies: it camouflages itself with ecclesiastical symbols and hides itself behind confessions and creeds. It operates in the sphere of \textit{adiaphora}, that is, among issues that are not regarded theologically or confessionally indispensable. These \textit{adiaphora}, however, come to symbolize “a counter-church within the Church of Christ”\textsuperscript{306} The church needs to be liberated from the idolatrous heresy of racism and its by-products.

\textsuperscript{302} Unity, 14.
\textsuperscript{303} Unity, 13.
\textsuperscript{304} The fact that Buthelezi talks about ‘race’ and even of race as God’s gift reveals how deep he himself is in the reality of apartheid and how penetrated his thought after all is by the general spirit of his time. By using the word ‘race’ he accepts the existence of such a category, a fact which in turn makes a racial division of humankind possible even though Buthelezi himself fights against such divisions. Ashley Montagu (1997, 31) maintains in his book \textit{Man’s Most Dangerous Myth – The Fallacy of Race}, first published in 1942, that there is actually no reality that can be called ‘race’, that the category is not biologically but socially constructed. According to Montagu, to speak of ‘race’ is racist.
\textsuperscript{305} Buthelezi uses the concept ‘heresy’ in two different meanings. Here heresy is a negative thing, an ideology opposite to the true gospel. Buthelezi’s other use of the word ‘heresy’ (discussed in chapter 2.3.) perceives it from a positive perspective.

Buthelezi was a part of the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, influencing the movement and being influenced by it. Many churches and theologians across denominational lines declared apartheid a heresy. John de Gruchy and Charles Villa-Vicencio edited a book \textit{Apartheid is a Heresy} (1983) in which they gathered documents from different churches/church bodies from a 30-year-period and addresses from nine theologians. They mention the Cottesloe Consultation and \textit{A Message to the People of South Africa} as two major events in the churches’ struggle against apartheid. They also include the statement of the South African Catholic Bishops’ Conference (1957), the decisions by the LWF (1977), the Alliance of Black Reformed Christians in South Africa (1981) and the WARC meeting (1982) that all rejected apartheid. (De Gruchy & Villa-Vicencio 1983, 144, 145.)

Ellingsen (1993, 152-162) lists statements made by churches and councils in South Africa and abroad to condemn apartheid. He only mentions one declaration in favor of apartheid made by the NGK in 1974. It is also noteworthy that Presbyterian-Reformed and Lutheran churches have issued more statements against apartheid than other denominations. (Ellingsen 1993, 2.)

\textsuperscript{306} Unity, 13-16.
5.2.1. Together in worship and confession

Buthelezi suggests oneness in faith, in struggle and in the victory as the criteria for the oneness of the church. Being one in faith has two main aspects: oneness in worship and in confession. Buthelezi stands against the tendency to separate statements on church unity from the daily life of Christians in South Africa and maintains that the fact that people confess their faith in one church, and yet act as if there were many, unmask the falsity of the so-called unity.\(^{307}\) He strongly questions the oneness of a church that worships God in separate services divided on the basis of political ideologies or race. A worshipping community, the basic unit of the church, should not be divided by any reason other than geographical obstacles. Racial or ideological segregation in worship reveals the disunited state of the church: there is no one church. The god of a community that has withdrawn itself from other believers on the basis of race is not the Father of Jesus Christ but an idol.\(^{308}\)

Buthelezi is against the kind of thinking that fundamentally considers the church to be one and united regardless of the experiences of its members. There are two alternative ways of understanding the problems in church unity: the problems are either due to the failure of Christians to realize the unity satisfactorily or they are a consequence of a lack of unity.\(^{309}\) Buthelezi chooses the latter option: the experienced situation reflects the factual reality behind it. Segregation points to lack of unity rather than to a failure to express an existing unity. The *situation* again receives a central position; *experience* judges the truth of propositions. Unity either exists so that the members of the church can experience it or it does not exist at all. The straightforward demand for a concrete unity arises, at least partially, from the African worldview: according to Buthelezi, the separation of faith claims from daily life might not be as problematic to Europeans as it is to the Africans who experience reality through the idea of the wholeness of life.\(^{310}\) Buthelezi’s demand for concrete unity is in line with the

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\(^{307}\) In Christ78, 33.
According to Hallamaa (1988, 145, 146, 152, 164, 165) the NGK, contrary to Buthelezi and Black Theology, endorsed the reality of separate ethnic churches. Christians were thought to be one in Christ but because of the differences between peoples, based on creation, the one church of Christ was thought to manifest itself among them in the form of separate churches. Atonement was understood to both make the believers one people of God and confirm the diversity of creation with its creational orders, according to which life was to be formed. The equality between believers was thus foremost a spiritual reality and should not be applied as such to society.

\(^{308}\) In Christ78, 34, 35.

\(^{309}\) Structures, 476, 477.

\(^{310}\) Meaning, 103.
Appeal to Lutheran Christians in Southern Africa that FELCSA adopted in 1975. The Appeal abandons an idea of spiritual unity of the church that does not need to be manifested, disclaims separate ethnic worship services, and calls for the biblical criterion of God’s love to have an impact in society.  

The pragmatic approach to unity leaves no room for a metaphysical unity that only exists in confessions and reports or in an abstract sphere unrelated to the life of ordinary people. There basically exists no such sphere since the reality is one. Thereby Buthelezi’s approach to church unity is in line with his preference of existentialist theology over essentialist theology and with his understanding on the wholeness of life.

Again justifying his case by experience Buthelezi compares church unity to friendship:

Those who deliberately shun worshipping together for racial or other political reasons cannot legitimately claim that they belong to one church nevertheless. It is like saying: ‘We hate the experience of being together, but we remain good friends.’ Here friendship is falsely regarded as an inviolable state of human relationship; it belongs to the order of the given and remains only to be expressed.

Like friendship church unity is not a given fact. If the churches are not one in faith (expressed in worship and confession) and struggle (for the liberation of the oppressed), they simply do not belong to one church. Buthelezi also uses language referring to family. Being a member of a family is a different matter than being a friend, since a family remains a family even when fellowship is not felt or practised. The then president of the LWF, Bishop Josiah Kibira, spoke about the suspension of the white South African churches from LWF as a family issue in the Seventh General Assembly. He spelled out what ‘suspension’ means in an African context: “In the African context, suspension does not mean expulsion from a given family or human fellowship. For us, it means temporarily taking away the rights of a family member to show how urgent it is that the member changes his/her life on a certain point.” Contrary to Buthelezi, Kibira’s words hint at an idea of an invisible unity that churches cannot fail by not expressing it. But, although Buthelezi defines Christian unity from a new perspective, he also continues to use the traditional language of the church as a family.

312 In Christ78, 34.
313 E.g. Christianity, 4: “In Christ mankind becomes a family, a brotherhood.”
According to Buthelezi the existence of church divisions is a sinful occurrence:

If we confess that church divisions are a sinful phenomenon, as in fact we must, it is a dangerous form of complacency to leave the impression that no matter what we do, church unity is inviolable and that the only sin we can commit about it is not to give witness to it.\(^\text{315}\)

Connecting the concepts of ‘church unity’ and ‘sin’ raises questions. As has been discussed in chapter three, Buthelezi understands the church to share sinfulness and alienation with the world. Also the church is thus penetrated by sin. It is *simul iustus et peccator*.\(^\text{316}\) Furthermore, if the unity of the church is equated with ‘church’, the statement expects ‘segregation’ and ‘church’ to be mutually exclusive. On the one hand then, it is said that the church shares the sinfulness of the world and, on the other hand, that church unity does not exist where there is segregation. Segregation becomes a sin that is not tolerated.\(^\text{317}\) It remains an open question whether both or only one of the separated churches really belong to the body of Christ.

Even when the church is segregated and does not exist on the institutional level because of being split by the idol of race, the invisible body of Christ continues to exist in the ruins of the racist church:

Heathen shrines, so to speak, have been created in the honour of those gods and called white and black Christian churches. If these words are too strong to swallow, they should at least help to shock us into an awareness of the serious harm done when the church is divided according to race. Here I do not intend to deny theologically that God can create good even with evil circumstances. I do not deny that God has raised sons and daughters even in our segregated church circumstances. God is not deterred by even evil structures to accomplish his goals, but this does not exonerate us from the guilt of creating evil structures. All I am concerned about here is the false identity of the church whose symbols are race and colour.\(^\text{318}\)

To some extent Buthelezi seems to accept an invisible unity of the church, at least on the level of the *ecclesiola*. The quotation implies that his aim in opposing the backers of invisible unity is to wake the church up from its fallacy rather than to make dogmatic statements about the definition of the church. Experience and the existential situation are once again the focal point. Also, whereas Buthelezi’s

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\(^{315}\) Structures, 476.

\(^{316}\) See e.g. Stavanger, 178.

\(^{317}\) Also de Gruchy writes that the divisions visible in the world also exist in the church which is a part of humanity. But “the difference is this, that in the Church these divisions are anathema” (De Gruchy 1974, 132). De Gruchy’s view coheres with that of Buthelezi: segregation in the church is a serious problem that must not be approved even though the sinfulness of the church is admitted.

\(^{318}\) Biblical, 57, 58.
emphasis is often on the acts and behavior of Christians here God’s role as the constitutor of the church is explicitly brought forth. After all, the credibility of the church does not depend exclusively on the behavior of people.

To untangle the situation of disunity in the church Buthelezi calls for a new *confession* to supplement old confessions that have lost their relevance and do not reflect current practice. A conflict between a confession and historical reality demand a rewriting of the confessions so that they would successfully express the reality behind them. Buthelezi presses for a new confession that would list the criteria of the oneness of the church. Buthelezi was not the only one in South Africa to call for a revision of confessions. Different groups wrote new declarations of faith. These groups and individuals restated what Christian faith meant for them. The new confessional documents imply that the aim was not to rewrite the confessions in order for them to correlate with the practice, but to declare anew what unity in Christ means and requires.

For Buthelezi confessions and creeds do not represent an indicator of truth: “It is my firm belief that historical confessions are starting points and types of theological reflection rather than its last word and ultimate summary of truth.” They are attempts to set boundaries for the faith community in specific historical situations. In different environments and new situations old confessions may require revision or supplement in order to remain relevant and credible. If old formulations become but empty words, new formulations are required. The confessions are meant for keeping the church on the right track; empty words cannot affect the decisions the church takes.

Buthelezi demonstrates his stand against the infallibility of confessions and creeds with a Lutheran example: he declares that the Book of Concord is not merely a document listing the fundamentals of the church but also a book that is penetrated by the political, cultural and other such influences of the time and place in which it was written. Its validity as a historical document is not questioned but its role as the indicator of the right dogma is.

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319 In Christ78, 36, 37.
320 See e.g. *A Message to the People in South Africa* (1968) in Hofmeyr & Millard & Froneman 1991, 242-247; the *Belfast Confession* (1968) in [http://www.vgksa.org.za/confessions/belfast_confession.htm](http://www.vgksa.org.za/confessions/belfast_confession.htm); the *Kairos document* (1985) in Hofmeyr & Millard & Froneman 1991, 362-366. The Belfast Confession states: “We believe… that this unity must become visible so that the world may believe that separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups is sin which Christ has already conquered, and accordingly that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the Church and must be resisted.”
321 Structures, 476.
322 In Christ78, 36.
It can be asked whether holding to certain doctrines makes a sufficient basis for ecclesiastical solidarity. Buthelezi thinks such a basis alienates the church from the human level as the church escapes to an ideological world. According to him, confessional solidarity which is based on confessions and doctrines has proved itself inefficient in the Third World context: subscribing to a certain list of dogmas is no proof that one will be accepted as an equal human being if one happens to have brown pigmentation.\textsuperscript{323} Simon Maimela, a South African theologian, illustrates how the race and the color of one’s skin were the actual salvation principles in the apartheid society: they determined one’s position in regard to different rights. Confessing Jesus as Lord did not change the inferior position of a black person.\textsuperscript{324} In this situation Buthelezi calls for different ways of expressing Christian solidarity.

Buthelezi’s and Kistner’s discussion on CA’s article VII\textsuperscript{325} gives a practical example of how confessions are to be understood not as set definitions but as guidelines. They do not discard the CA, but reinterpret it in the context of their country. The thesis is that article VII has been misinterpreted after the time of the Reformation, a fact that has subsequently created problems. Buthelezi and Kistner argue that the aim of article VII was to show that the Reformation was in line with the early church and that it was not written as an exhaustive definition of the true church. Quite the contrary, the seventh article intended to set the minimum criteria for the unity of the church, and thus point to an ecumenical direction. After the time of the Reformation the article has, however, been misunderstood as the definition of a particular church, namely the Lutheran church, a fact that has led to the fading of the once important ecumenical aspect of the article.\textsuperscript{326} Buthelezi considers the definition of the church in the Lutheran confessions to be “contextual and apologetic”. As such it filled the need for which it was written since the Reformers were probably able to anticipate the accusations of destroying church unity. But Buthelezi asks: “It did --- serve the purpose for which it was

\textsuperscript{323} Toward, 70-73.
\textsuperscript{324} Maimela 1994, 189.
\textsuperscript{325} CA VII: “Likewise, they teach that one holy church will remain forever. The church is the assembly of saints in which the gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly. And it is enough for the true unity of the church to agree concerning the teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. It is not necessary that human traditions, rites, or ceremonies instituted by human beings be alike everywhere. As Paul says [Eph. 4:5, 6]: ‘One faith, one baptism, on God and Father…’” (CA 2000, 43.)
\textsuperscript{326} Proclamation, 26.
made. My question is: Does it serve ours?” As already seen in chapter four the “right preaching of the Word” as a characteristic of the church was explained anew in a holistic manner in order for it to serve as a guideline for the church in the apartheid society. The intention thus is not to put the CA aside, but to redefine it so that it relates to the current reality of the church. The situation seems to define what is relevant in the tradition.

5.2.2. Unity on the human level

When Buthelezi criticizes confessions and creeds as the basis for confessional solidarity, he urges the church to define the solidarity in a new way: fellowship is to be sought on the human level. When religion is made abstract, the human being is easily compromised in favor of ideals; clinging to confessions as the divine truth involves the threat of discrediting “the human”. It might be easier to concentrate on theological conceptualizations than real people and their needs.

Very often solidarity on the basis of the profession of allegiance to the common “faith of our fathers” serves as a smokescreen for diverting attention from the patterns of socially and even ecclesiastically entrenched alienation on the human level. Yet genuine oneness in Christ manifests itself best on the level of “naked humanity,” where the masks of “common faith” and “common confessions” as the basis of fellowship are very often removed.

In other words, Buthelezi wants to do away with the church as an institution defined by old official statements and move to the human level where unity and fellowship are experienced in practice. People rather than the dogma come first. The problems that disunity creates on the institutional level of the church might not seem fatal, because they do not restrain the church from running its basic ministry. But when the disunity comes to the human level, “it is a matter of life and death” as it affects the community or even families. A real unity arises from below. Buthelezi concentrates on the fides qua in his definition of unity; the faith that is experienced and expressed judges whether the church is one. If the fides quae is taken as the indicator, there is a threat of the confession becoming “a

327 Structures, 476.
328 Proclamation, 27-30.
330 Toward, 73. Almost the same piece of text already in Creation, 302, 303.
331 “Jesus Christ did not die on the cross for a ‘faith’ or a ‘religiosity’ or an ‘idealism,’ but he died for man” (Creation, 199).
332 “Church unity and mutual acceptance on an institutional level may be seen as a luxury in a sense that the basic ministry of the church can still be carried out even through the agency of divided denominations. But it is a matter of life and death when you begin to think of what denominational divisions and rivalries mean to the religious integrity of the family or local community.” (Mutual, 72.)
smokescreen” that excuses the actual malpractices in the church. Buthelezi’s criticism of the confessions is a criticism of the discontinuation between the *fides qua* and the *fides qua*: they have to agree in order for the confession to be credible. Unity must be generated from and by the members of the church. He maintains that the people are the church. Thus, if the people are one, it means that the church is also one. The question arises again whether there is a church at all if the people are not one.

It is the alienation of both the black and the white from true humanity which is a barrier to the unity of the church. The white have to overcome their perverted perception of reality to realize that a black person is a sister or brother in Christ, equal and worthy. Once they begin to see the other through new eyes, solidarity is possible. The alienation of the black, their distorted image of themselves is also to be mended for unity to be real. Buthelezi does not talk of blacks being racist towards the white. This kind of alienation would also be in the way of unity, even if it was less visible. Once alienation is overcome and unity “on the human level” achieved, the confessions have a realistic basis; then declaring the faith in one, holy, catholic and apostolic church would hold true, also when judged by experience.

Love for the neighbor is a key indicator in judging whether there is unity on the human level. Real unity is a unity which is expressed by accepting the other as a sister or brother in the same community. The consideration of humanity as a criterion for *Christians* belonging together might seem problematic. But even while *human* is emphasized *Christ* remains in the center: what Buthelezi offers as a means to reach unity, is the way of the cross. The foot of Christ’s cross is the place to pursue the unity of the church:

The unity of the church derives from the singularity of the event that led to its creation and the unity of the mission of God in Christ. The cross made Christ the one cosmic rallying point (John 12:32) and one Pentecost gave birth to the one church. --- It is of theological significance that Jesus in his high priestly prayer prayed for the unity of the church – many centuries before the East/West schism or the Reformation took place.333

Christ is the reason for the existence of the church, and therefore, the unity of the church is to be strived for in him. Buthelezi refuses to take shortcuts in the process: the hoped-for unity is not an easy way out, nor is it achieved by giving up one’s ideals and principles.334 Buthelezi’s texts suggest that Christian unity on the

333 Stavanger, 178.
334 Sign, 144.
human level can be attained by concentrating on Christ as the one savior and then following the way of Christ that seeks the wellbeing of the other.

The struggle for the liberation of the neighbor and Christocentricism are in a dialogue in Buthelezi’s thought. Together they define the Christian way. Silvo suggests that Buthelezi’s production implies that it is more important that the liberation struggle is fought following the way of Christ than that the wellbeing of other people is pursued. However, it has become obvious in this study so far that Buthelezi pays a lot of attention to the oppressed of the land and even as he sets Christ as the example for the struggle of the church for the liberation of these people, it appears that for him the concrete liberation of the people is at least as important as is the fact that the struggle is Christocentric. Also, Buthelezi (and Kistner) points out that Jesus can be turned into an idol. Then following his example is not a merit:

When Jesus Christ himself becomes an idol, worship even of him becomes sinful. One characteristic of an idol is that it is a god chosen arbitrarily solely because it serves the petty interests of the worshipper. When Jesus himself is used in the interests of division, he ceases to be the Son of God, the Creator, and becomes a heathen idol.

In the light of this text, following Christ can be judged by the way one acts towards the neighbor. In other words, the wellbeing of the neighbor becomes a criterion for following Christ. The two are not rivals.

5.2.3. The model of King Cyrus

Buthelezi warns the church of lulling itself into a false assurance of its position in God’s plans; if the church proves untrustworthy or ineffective in carrying out the liberating message of Jesus Christ, God will not hesitate to use forces outside the church to implement his will. If the church is occupied with other matters, like racial ideologies, God uses others to realize his historical plans. These other parties might even shape the designs within the church: “God may use forces outside the church in order to liberate the church.” The claim is justified by short references to the Bible: in the Old Testament God called King Cyrus to accomplish his goals when Israel hesitated (Is. 45:1), and in the New Testament Jesus notes that God could raise children to Abraham from stones if he so wanted.

335 Silvo 1987, 152: "Keskeistä tässä lainauksessa [from In Christ – One Community in the Spirit] on Buthelezin tuotannon valossa, että taistelua käyään Kristuksen taistelun mallin mukaisesti eikä se, että lähimmäisen hyvä asetetaan absoluuttisesti etusijalle."
336 Proclamation, 29.
337 Unity, 20.
(Matt. 3:9). Also in South Africa, God could use other forces, maybe the black liberation movement that is not working under a Christian label, to liberate the church that is contaminated by racism. Buthelezi predicts that the church might even be the last haven for racism in a liberated South Africa.\(^{338}\)

In a different context Buthelezi refers to the work for justice that the Jewish community has accomplished in South Africa. He does not propose that the task of unifying the people of South Africa would have been taken away from the church and handed exclusively to the Jews. But he does set pertinent questions:

Is the Jewish faith proving itself more dynamic and relevant to the political and moral problems of South Africa? Under these circumstances is it a desirable thing to encourage the proselytic Christian mission to the Jews in South Africa? Should it not be the other way round?\(^{338}\)

The mere fact that he asks these things shows that the existence of the church has no justification if it does not realize the relevance to the existential situation of the people. Buthelezi does not respond to his own questions. The focal point in the article is not so much the state of the Jewish community than that of the Christian church in the country. However, since he elsewhere refers to “the model of King Cyrus” as one of the possible routes for the liberation of the people of his country, his suggestion of the potential role of the Jews can be a reference to a possible King Cyrus of the 20th century.

The fact that Buthelezi actually asks whether Christians should be proselytized to Judaism rather than vice versa on the basis of the social impact that the faiths have in South Africa confirms his holistic and dynamic understanding of faith: a passive faith is not worth having, a living faith affects its surroundings. The spread of Christianity should be viewed by the amount of people who live their everyday life according to the unique Christian message of fellowship and who also let it transform their social, economic and political surroundings.\(^{340}\)

The fact that Buthelezi questions whether Jews should not be converted to Christianity because of the social fruits of their faith raises the question of the reason for the existence of the church. Is the church only needed for the liberation of the black spirit, for political liberation and as a means of spreading love for one’s neighbors? The question will be discussed under the following subheading.

\(^{338}\) Unity, 20, 21. In Christ78, 41, 42.
\(^{339}\) Daring, 7, 8.
\(^{340}\) Christianity, 4.
5.3. The role of the church in the political liberation process

The renewing power of the gospel is not restricted either to the church or to the liberation of individuals. The church has also been given the task of working for the liberation of the surrounding society from the chains of apartheid. The functional understanding of the church is pronounced: the church exists for a mission and for others.

The Church does not exist for itself but for ministering to South Africa. Therefore what is of primary importance is not just structural change within the Church but how the Church projects itself as a catalyst in changing the thinking and behavior of South Africa’s politicians, economists and citizens.\textsuperscript{341}

Buthelezi emphasizes God’s position as the judge of what is just and good. The church cannot withdraw from the political field or from working for social justice. Buthelezi criticizes those who urge Christians to totally leave politics to politicians.\textsuperscript{342} Just as the human being is a psychophysical entity, so also the church is involved in all aspects of human life. The centrality he gives to social and political problems is characteristic to liberation theology and logical in his context; it also places his thought within the frames of political theology\textsuperscript{343}.

When Buthelezi discusses the need for a new confession, he proposes three points that could further the unity of the church and that could be taken into consideration in a new confession.

\begin{enumerate}
  \item Religious Question: Meaning of faith in God in relation to current ideologies that also require faith commitment, e.g., racism, with its wide range of manifestations.
  \item Political Question: Man who is created in God’s image, and allowed to share God’s dominion over the rest of creation, understood in the context of issues like political oppression of man by man, colonialism, neo-slavery etc.
\end{enumerate}

\textsuperscript{341} Change, 197, 198.
\textsuperscript{342} Change, 198.
\textsuperscript{343} “Ich --- hoffe daß meine Theologie für alle Bereiche des Lebens wichtig ist, einschließlich der politischen Realität” (Afrikaner, 535).

Political theology can be defined in different ways. According to Denys Turner (1996, 654), “the first thing to be understood about political theology is that there is no one theology that goes by the name. There are many varieties even as confined to the contemporary theological world, and many more if one takes into account the long history of doing Christian theology in the light of the ‘political’. The second thing to be understood is that a political theology is not simply the working through of the political \textit{implications} of the theological position which in itself is ‘politically neutral’, as if a political theology consisted in the mere \textit{applications} of theological ideas to the political realm. Political theologies in the contemporary sense start with the political: it is theology done in conscious reflection upon the political, and more broadly social, conditions which feed into its own very constitution as theology.”

Turner (1996, 655, 656) explains that ‘political theology’ is sometimes referred to as a grouping that includes ‘liberation theology’, whereas other times ‘liberation theology’ is understood to be the southern dimension and ‘political theology’ the northern dimension of politically active theology. In the first sense of the concept Buthelezi’s Black theology can be regarded as political theology.
Economic Questions: God as the source of all the gifts for sustaining life understood in relation to the reality of the unequal distribution of God’s gifts entrenched in exploitative economic systems.  

All three points are colored by political problems and aims. The question arises how far is it healthy to combine faith with politics. The points seem to suggest politics as an indicator of church unity. However, Buthelezi does not talk about a certain party program but broad issues that are closely tied to the notion of equality of human beings created by God. The holistic approach to life does not allow the separation of political issues from the church: since political issues affect the lives of people, the church has to speak up when politics oppresses God’s children.

The church has to remain loyal to its unique message of reconciliation also at times when that message is not politically popular: “There may be other ways, but this is the only one which invests the church with Christian identity; otherwise the church will be just one of the political parties.” The church remains distinct compared to the rest of the world so long as it carries out its calling. Although the church plays an important role in political matters because life is a whole, it nevertheless must not become a political party.

The importance of the interplay between the church and society is also apparent in Buthelezi’s consideration of the ecclesiastical situation in South Africa as a status confessionis. He regards the state of affairs to be more serious because the segregation exists not only inside the church but also in the surrounding society that is divided along the same racial lines. A worshipping congregation segregated in the same way as society would attest to the church either having no clear opinion of its own or agreeing with the system. The church should therefore stand out from the rest of society and show it the way out of its destructive state.

It seems that in terms of the liberation of the South African society Buthelezi would be content with the abolition of apartheid and an equal status of people of different colors. His stand is problematic from the point of view that conversion to Christianity has traditionally been understood as an important aim of the gospel. Is Buthelezi less occupied with the salvation of the soul because of

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344 In Christ 78, 36, 37.
345 Stavanger, 179.
346 According to de Gruchy (2005, 187) it was Buthelezi’s initiative that led the LWF to declare (in Dar-es-Salaam in 1977) the situation in South Africa a status confessionis. On the LWF and the status confessionis in South African see chapter 2.2.
347 In Christ 78, 35, 36.
the emergency of the struggle for social liberation or because many of those that are in need of liberation already are believers? Or is the impression due to the nature of the texts, many of which have been written as articles/speeches for specific audiences?

De Gruchy’s argumentation illuminates Buthelezi’s emphasis on the liberation of the nation from the chains of apartheid. According to de Gruchy, the unity of humanity was given in creation but broken by people. Now the unity is present in the church – even if only partially realized – which is called to work for the unity of the whole of creation. Once reconciliation of the whole of humanity is achieved, the church will have accomplished its mission and will not be needed anymore.\footnote{De Gruchy 1974, 131, 132.} De Gruchy’s view of the church as a means for achieving unity in the world supports Buthelezi’s emphasis on the liberation of society, and illustrates the importance of the question of the unity of humanity for South African theologians during the apartheid era. As has become clear in the preceding chapters, Buthelezi considers human existence to consist of an undivided entity. When the church works for justice and unity in the community, it works according to the will of God. Therefore, it can be said that Buthelezi is interested in the salvation of the whole human being.

Buthelezi does not push Christ into the margin while centering social problems as the focal point. As referred to in the introduction, a shift can be discerned in Buthelezi’s theology from a more radical phase in regard to politics and social liberation in the 1970s to a more conventional phase in the mid-1980s. However, both phases are Christocentric. Buthelezi proposes that Christ and the church are the only place for humanity to attain unity: “According to this text [Phil. 2:10-11], the whole universe derives unity and common purpose during the worship and acknowledgement of Christ as Lord.”\footnote{Unity, 13. See also Treasure, 4: “Where people are divided not only on the basis of race and colour, but also of ideology and models for action, you have to portray the church as the only potential rallying point, the only point where people can at least listen together to a common source that transcends their other allegiances and conflicting directions of commitment.”} Buthelezi not only entertains an idea of social liberation and harmony among humanity but also considers Christ as the one who can offer this.

Unity, whether of the church or of humanity, should not mean leveling things up, an ecumenism of conformism. When Christ spoke of being lifted up and all men drawn to himself, he was not predicting some kind of universalism. He was rather setting himself up as the center of the desirable unity of humankind. He was pointing to the way of the cross as the new medium for the healing of the divisions of humankind. His followers were to be
prophetic signs to that way of the cross, God’s chosen way of reconciliation. Hence for the church to be a prophetic sign means to die by pointing away from itself, but to Christ as the rallying point. In other words, Buthelezi proposes that Christ can be the ground for the unity of humanity. The church in itself, on the other hand, cannot. The church can serve as the sign that points to Christ, but in taking this task the church has to be ready to lose its own life. Serving the man of the cross requires giving up the desires for status or fame. But how should the church die? How much can the church give up and still remain a church?

The picture of a dying church that works for the healing of broken humanity refers to sacrificial living. Individuals, groups and individual churches have to be ready to make sacrifices. This is central in Buthelezi as has been seen in chapter four. A Christian is a follower of Christ and to truly follow Christ means to walk with those who suffer in the shadows that repress their wholeness of life. The way of Christ might take the church up to Calvary where it is crucified and killed.

In his presentation on the main theme of the Fifth General Assembly of the WCC (Jesus Christ frees and unites, Nairobi 1975) Dr. Robert McAfee Brown explained that “Jesus frees us from the false securities by which we try to make our lives secure; and positively, he frees us for the possibility of seeing the world through eyes other than our own.” When Buthelezi talks about the need for the church to lose its life, he seems to refer to this kind of dying – or being set free: when a person, or the church, loses one’s life and gives up the need to build one’s status or other such things, one is freed for service after the model of Christ.

Buthelezi quotes Luther’s famous “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all and subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all,” and continues:

This is one way of saying Christ frees and unites. Like Jesus Christ, who demonstrates the lordship over the powers of the world by the way of the cross, the Christian manifests his new freedom by reaching out to others and offering himself as a gift to them.

In this context, the readiness of the church to die can be understood to point to the death of the institution or to the required readiness of the church to lose the appreciation of the world. The loss of a Christian identity or faith is not proposed.

350 Sign, 144. Italics mine.
351 In Christ78, 42.
353 WA 7, 21, 1-4.
354 People, 91.
However, Buthelezi does not set limits to how far the dying can or should go. Probably there are no absolute limits to the extent of dying. But since the appreciation of the existential situation is important to Buthelezi, the limits in each time and place can be understood to be found in that situation. Nevertheless, dying cannot happen at the expense of the gospel and the example of Christ.

The dying church is called to be a prophetic sign, a fact that has a political dimension. In his speech at the Eighth General Assembly of the LWF Buthelezi drew attention to the situation in which the Reformers began the Reformation. The church was deeply involved in politics. The church is not to become a solid part of the political machinery but to remain a prophetic voice in the wilderness.

Or are we praying that God’s kingdom should come on earth in such a way that the ministry of the church makes an impact on all levels of life including the social, economic and political levels? --- We need to remember that it was precisely this kind of a church that the Reformers challenged with the message of the gospel. --- It was the era of Christendom. --- It occurs to me that whichever way the church turns, there are mines in all the fields. It seems as if the safe thing to do is for the ecclesiastical boat not to tarry too long in any power-port of call; it must continually be on a prophetic move, otherwise sooner or later some power mine will blow it to pieces.355

The church must not get involved in politics in a way in which it loses its freedom and comes under threat of betraying or leveling the gospel.

Especially the black Christians should become a prophetic voice in South Africa. If the 18 million black citizens would speak out together the gospel of Christ and proclaim, “thus says the Lord”, the impact could be tremendous. Buthelezi notes that there are only 3 million whites and because the mission of liberation has been left to a few white liberals, the gospel has not had a notable influence. There is a time to minister quietly through physical presence, and there is a time to minister using prophetic words. “There is no act as cowardly as sitting quietly when it is time to stand up, speak and be counted.”356 The church is called to establish a prophetic presence in the apartheid society. Through it Christ can incarnate in South Africa; he can become real and relevant in the situation at hand.357

Buthelezi’s political aspirations do not include violence like some other liberation theologies. The cross is a cross of suffering for the sake of change and not a cross on which the enemy is crucified. He states explicitly: “Violence is inconsistent with the spirit of the gospel of Christ. --- The church should be a

355 For Life, 36, 37.
356 Presence, 7.
357 Presence, 7.
peace maker and not a party in the business of violence.” The church should offer
a negotiation table to the different sides of the South African crisis.\textsuperscript{358}

\textsuperscript{358} Violence, 54, 55.
VI CONCLUSION

Buthelezi clearly does not aim at creating an ecclesiology of his own. His goal is to influence the concrete situation around him. Theology works as a tool as Buthelezi applies his theological knowledge into the situation. Therefore, his theological rhetoric is at times stronger than what is characteristic to academic theology in general. This study has dealt with three main themes explaining and analyzing Buthelezi’s outlook on what is required for the church to be credible in an oppressive situation.

First, the church has to embrace the wholeness of life. Buthelezi draws the notion of the wholeness of life from African tradition in which religion was considered to be inseparable from the rest of human existence. Religion was present in all that people did; therefore it was impossible to talk about religion as an entity in itself apart from other aspects of life. The wholeness of life is not only an African but also a biblical idea that is reflected for instance in the Hebraic conception of a corporate personality that in turn is the background to the New Testament understanding of the body of Christ. According to Buthelezi, even Luther’s doctrine of two kingdoms promotes a conception of life as one whole. The doctrine of creation backs Buthelezi’s emphasis on the wholeness of life, the appreciation of the ‘world’ and the equality of humanity. The outstanding source for Buthelezi’s concept of the wholeness of life, however, is the African tradition.

Buthelezi takes the African ‘wholeness of life’ into the ecclesiastical field considering the concept to be a postulate for ecclesiology. The church must not form a spiritual reality within the worldly reality but take the ordinary life seriously. Life has a sacramental nature as God encounters humanity in the structures of life. The church should express holistic Christianity.

The experience of the African person is alienation from the wholeness of life. The mission churches introduced South Africa to Christianity which did not embrace impilo (the Zulu word for ‘the wholeness of life’). Subscribing to the new religion led the convert into a situation where he lived in two realities, the Christian and the traditional, a fact that in turn inflicted alienation from impilo on him. Like other African theologians, Buthelezi calls for the right of the African person to be an African Christian. The church in Africa must not be a copy of the European way of life.

Black South Africans did not experience alienation only in the church but also in society in which economic and political oppression prevailed, increasingly
so after the implementation of apartheid in 1948. Buthelezi emphasizes that the wholeness of life constitutes of spiritual as well as material aspects. Neither one should be neglected.

The relation between the church and the world was discussed in relation to the notion of impilo. Buthelezi maintains that the church shares solidarity with the world in sin and under the lordship of Christ. Despite the fact that the church is a part of the sinful world, it is also called to bring the world the message of reconciliation between humanity and God and among people. The church has accepted the forgiveness of God in Christ. Because the message of forgiveness is meant for the whole creation, Buthelezi emphasizes an open relationship between the church and the world. The two are bound together within the same reality, even as the solidarity between them has to remain critical. When the church ministers to the world in need, the church does not help the world from above but shares the same reality under the lordship Christ. Christ is the lord of the whole creation, not only the church.

Secondly, like other liberation theologies also Buthelezi’s Black Theology uses the incarnation of Christ as a source of inspiration. He calls for the church to become incarnate in the situation that people live in. Incarnation and the wholeness of life are closely related: both require the church to take ordinary people seriously. If the church is not incarnate, the members will become alienated from the wholeness of life as their existential situation does not have a place in the church. The church must become the people, so that it truly lives and struggles among them.

Buthelezi’s writings strongly imply that the people constitute the church. In line with other theologians from the Third World context, he urges the institution of the church to give room for the believers. People are the body of Christ in and through which the gospel is incarnated in the world. They carry out this mission under the lordship of Christ.

While the people are the church, institutional structures have a role if they serve the gospel and people; in itself the institution has no value. The structures will serve the people so long as the institution is an incarnation of the gospel – and not that of racism as Buthelezi accuses the church in South Africa of having been. The incarnation of the gospel in the church happens in two directions. Firstly, the gospel needs to be preached in words understandable to those listening, and
secondly, it also has to be preached through the body. Being physically present has a sacramental character.

The church must be ready to suffer, and as a consequence of the requirement of incarnation, it is bound to suffer. The church incarnate logically cannot remain intact in a situation where people experience pain and agony. But suffering in itself has no intrinsic value. For suffering to be redemptive it must follow Christ’s example. Like Christ suffered so that humanity could be liberated from sin and alienation, redemptive Christian suffering aims at setting the oppressed free. Buthelezi echoes a Lutheran theology of the cross. His understanding of the cross is however more occupied with the concrete goal of suffering than Luther’s. The way of the cross is an action model for the church.

In general, Christ is the exemplar for the church. The church can discern what is required from it by looking at its Lord who became truly human and, furthermore, bore the burdens of those he encountered. He became vulnerable even to the point of losing his life. Similarly the church is called to be a servant of the suffering. It must not strive to achieve merit for itself but rather forget its own interests and concentrate on the needs of the oppressed. The church is not an end in itself but a means of God’s action in the world.

Thirdly, the church is called to strive for the liberation of people, the church and society. Buthelezi is loyal to the ideas of the wholeness of life and incarnation in understanding liberation holistically. The dialectics between horizontal and vertical are therefore not of interest to him. Echoing Tillich’s correlation method, but also paralleling the emphasis of other Third World theologians, Buthelezi takes the existential situation of the people to be the starting point for liberation and the ministry of a credible church. The agony the black experienced in South Africa can be summarized in the question “But God, why did you create us black?” The gospel responds to the existential questions that people ask.

In agreement with many other South African theologians, Buthelezi argues that the church that is wounded by apartheid, divided colorwise and penetrated by worldly ideologies needs liberation. According to Buthelezi as well as the LWF, the apartheid situation constituted a status confessionis. The church had to be liberated into embodying true fellowship of all believers. Buthelezi urges church unity on the human level. Unity has to be concrete and experienced by the members of the church. Unity that only occurs on the level of ecclesiastical
statements is false as long as it does not manifest itself in the life of the congregations.

The confessions must also reflect the concrete unity. They, like church structures, do not need to be preserved unchanged. The confessions are to be renewed if they no longer speak relevantly in the current situation. The requirement for concrete unity is in line with the requirement for incarnation: for something to be true about the church, it must be true on the human level, in the concreteness of everyday life.

The church is responsible for fighting for the liberation of society. Buthelezi maintains that the church exists for ministering to South Africa. God is in charge of all the dimensions of life, also the political. Buthelezi understands the Lutheran two kingdoms doctrine not to exclude God from the political sphere. However, the church is not to dominate the rest of society. The role of the church is to affect politics as a prophetic sign. The solidarity that it shares with the world must remain critical. The discussion on the political aspect of the church highlights Buthelezi’s functional understanding of the church.

Victory at the end of the liberation struggle is a matter of certainty, both in the here and now and beyond the border of death. The true church will be liberated. Buthelezi’s texts imply that those who side with the oppressed constitute an ecclesiola, or the true church.

The cross of Christ is the ultimate point for the unity of the church and the whole of humanity. Christ is not only an example in the liberation struggle but also the Lord, the foot of whose cross offers a ground for unity. The fellowship of believers appears as the essence of the gospel. It stems from the fact of God’s acceptance of the sinner. The sinner’s acceptance of God’s acceptance includes accepting all those who God accepts. Fellowship is the unique message that Christ offers in the oppressive and racist situation.

As all the three concepts, the wholeness of life, incarnation and liberation show, according to Buthelezi, a lot of the credibility of the church in an oppressive situation depends on how well people follow God’s will and Christ’s example. The experience is the judge of the credibility. The gospel of Christ becomes relevant through the people. Buthelezi talks less about how God’s Word constitutes the church. However, he also embraces the idea of God’s hidden way, more so towards the 1980s. God can work even through the ruins of a racist
institution. Also, the way of the cross does not always appear as efficacious in the eyes of the world.

Due to the central position Buthelezi gives to the existential situation and experience of the people and, on the other hand, to Christ as the example for a Christian and the church, his understanding of the church can be labeled *existential-Christocentric*. The definition reveals two important poles in his ecclesiological thinking. The first pole, the importance of the existential situation, calls for the appreciation of the human level: the church must grow from below. It also covers the notion of the wholeness of life as it points to the fact that the whole human experience is important. The second pole, Christocentricism, involves the aspects of incarnation and suffering as action models of Christ and liberation as the goal of his suffering. It urges the church to look at its Lord and to discern what he would do. Following Christ means following a concrete way of love and the cross. Christ also offers the ground for the unity of humanity. As this study has shown, Buthelezi’s ecclesiological thought moves within a space framed by these poles.

The requirements of a credible church pose a challenge to the universal church. What would it mean for the church to be existential-Christocentric in the 21st century? Buthelezi’s address urges the church to take the questions of the AIDS-orphan in Kampala and the long-term-unemployed in Helsinki seriously, to truly listen to the questions of the people and search for answers that are not determined beforehand with the people in the gospel of Christ. The demand for the church to become the people of Soweto can be understood to embrace all the oppressed people. Being a church incarnate requires the church to identify with those who have been left out, and to follow Christ’s example requires the church to strive to lift them up.

Buthelezi’s argumentation on the church calls the church *to be the people*. When a person is given the status as a true building block of the church, he or she becomes important. Nobody exists simply for others to live out their calling to minister to the poor. A person is not the target for something, even something good, simply coming from the outside. The church consists of people each of whom is a *causa efficiens*. 
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANC</td>
<td>African National Congress</td>
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<tr>
<td>BCM</td>
<td>Black Consciousness Movement</td>
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<tr>
<td>BPA</td>
<td>Black Parents Association</td>
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<td>CA</td>
<td>Confessio Augustana</td>
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<tr>
<td>CI</td>
<td>Christian Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>CWME</td>
<td>Commission on World Mission and Evangelism</td>
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<tr>
<td>DRC</td>
<td>Dutch Reformed Church</td>
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<tr>
<td>EATWOT</td>
<td>Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians</td>
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<tr>
<td>ELCSA</td>
<td>Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FELCSA</td>
<td>Federation of Evangelical Lutheran Churches in South Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LWF</td>
<td>Lutheran World Federation</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGK</td>
<td>Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NHK</td>
<td>Nederduitse Hervormde Kerk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NUSAS</td>
<td>National Union of South African Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAC</td>
<td>Pan African Congress</td>
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<tr>
<td>SACC</td>
<td>South African Council of Churches</td>
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<tr>
<td>SASO</td>
<td>South African Students Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spro-cas</td>
<td>Study Project on Christianity in Apartheid Society</td>
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<tr>
<td>TRC</td>
<td>Truth and Reconciliation Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe. Weimar 1883-</td>
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<tr>
<td>WARC</td>
<td>World Alliance of Reformed Churches</td>
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<td>WCC</td>
<td>World Council of Churches</td>
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