

Images of God in the South African Kairos Document (1985)

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Dates:

Received: 07 June 2025

Accepted: 18 July 2025

Published: 23 Oct. 2025

How to cite this article:

Landman, C., 2025, 'Images of God in the South African Kairos Document (1985)', *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 81(1), a10863. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v81i1.10863>

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The South African Kairos Document (KD) was written, signed and published in 1985 by an ecumenical group of theologians and concerned laity. In 2025, the KD is commemorating four decades since its publication. This article explored the images of God in the KD, which has not been done before in any academic publication. It furthermore attempted to understand these images against the background of that time by comparing them with the God images of two other documents of the same time, the Belhar Confession (BC) of the (then) Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) and the *Kerk en samelewing* or *Church and Society* (CS) of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC). This study found: (1) In KD and the BC, God is portrayed by means of present tense verbs – as active, intervening, taking sides and correcting. In *Church and Society*, God is passively caught up in noun constructions, such as 'the Kingdom of God'. When God is used in conjunction with a verb, the verb is in the past tense, referring to God's actions in the Bible. (2) In all three documents, God is portrayed as transcendental, but in KD and the BC, God is portrayed as immanent—as co-suffering with the oppressed. (3) All three documents portray God as male. (4) KD and the BC portray God mainly in terms of the contextual issues of the time, such as justice, peace and reconciliation, using various strands of liberation theology. CS uses salvation history and a theology of predestination to determine God's will for present times, arguing that God's will has never changed for his chosen people since biblical times. (5) While KD and the BC refer to God in terms of the New-Testament God of love and justice, CS often refers to the God of the Old Testament.

Contribution: All three documents show a preference to refer to God rather than to Jesus Christ who is only mentioned in reference to reconciliation.

Keywords: South African Kairos Document; Belhar Confession; *Church and Society* or *Kerk en samelewing*; images of God; Dutch Reformed Mission Church; uniting the Reformed Church in Southern Africa; the Dutch Reformed Church.

Introduction

Aim

During 1985 and 1986, a variety of theological documents were published in reaction to the political situation in South Africa when a State of Emergency was declared by the *apartheid* regime on 20 July 1985. This article deals with the South African Kairos Document (KD) of September 1985. The images of God in the KD will be compared with two other documents which were issued within the next year. The three documents that will be compared are:

- The South African KD that was composed and signed by a group of concerned South Africans, including theologians, and published on 25 September 1985 in Johannesburg, South Africa;
- The Confession of Belhar (CB) (1986) that was accepted by the (then) Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) (1986) at their Synod in Belhar on 26 September 1986; and
- *Church and Society* (CS) (*Kerk en samelewing* [KS]) that was accepted by the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) at their Synod in October 1986.

The aim of this article is to profile the images of God portrayed in the KD, which will be done in the first part of the article. To understand the use of these images at this particular point in time, it will – in the second part of the article – be compared with the images of God used in the CB (DRMC) and the CS (DRC). These documents are supported by a variety of theological positions (Pietism, Liberation Theology, *status quo* theology, Black Theology, Prophetic Theology, contextual theology, etc.) that all have their origin in missionary theology but are different in their contextual

Note: The manuscript is a contribution to the themed collection entitled 'The Kairos Document for Contemporary Crisis', under the expert guidance of guest editors Prof. Gift Tlharihani Baloyi and Prof. Eugene Baron.

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expression in the middle-1980s. Studying their use of the images of God will highlight these differences and similarities.

As stated, the focus of this article will be on the 40-year-old KD of 1985. The other two documents have been chosen for this study since they stem from the same period and are relevant for comparison. While the KD was written by an ecumenical group of church leaders and committed laity, the CB is a church document of the (then) DRMC, now the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa. The CS or KS is a position statement by the (white) DRC, a church both Kairos and Belhar reacted to as a result of their State Theology.

Introductory statistics

Although the main part of this article will offer an analysis of the contents and references of the words and phrases used for 'God' in the KD, an introductory and cursory overview will be provided of how often these words and phrases are used in all three the mentioned documents.

In the KD (1985:1–29) the designation 'God' appears 73 times. In 27 of these, God is acting, that is, God as an actor is provided with a verb, such as 'God issues a challenge'; 'God will not permit'; 'the peace God wants'; 'God will intervene'; 'God redeems'; 'God takes sides with the oppressed'. The verbs are notably all in the present tense as God is portrayed as acting in the present. These God-verb constructions constitute more than a third of the God-references. References are also made to the false god (of the state, 10 times), the godless (3 times) and the enemy of God (3 times). More passive ways of referring to God occur in phrases such as 'the Word of God' (4 times), 'in the name of God' (6 times), and 'the Kingdom of God' (once). Names given to God in the KD are 'Yahweh', 'Liberator', 'Almighty God' and 'God of the Bible'. The KD only refers three times to 'Jesus Christ', 11 times to 'Jesus' and six times to 'Christ'. There is one reference to the 'anti-Christ'.

While the KD fills about 29 printed A4 pages, the CB (Belhar Confession 1986/2017) covers only four pages. In the latter there are 24 references to 'God', while more than half of them is to God as actor, for example 'God has entrusted the church ...'; 'God has revealed Godself'; 'God brings justice', and 'God supports the down-trodden'. Again, the verbs associated with God are in the present tense. Passive references to God are mainly to the 'people of God', the 'will of God', and 'God's life-giving Word and Spirit'. There is one reference to the 'ungodly'. In comparison to the 24 references to 'God', the CB refers 11 times to Jesus (Christ) and four times to the (Holy) Spirit.

Church and Society (Algemene Sinode van die Ned Geref Kerk 1986:1–63) is a document of more than 60 pages in A5 format; therefore almost twice as long as the KD and at least 15 times longer than the BC. It contains 204 references to 'God', 57 to Jesus (Christ) and 19 to the Holy Spirit. In only

29 references to 'God', he (*sic*) is an actor, usually in performing deeds of salvation such as 'God has chosen Israel', 'God calls his people', 'God reconciles' and 'God concludes a covenant'. However, most of the God-verb-constructions are in the past, referring to God's actions in the Bible. Passive references are to the 'will of God' (9 times); the 'Word of God' (14 times), the 'Kingdom of God' (5 times), Christians as the 'image of God' (15 times), and to the 'people of God' (volk van God 17 times). God is also called 'Yahweh' (3 times); the 'triune God' (8 times), 'Father' (6 times) and once the 'God of the less privileged'.

Research questions

From this cursory overview of the usage of the images of God in the three documents under discussion, the following five research questions are formulated:

- *Do the active and passive portrayal of God refer to different ways in which the liberation and state theologies of the time viewed God?*
- *Is God portrayed as transcendental (controlling) or immanent (co-suffering) to human beings? How is the relationship regarded between God and 'God's people'?*
- *Is God portrayed as male or female? Do these documents, and especially the KD, contain African images of God?*
- *How is God portrayed vis-à-vis?*
- *the contextual issues of the mid-1980s, such as justice, peace and reconciliation? What are the theologies that support these views of God?*
- *Is the God portrayed in these documents primarily the Old Testament warrior-like God, or the New Testament God of love, justice and peace? Why are there many references to 'God' as opposed to the relatively few references to Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit?*

Literature review and unique contribution

No publications, academic or secular, could be found that dealt with the images of God in the South African KD, although scant references to God are made in some of the academic articles on the KD, in which the theologies informing the KD are discussed.

In 1987, shortly after the publication of the KD in 1985 and a revised version published in 1986, two of its self-acknowledged authors, Albert Nolan and Bonganjalo Goba, published academic articles on aspects of the KD. Nolan (1987) wrote on 'The Eschatology of the KD' and presents an image of God as active and interventional in the *kairos*, that is, the present crisis. Nolan draws this image of godly activity from the Old Testament prophets: 'God is directly involved in the changing times. God speaks loudly and clearly through this crisis or that conflict or some victory over the forces of evil' (Nolan 1987:63). Nolan (1987:64) defines the *eschaton* as a time when God is going to do a new thing (Is 43:19). Nolan therefore interprets the crisis addressed by the KD as pointing forward to the *eschaton* and liberation.

Goba (1987:313) explains in his article 'The KD and its implications for liberation in South Africa' the insight of the KD that liberation is only possible after a critical social analysis of the present situation has been made and an appropriate theological response is formulated, as the KD set itself out to do. According to Goba (1987:317), this analysis will show that the god of the *apartheid* state is false and that the real God becomes apparent from the 'vision of God held by oppressed Christians'. This is according to 'a biblical understanding that the God of the Bible always sides with the oppressed' (Goba 1987:322). According to a later article by Johannes Smit (2023:2), 'Bonganjalo Goba and the challenge of Black Theology', Goba views Black Theology as South Africa's Liberation Theology. Black Theology is based on Black Consciousness, which is not equal to African Theology, which is ethnographic, but is the Theology for black people in a specific situation of oppression. Black Theology, based on the Black Consciousness of South African Blacks, is the theology underlying the KD.

Since 2010, articles on the KD have tried to determine anew what the theology of the KD is. Vuyani Vellem (2010:1010) discusses Kairos Theology as Prophetic Theology in his article 'Prophetic Theology in Black Theology, with special reference to the KD'. Prophetic Theology is a trajectory of Black Theology. As such it is firstly a contextual theology, reacting to the crisis of the time, and secondly a confessing theology that confesses that apartheid is a sin against God and that Jesus Christ is Lord of all. Black people have always been excluded 'in the discourse of God-talk' (Vellem 2010:4) and a contextual Prophetic Theology, as discussed in the KD, put the record straight.

Buttelli (2012) discusses Kairos Theology as Public Theology in his article 'Public Theology as Theology on Kairos: The South African KD as a model of Public Theology'. Herein, he states '[P]ublic [T]heology is a new way of doing theology, which emerges from the [L]iberation [T]heology tradition' (Buttelli 2012:101). A Prophetic Public Theology, such as that of the KD, therefore aligns Liberation Theology to its context of crisis (Buttelli 2012:105). The Prophetic Theology of the time exposes the tyranny of the State to which God is opposed since God takes sides in the political struggle in which the people of God must engage alongside God (Buttelli 2012:95). Le Bruyns (2015), too, explains Kairos Theology as Public Theology in his article 'The rebirth of Kairos Theology and its implications for Public Theology and citizenship in South Africa'. As a Public Theology, it is a '[P]rophetic [T]heology for a time of struggle' (Le Bruyns 2015:461). Both Buttelli and Le Bruyns masterfully argue for the relevance of the KD for the democratic South Africa of today, based on the KD's ability to be a Public Theology for times that need a critical theological input.

Gabriel Ndhlovu (2016) questions the relevance of the KD for democratic South Africa in his article 'The theology of

truth and social justice in the present context: An examination of the relevancy of the KD 30 years after its draft'. He criticises the KD on two points. He (2016:77) pleads for peaceful civil disobedience as opposed to the KD's call for radical public action, and points to the need to address black-on-black violence, and not only white-on-black violence, as far as reconciliation is concerned. Demaine Solomons (2020), on the other hand, praises the KD in the article 'Re-examining a Theology of Reconciliation: What we learn from the KD and its pedagogical implications', for insisting that reconciliation is not possible without justice, and for depicting God as not neutral in the struggle for liberation (2020:5).

This article's contribution is the systematic, albeit limited, exploration of the uses of the images of God in the KD, which is missing from the literature. Comparing the KD with contemporary documents, such as the CB (DRMC) and the CS (DRC), as it is explored in this article, is even more unlikely to be found in academic research.

Research methods and design

Content analysis is used in this article and focuses on:

- The frequency of the use of terminology for the (Christian) divine,
- the active God-verb-constructions and the passive God-noun-constructions in the text, and
- the significance of the latter in the different theologies that underlie the KD, the CB and the CS.

This technique is applied to identify 'replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use' (Krippendorff 2018:24), allowing researchers to derive meaningful insights from text or other forms of communication.

Images of God in the South African Kairos Document

Chapter 1: The moment of truth

The South African KD consists of a preface, five chapters and a conclusion. In the preface the process is described, which led to the publication of the KD on 25 September 1985 in Johannesburg. There are no references to God in this preface.

The first chapter consists of about 500 words and introduces the concept of *kairos* and how the KD has not only been necessitated by the crisis situation in South Africa, but also ordered by God himself. There are two references to God in this chapter, and in both God is active in the calling for a *kairos* document. Firstly, 'God issues a challenge to decisive action', and secondly, it is God who offers an opportunity, a *Kairos*, which needs to be taken (Lk 19:44). There is one reference to Jesus in 'Jesus wept over Jerusalem'.

In terms of the research questions, God, as portrayed in the first chapter, is active in demanding action. God is transcendental, not genderised as male or female, and deeply involved in the contextual issues of the time. Moreover, God is portrayed as the Lucan God who calls the 'church' to act against injustice (Kairos Document 1985:3–4).

Chapter 2: Critique of State Theology

The second chapter of the KD offers a critique of State Theology, the theology of the South African *apartheid* State that justifies the *status quo* of racism, capitalism and totalitarianism that especially oppresses the poor. This chapter consists of about 2000 words. It especially criticises 'the use that is made of the name of God'. It uses 'God' and 'god' 29 times, of which nine references are to the idol god of the State. It refers to the Second Coming of Christ once. No references are made to Jesus or Jesus Christ (Kairos Document 1985:4–10).

Chapter 2.1 Romans 13:1–7

This first subsection deals with the State Theology's use of Romans 13:1–7 to oppress resistance against the State. It refers to God seven times, mainly as an actor, that is, as the God who 'does not': 'God does not demand obedience to oppressive rulers', and 'God will not permit his unfaithful servant to reign forever' (Kairos Document 1985:5–7).

Chapter 2.2 Law and order

In this subsection, there are two references to God, both stating that obedience must be to God alone, and not to a State that blesses injustices (Kairos Document 1985:7–8).

Chapter 2.3 The threat of Communism

Here it is stated that the South African State has created an enemy and calls it 'Communism'. In this subsection there are no references to God (Kairos Document 1985:8).

Chapter 2.4 The God of the State

This subsection deals with the abuse of the name of God, especially in the South African Defence Force and the preamble to the *apartheid* Constitution. There are nine references to God, that is, the God of the Bible, the Almighty God and God's holy name. There are also nine references to god, the idol of State Theology. In this subsection, neither God nor god is used in an active sense, but in noun constructions to distinguish the true God as the 'God of the Bible' from the false god of casspirs¹, hippos, teargas, rubber bullets, sjamboks (a whip, often made from wild animal hides), prison cells and death sentences.

In terms of the research questions, the second chapter of the KD, which deals with State Theology, portrays God as the

1. Casspirs are Mine Resistant Ambush Protected Vehicles (MRAPs) initially designed and used by the South African Police (SAP) and South African Defence Force (Venter 2017).

God of the Bible that demands action against the false god of the State. God is transcendental, neither male or female, outspokenly contextual and speaks with the voice of the Gospel of Luke (Kairos Document 1985:8–10).

Chapter 3: Critique of 'Church Theology'

This chapter criticises 'Church Theology', that is, the theologies of a majority of 'English-speaking churches'. These churches use stock phrases to plead for reconciliation, peace, justice and non-violence, and deliberately do not call the church to transforming action. The chapter is a third longer than the previous one on State Theology and comprises about 3000 words. It contains 12 references to God and four to Jesus (Kairos Document 1985:10–17).

Chapter 3.1 Reconciliation

This subsection depicts the present conflict of that time in South Africa in binary terms as one between God and the devil. God is portrayed as active in wanting peace that 'is based upon truth, repentance, justice and love'. Reference is made to the Lukan Jesus (Lk 12:51), who rejects false peace (Kairos Document 1985:10–12).

Chapter 3.2 Justice

In this subsection, the notion of Church Theology that justice can be brought about by reform determined by the oppressor is rejected. There are only three references to God, but God is portrayed as powerfully active in bringing about true justice, that is, God's justice, as was done during the Exodus:

God will bring about change through the oppressed as he did through the oppressed Hebrew slaves in Egypt. God does not bring his justice through reforms introduced by the Pharaohs of this world. (Kairos Document 1985:12–14)

Chapter 3.3 Non-violence

In its critique of Church Theology for its stance on non-violence, this subsection makes no reference to God. It dismisses the idea that when Jesus says to turn the other cheek, it is a command not to defend oneself (Kairos Document 1985:14–16).

Chapter 3.4 The fundamental problem

According to the KD, the fundamental problem with Church Theology is their spirituality that urges them to sit and wait for God to intervene. The KD is of the opinion that human beings themselves should answer to God's call to intervene instead of simply sitting and praying. A biblical spirituality includes people in God's redemptive will to redeem his whole creation.

In terms of the research questions, chapter three of the KD portrays God as one taking action and prompting the passive churches towards action, as God has fought for justice with Moses in the Exodus. God is neither male nor female and is again very contextually involved.

God revealed himself in the active spirituality of both the Old and the New Testaments (Landman 2009) (Kairos Document 1985:16–17).

Chapter 4: Towards a Prophetic Theology

The fourth chapter of the KD deals with Prophetic Theology as opposed to both State Theology and Church Theology. It contains about 2500 words and refers to God 13 times, incidentally mainly in noun constructions, in order to give a 'new' image to God as opposed to the other theologies (Kairos Document 1985:18–25).

Chapter 4.1 Social analysis

The KD authors set themselves to the task of basing their Prophetic Theology on a thorough social analysis of the present situation in South Africa. Again, it is the Lukan Jesus (Lk 12:56) who warns us to interpret the *kairos*. The KD regards the present situation not as exclusively racist but as economic, as a conflict between the interests of the haves and the have-nots. God is not mentioned in this analysis (Kairos Document 1985:18–19).

Chapter 4.2 Oppression in the Bible

In describing oppression – and liberation – in the Bible, the KD (Kairos Document 1985:19–20) involves God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. The KD strongly emphasises that God is the liberator of the oppressed. In this, the KD constantly uses images and quotes from the Old Testament. God is Yahweh, 'the one who has compassion on those who suffer and who liberates them from their oppressors'. God is the God of the Exodus, who did not try to reconcile Moses and Pharaoh but liberated the oppressed from the oppressor. Furthermore, the Old Testament, in the words of Psalm 103:6, depicts God as the one who does what is right and 'is always on the side of the oppressed'. The Lukan Jesus, whom the KD points out was also a victim of oppression on the cross himself, expressed himself in the words of Isaiah to be a liberator under the influence of the Spirit of the Lord:

The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to set the down-trodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favour. (Lk 4:18–19)

Chapter 4.3 Tyranny in the Christian tradition

In this subsection, the State and its tyrannical behaviour are not only depicted as the enemy of the people but also as the enemy of God. People are made in the image of God and oppressing them turns the State into God's enemy. For emphasis, the expression 'enemy of God', referring to the State, is used four times in the concluding paragraphs of this subsection (Kairos Document 1985:20–23).

Chapter 4.4 A message of hope

In this section, hope is captured in the repeated phrase 'God is with us' (Immanuel). However, in this intersection, the

main role goes to Jesus. For the first time in the KD – that is, 80% into the document – reference is made to Jesus Christ in the sentence 'At the very heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ and at the very centre of all true prophecy is a message of hope'. It is Jesus who taught us to speak of this hope as the coming of God's kingdom, the KD claims. This subsection, and the chapter as a whole, is concluded with the warning that 'we must participate in the cross of Christ if we are to have the hope of participating in his resurrection'. This warning, that suffering precedes liberation, introduces the next chapter on action that needs to be taken physically by the church in order to gain liberation.

In terms of the research questions, chapter 4 of the KD presents new images of God in comparison to the unjust god of State Theology and the passive God of Church Theology. The God of Prophetic Theology is an active liberator as revealed in the Old Testament by the Exodus, the prophets, the wisdom literature and the name 'God is with us' (Immanuel), and in the New Testament by the Lukan Jesus and Christ on the cross. God, as siding with the poor, takes on immanent features as opposed to the strictly transcendental images of God elsewhere in the KD. God is neither male or female, and still very contextual. Prophetic Theology brings hope, but liberation will only come after the struggle for justice has been won (Kairos Document 1985:23–25).

Chapter 5: Challenge to action

Chapter 5, the last chapter of the KD, calls for the church to participate in the struggle. Seven references are made to God, being actively leading and demanding this struggle, and a call is made to the church to obey, and follow God in this. The chapter is about 1000 words long (Kairos Document 1985:25–28).

Chapter 5.1 God sides with the oppressed

God is always on the side of the oppressed (Ps 103:6 once again), and their cause is God's cause. The church can only affect reconciliation when God and Jesus Christ (here used for the third and last time in the KD) are involved with the poor and oppressed and it gets acknowledged (Kairos Document 1985:25–26).

Chapter 5.2 Participation in the struggle

Christians are called to participate in the struggle for liberation and a just society. This comes at a price and includes consumer boycotts and stayaways. God is not mentioned in this subsection in which the church is encouraged 'to move beyond a mere "ambulance ministry" to a ministry of involvement and participation' (Kairos Document 1985:26).

Chapter 5.3 Transforming church activities

The church is to reshape all its regular activities – Sunday services, communion service, baptism, Sunday school, even funerals – to make its faith consistent with the *kairos* God is offering and to join the struggle for God's peace. God is active, so be the church (Kairos Document 1985:26).

Chapter 5.4 Special campaigns

Apart from their regular (revised) activities, the church should have special programmes, which will not duplicate or counteract those of people's organisations. God is not mentioned in this subsection (Kairos Document 1985:26–27).

Chapter 5.5 Civil disobedience

Since the present regime has no moral legitimacy, the church sometimes has to engage in civil disobedience in obeying God more than human beings do (Kairos Document 1985:27).

Chapter 5.6 Moral guidance

The church must give moral guidance by clearly stating the moral duty of Christians to resist oppression and struggle for liberation. God is not mentioned in this subsection.

In terms of the research questions, Chapter 5 of the KD calls on the churches to move towards action in obedience to God as their moral duty. God is transcendental but is also immanent in the inner call to fight for liberation. Prophetic Theology is expressed here as a branch of liberation and specifically Black Theologies (Kairos Document 1985:27–28).

The Kairos Document conviction

The KD concludes with the prayer that 'God will help all of us to translate the challenge of our times into action'. The final two sentences of the KD are allotted to God:

We are convinced that this challenge comes from God and that it is addressed to all of us. We see the present crisis of *Kairos* as indeed a divine visitation. (Kairos Document 1985:28–29)

Foci of investigation into the images of God

To profile the images of God used in the KD, a short non-exhaustive comparison will now be made with the God images in the CB (Plaatjies-Van Huffel 2017), a contemporary church document of the (then) DRMC which also reacts against State Theology and falls outside of Church Theology as understood by the KD. Another contemporary document that is presented here for comparison is the CS or KS of the DRC, which represents the State Theology as described in the KD.

Finding 1: God as active or passive

As indicated above, the God of the KD is an actor. God is a liberator who acted to achieve justice in the Exodus and throughout the history of his people. God's revelation as an actor has not stopped beyond biblical times, and God reveals himself contextually in the crisis of the present

moment. The God of the Bible is the true God and is still acting against his enemies, which now are the idol god of the State and the passive God of some churches.

As in the KD, the CB (1986/2006) of the (then coloured) DRMC provides more than half of its references to God with a verb. God is an actor – and an actor in the moment. God calls the church. God brings justice. God frees, protects, restores and supports. The CB takes God's caretaking and protecting role seriously and confesses this God at the cost of God the creator, as its other confessions do (ed. Plaatjies-Van Huffel 2017).

Church and Society (Algemene Sinode van die Ned Geref Kerk 1986) is the first step given by the (white) DRC to 'take itself away from the policy of apartheid', a move prompted *inter alia* by the publication of the CB in 1986, a process that had already started in 1982 (Van der Merwe 2013:1). However, the God-talk of the CS remained within the State Theology that was so heavily criticised by the KD, and reacted against by the CB. In short, while the God of the KD and CB is an active God who engages in the moment, the God of the CS is revealed; that is, God's revelation has been concluded with the Bible. Paragraph 10.2 states that:

Ons glo en bely dat die Heilige Skrif die volkome en vir alle tye gesaghebbende openbaring van God is. Daarom is dit vir ons die enigste maatstaf waaraan standpunte, gesindhede en optredes in die Suid-Afrikaanse situasie getoets moet word.

[We believe and confess that the Holy Scripture is the complete and for all time authoritative revelation of God. Therefore, for us, it is the only standard by which viewpoints, attitudes, and actions, in the South African context, must be tested] (Algemene Sinode van die Ned Geref Kerk 1986:6)

(In short, the Word of God is the completed revelation of God and the only measure against which the South African situation will be tested). God is now 'passive' whose will should be deduced from how God was revealed in the Word of God. The expressions 'will of God' and 'Word of God' appear numerous times in the CS as passive constructions. From the 204 references to God, only 24 (11%) see God in action. These references are to God's actions in the Bible and do not refer to today. Therefore, the verbs assigned to God are mostly in the past tense, for example, 'God het 'n nuwe begin gemaak' or 'God has made a new beginning'. In short, the God of the CS is the God of 'heilsgeschiedenis', who has revealed himself (*sic*) in salvation history; he is not the contextual God who calls upon his church to action in a specific crisis, as is done in the KD (and also in the CB).

Finding 2: God as transcendental or immanent

In the KD, God is transcendental and powerful to mobilise people against injustice. However, some of the images in the KD of God siding with the poor and addressing his

people's conscience to obey him may suggest an image of God that is immanent in people as co-sufferer (Landman & Pieterse 2019).

In this regard, the CS has the same image of God as transcendental, encouraging God's people through God's Spirit, which also remains transcendental. The CB confesses a God that is siding with the poor, which may point towards some immanence just as it is found in the KD.

The CS once refers to God as on the side of the '*minderbevoorregtes en die weerloses*' [the less privileged and the defenceless] (Algemene Sinode van die Ned Geref Kerk 1986:26). For the rest, God is fiercely transcendental as the triune God consisting of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Reference to the triune God is made about 15 times in the document. However, several references are made to human beings [*die mens*] as image bearers [*beelddraers*] of God and his representative in paragraph 12.3.5.1 of the CS. Is this to emphasise that, contrary to State Theology in the past, all human beings, irrespective of race, are worthy in God's eyes, or does it reflect some (albeit accidental) immanency of God in every person?

Finding 3: God as male or female

God is not overtly genderised in the KD. However, there are two places where God is referred to as 'Father'. Also, the pronouns 'his' and 'him' are used in connection with God, which makes the image of God in the KD male.

The 2006 English version of the CB, which is used here, uses language inclusively as far as God is concerned, replacing all pronouns such as 'his' or 'him' with a repetition of 'God'. However, the first and last sentences of CB confess God as Father, which ultimately makes God male, as does the KD.

In the CS, God is overtly male in referring (several times) to God as Father and in the pronouns 'him' and 'his'. Not only is God male, but male is presented as superior, where the CS in paragraph 12.3.5.4 makes some subordinating remarks about 'woman' [*die vrou*] who has been taken from man (*sic*) to be his helper and supplement.

It seems that (the then called) Feminist Theology which was already rife in Europe as well as in North and South America in the 1980s, and even in Asia and the rest of Africa (see Landman 1984) had not yet hit the South African theological scene in the mid-1980s, not even in local liberation theologies.

Finding 4: God as the God of theologies

What are the theologies underlying the KD? Analysing the theology of Bonganjalo Goba, one of the authors of the KD, Smit (2023:1–13) describes Goba's Black Theology as the South African Liberation Theology that is based on the local Black Consciousness. It is not ahistorical, but

contextually and contemporarily linked to the crisis addressed by the KD. Although Smit's analysis was made many years after the KD, this author is of the opinion that Black Theology is not only linked to the Kairos Theology but has indeed fed it. Furthermore, although the Prophetic Theology described in the KD is underdeveloped, it provided the Public Theology needed at the time (see Le Bruyns 2015).

While the KD was written by lay and professional theologians, the CB was constructed by academic theologians of the (then) DRMC. It reflects the characteristics of Liberation Theology in presenting God as the active and intervening liberator. However, since Liberation Theology carries many characteristics of missionary piety in its overly biblical language, the CB also displays its roots in the missionary piety of sin, soul and salvation in its choice for these or related words.

The CS is firmly rooted in the predestination theology that has formally been part of its Church Theology for a long time. It confesses the triune God who has chosen 'his people' since biblical times and predestined their future for times to come. Israel is God's chosen people in paragraph 12.1.2, and in paragraph 14.1.1 it is stated, in the same language as pertaining to Israel, that '*die Ned Geref Kerk vorm deel van God se unieke, heilige en uitverkore eiendomsvolk ...*' [the DRC forms part of God's unique, holy and chosen people that belongs to God]. This theology of being God's chosen people makes it extremely difficult for the DRC to deviate from the State Theology of *apartheid* and address the *kairos* of 1985/1986.

Finding 5: God as Old or New Testament

The God of the KD calls to action and leads the war against the idol god of the State, as God has done in the Exodus and numerous other times in the Old Testament. However, the war is not for blood or power, but to restore justice, reconciliation and eventually peace. However, the God of the KD does not reconcile before injustice has been conquered. In the KD God speaks through the Lukan Jesus for justice. However, while God is mentioned 73 times in the KD, there are only seven references to Jesus, and three to Jesus Christ. It seems, therefore, that in the KD priority is given to God as the liberating God, especially rooted in the Old Testament. While God revealed himself in the active spirituality of both the Old and New Testaments, it is the God of the Exodus that takes the front page in the KD.

The God of the CB is the New Testament God of love, justice and peace. Of the almost 50 Scriptural references in CB, only three are from the Old Testament, all of them confirming God's loving commitment to justice and reconciliation (Baron 2017). However, in comparison to the 24 references to 'God', the CB only refers 11 times to Jesus (Christ) and four times to the (Holy) Spirit.

The God of the CS is the God who has chosen his people since Israel's time to be his special focus. Emphasis is on the triune God of the New Testament, who has his roots in the Old Testament and has remained the same forever. God has appointed the State (in this context the apartheid State) to rule over people with authority, and the State should therefore be obeyed. Claiming that God is the God of both the Old and the New Testament, the CS, however, continues to confess the God of the *status quo* of State Theology. Like the KD and the BC, the CS contains 204 references to 'God' in comparison to the 57 references to Jesus (Christ) and the 19 references to the Holy Spirit.

The question remains why these three documents, but especially the liberational KD and the CB, make significantly more references to God than to Jesus (Christ) or the (Holy) Spirit. At this stage, it can only be regarded as an observation; the explanation for this observation is to be undertaken in future research.

Conclusion

The images of God in the KD come especially to the forefront when the CB (DRMC) and the CS (DRC) are compared. The following was found:

- In KD and CB, God is portrayed in verbs, as active in intervening, taking sides, commanding and correcting. God is depicted as acting strongly in the present. In the CS, God is passively caught up in noun constructions such as 'the Kingdom of God', 'the people of God' and 'the will of God'. When God is used with a verb, the verb is in the past tense, referring to God's actions in the Bible.
- In all three documents God is portrayed as transcendental, but in KD and CB as immanent, that is, as co-suffering with the oppressed.
- In all three documents God is male, although CB uses inclusive language *vis-à-vis* God, and God remains the Father.
- KD and CB portray God mainly in terms of the contextual issues of the time, such as justice, peace and reconciliation, using various strands of liberation theology in doing so. The CS uses salvation history and a theology of predestination in trying to determine God's will for present times, arguing that since biblical times God's will has never changed for his chosen people.
- While KD shows a preference for the image of God as the God of the Exodus, and CB prefers to refer to God in terms of the New Testament God of love and justice, the CS refers many times to the God of the Old Testament as the One who has chosen his people from times immemorial – remaining the same as a triune God of the New Testament. All three documents show a preference to refer to God rather than to Jesus Christ, who is only mentioned in connection with reconciliation.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author declares that no financial or personal relationships inappropriately influenced the writing of this article.

Author's contribution

C.L. is the sole author of this research article.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the University of South Africa and the College of Human Sciences_CREC on 04 June 2025 (No. 8362).

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or non-profit sectors.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

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