CHRISTIAN BAPTISM AND AN IDENTITY OF INCLUSIVITY, DIGNITY, AND HOLINESS

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INTRODUCTION

During the last two decades, the rapid changes that have taken place in South African society and in other societies all over the world cause people to search for new orientation, fresh direction, and certainty. In situations of disorientation and uncertainty, the quest for orientation, certainty, and identity is very much alive. In different parts of the world, people from a plurality of national, racial, ethnic, tribal, cultural, gender, sexual orientation, and socio-economic groups make fresh attempts to define themselves and others.

This quest is undertaken by South Africans who live in new realities—no longer in an apartheid state, but towards an inclusive democracy; no longer more diverse and separated, but towards diverse and together; no longer violations of human rights (political, civil, broad social, economic, and environmental), but towards a culture of human rights; no longer unity in uniformity and homogeneity, but towards unity in diversity; no longer Afropessimism, but towards the celebration of Africanness; no longer discrimination against women, but towards a partnership of equality of men and women; no longer homophobic, but towards the dignity of homosexual people; no longer handicappism, but towards recognizing and protecting the dependent nature of all human life; no longer ageism, but towards appreciating and celebrating all the development phases of the human life span. All South Africans, those who benefited and those who were wronged by apartheid, need re-orientation, new certainties, new ways of naming ourselves, and new identities in this new situation. It would not be diffi-

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1 In chapter 1 of our book, Robert Vosloo and I describe the major processes of change in South Africa, the rest of the African continent, and in other parts of the world. See N. Koopman and R. Vosloo, Die ligtheid van die lig. Morele oriëntasie in ’n postmoderne tyd (Wellington: Lux Verbi BM, 2002), 15–40.
cult to demonstrate the convergence between the South African transformation processes and those in other countries of the world.

Reflecting upon the identities attributed to you by others or the identities constructed by yourself is an important task. The way we name ourselves and others is, in the end, not innocent. The names we give to ourselves and to others impact the way that we deal with each other as humans in all walks of life. They influence the relationship of humans with the rest of creation. Identities determine the type of societies we eventually build. They influence discourses on human dignity, human rights, justice, reconciliation, and peace from the most personal to the broadest international levels.

Seeking re-orientation and certainty is not wrong. On the contrary, to live well as humans we need adequate levels of orientation, direction, and certainty. This quest for new names, new identities, and new ways of describing and explaining ourselves and others in our new environments can, however, take on a variety of wrong forms. Apartheid philosophy and theology taught us how not to deal with identity, and how not to name others and ourselves. The apartheid identities were identities of exclusion and violation of human dignity, and identities of morally wrong and unholy living. People were excluded, separated, and wronged, and their dignity was violated in terms of the diversity of categories mentioned above.

The rest of this article argues that Christian baptism paves the way for a discourse about identity along the lines of inclusivity, human dignity, and holiness. The works of various authoritative authors, as well as the important BEM document of the World Council of Churches, are appealed to in the discussion of the relationship between baptism and an identity of inclusivity, dignity, and holiness.

**Baptism and Inclusivity**

South African, Reformed theologian Adrio König gives a helpful description of the meaning of baptism. He reckons that baptism refers to

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2 Other related wrong ways of dealing with identity is the fact that the quest for new foundations and certainties in increasingly pluralistic societies can lead to fundamentalisms in different forms, e.g. absolutism, simplicism, rigorism, exclusivism, judgementalism, and even enmity and violence in religious and moral matters.