Nearly everybody is nowadays against apartheid. Even the Brother Association, the Afrikaner secret society which for decades pulled the wires of political power, has come to the conclusion that there is no longer any viability in apartheid.

That view is also held in church circles. The churches which from time immemorial have propagated the ideology of apartheid, such as the white Dutch Reformed Church (D.R.C.), are keeping up with the times and are trying to adjust to the new political and social situation.

A new age is also dawning for christians and churches which opposed apartheid. Clergymen like Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Dr. C.F. Beyers Naudé and Dr. Frank Chikane are less frequently in the news. Since Nelson Mandela’s release and the legalization of political organizations like the ANC and the PAC the position of a lot of churches and church organizations has been a rather modest one.

Some (former) church leaders decided to accept a political function (Dr. A. Boesak and the former secretary-general of the Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference, Dr. S. Mkhatshawa), others are concentrating on church work (Archbishop Tutu).

This survey makes a modest selection from the numerous publications on church and theology in South Africa which have appeared since 1985. If, at first, the struggle against apartheid was in the centre of interest, the most recent writings mainly deal with a (sometimes tentative) searching for a new position in a rapidly changing society. It is no longer a matter of ‘Farewell to Innocence’ of churches which are Servants of Power, but people are in search of a Theology of Reconstruction.

The more reserved role of the churches, among other things, appears from the...

---

Race Relations Survey, the most frequently used yearbook in which an attempt is made to reproduce all the relevant political and social developments in South Africa. For the first time since many years, however, the two most recent editions no longer contain a separate chapter on churches and religious organizations. Likewise, the most recent issue of Gastrow's Who's who in South African Politics, in contrast to earlier editions, no longer contains portraits of theologians such as Chikane, Naudé and Tutu.

Yet in many respects South African society continues to be dominated by religion. It is, therefore, hardly accidental that the negotiations about the future of the country have led to a new constitution which opens with the phrase "In humble submission to Almighty God".

Church and theology

A thorough and broadly planned survey of both historical and current developments in church and religion in South Africa is David Chidester's Religions of South Africa. The author is a staff member of the University of Cape Town and is head of the Institute for Comparative Religion in Southern Africa. A comparable, but less profound survey is offered by John W. de Gruchy's The Church Struggle in South Africa. A concise survey in Dutch is to be found in Stefan Rothe's Kerken in Zuid-Afrika. This booklet, moreover, offers the text of a lot of church documents on apartheid. A volume offering a broad survey was compiled by Martin Prozesky and was given the title Christianity amidst Apartheid. Among the subjects discussed are, for example: black theology, Christian inspired resistance to apartheid, the N.G. Church, social questions and the debate on violence. In 1992 the Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT) organized a conference in Johannesburg on the responsibility of the church in a situation of transition, the results being collected in the brochure Towards a Democratic Future.

So far the dialogue between adherents of different religions in South Africa has only been conducted on a very modest scale. A publication which reflects one of the attempts towards such a dialogue is the brochure Believers in the Future. Widely divergent, usually highly competent speakers (such as Dr. Frank Chikane, Dr. Denise Ackermann, Dr. Albie Sachs and Prof. Dr. Ali A.M. Mazrui) discuss themes like freedom of religion, the relation between religion and State, women and religion, and the perspective on a new South Africa.

The broader international context of the South African churches is treated upon in greater detail in different ways in two publications: A New Look at Christianity in Africa contains some essays by the female theologian Dr. G. Verstraelen-Gilhuis who died in 1989. Recently a collection of essays on Western Christianity in Africa was published under the title In elkaars spiegel. Among the themes discussed are inculturation, African spirituality, and the relation between African literature and Christianity. Entirely different international relations are put forward in Donald Harman Akenson's God's peoples which has for its subtitle: Covenant