THE FORMATION AND ETHOS OF
THE UNITED CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF
SOUTHERN AFRICA
1967 - 1992

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Social Science and Humanities in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts (by course work)

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PREFACE

The privilege and opportunity to do post-graduate studies in Congregational history and to be trained as church historian was afforded me by the grace of God through the Executive Committee and the Training for the Ministry Committee of the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa. I would like to thank all those who have helped to make these past two years two of the most enriching and challenging of my life.

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Above all, to God be all glory, honour and praise!
ABSTRACT

The commission to do post-graduate studies in Congregational Church history came from the Assembly of the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa since the Church was in need of a church historian. The title and contents for this dissertation thus had to be a result of research done in the history of the UCCSA. The questions which came to mind when we chose the topic and which we are attempting to answer are: How did the UCCSA come into being? What was the ethos of the UCCSA during the first twenty-five years of its existence? What role did Joseph Wing, the first general secretary play in the formation and ethos of the UCCSA? and What can be learnt from the history of the first twenty-five years of the UCCSA?

Chapter 1 deals with the formation of the UCCSA in 1967, but traces the history of Congregationalism back to its roots in England during the Reformation. The latter was necessary to show the links between early Congregationalism and the UCCSA which were very influential in the formation of the UCCSA and the shaping of its ethos during the period under review. Research on early Congregationalism, the LMS and ABM was done from secondary source material, but CUSA was also researched from primary sources, notably year books containing the minutes and reports of assemblies.

Chapter 2, researched entirely from primary source material, deals with the ethos of the Church up to 1992. The habitual character of the UCCSA would most clearly be revealed in the decisions taken by its courts and the efforts made to implement such decisions. The intention in this chapter was to let the assembly minutes and reports speak with a minimum of critical comment, since this would be done more fully in the final chapter of the dissertation. The approach, then, was to document the historical events without too much interpretation and evaluative comment. The events are documented in a thematic way, rather than chronologically, since the former method is more suited to the purpose of the thesis.

In Chapter 3 we look more closely at the role played by Joseph Wing, the first general secretary of the UCCSA in the formation of the Church and the shaping of its ethos. From documents studied it became apparent that he had played a very significant (if not the most significant) role in the formation of the Church and the shaping of its ethos during the period under review. Most of the research for this chapter was done from primary source material located at the Kuruman Moffatt Mission where Wing spent the last days of his life. These documents included personal letters, sermons and talks, some of which were handwritten. The material is presented in such a way as to show the motivating forces behind Wing's strong belief and active involvement in church unity and social justice issues, the two issues which dominated the ethos of the UCCSA during the period under review.

A critical evaluation of the formation and ethos of the UCCSA is done in Chapter 4. The formation is looked at from the decision of the uniting bodies to become a Church rather than a union of churches and how that decision influenced the ethos and witness of the UCCSA during the first twenty-five years. Though it is not specifically mentioned, an attempt has been made to also show the influence of early Congregationalism in the formation and ethos of the UCCSA, thus trying to link the first and final chapters of the dissertation. The role played by Joseph Wing is also evaluated.
CHAPTER 1: THE FORMATION OF THE UCCSA

The United Congregational Church of Southern Africa was constituted on 3 October 1967 at Durban when the London Missionary Society in Southern Africa, the Bantu Congregational Church of the American Board, and the Congregational Union of South Africa united. This union brought together Christians whose ecclesiastical roots were planted on three continents: Great Britain, the United States of America and Africa. It also took place exactly four hundred years after the first Congregational Church had been established in London where the whole Congregationalist movement had its origin.

Congregationalism has its roots in the pre-Protestant Reformation era as well as in the Reformation itself. Three major strands can be identified, namely, the influence of the early English reformer, John Wyclif, that of the Anabaptist movement, and that of the Swiss Reformation associated with Ulrich Zwingli and especially John Calvin. It is not our intention to examine these strands in any detail. However, it is necessary, for the purpose of exploring the ethos of the UCCSA, to reflect at greater length on the way in which such influences led to the beginnings of Congregationalism within the broader Puritan movement in England.
Origins

Three cardinal principles of Wyclif’s teaching form the basis of Congregationalism:

* "that the Bible is the ultimate court of appeal in all matters of doctrine, conduct and government;"

* "that there is such a thing as private judgement in doctrinal matters;"

* "that the Church in grasping temporal power sacrifices her true authority."

The Anabaptists and “spiritual” reformers, which form the second strand of Congregationalism, were the radical left wing of the Reformation. Their ideal implied a congregation which was self-governing, independent of state or episcopal control and having the Bible as its only law. The third strand, represented by the teaching of John Calvin, roots Congregationalism within the Calvinist or Reformer tradition. Congregationalism started at the same time that Calvinism began to spread. Just like Wyclif and the Anabaptists Calvin believed in the sole sufficiency of the Scriptures for

1 Wing,J., As One People, UCCSA, Braamfontein, 1977. p71
ecclesiastical polity. Congregationalism is indebted to Calvin’s theology as well as his form of Church order.³

Two important factors that contributed to the rise of Congregationalism were the new place that the reformers, especially Calvin, gave to the Scriptures and the availability of the Bible in English to the majority of people.⁴ For ordinary people the availability of the Bible in their own tongue meant that they were now free to read it or have it read to them, to meditate upon it and to interpret it for themselves. With this went the new practice of worshipping God in the vernacular and, therefore, intelligibly. The Bible began to speak inwardly to the hearts of the most conscientious and sensitive among them so that they became impatient with the conventional religion of the dominant party in the Established Church in England.⁵ Some hoped to bring the Church to fuller reform by working from within; others, in despair, felt driven to break away from the Church and the Church’s subservience to prelate, parliament and magistrate in order to form new groups in which they could be free to worship and to live according to their consciences.⁶ They felt compelled to do this by the demands of Scripture and by the response of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. These people, whether remaining in the established Church or not, were nicknamed Puritans because they passionately desired and repeatedly urged the need for purity in worship, Church government and personal life.⁷

³ Wing, Op. cit., p71
⁴ Ibid., p71
⁶ Ibid., p5
Routley defines Congregationalism as "a covenantal order of Christians historically derived from the Puritan movement of the English Reformation." It began as a form of dissent from the Established Church of England which was formed when Henry VIII had broken relations with the papacy in 1534 resulting in the Reformation in England. What actually happened, however, was that the Church in England was re-formed or reshaped in government and administration. The Puritans were of the opinion that "reformation" had to mean a church purged of corruption rather than just a re-shaped Church and some of them believed that a complete break with the Church of England was necessary for such reform to take place. Those Puritans who broke away, called the Separatists, refused to wait for reform of the Church by constitutional means asserting that reformation of the Church was the concern of the Church, not the State.

Like the Puritans, the Separatists regarded the Bible as the final authority under God in all matters of faith and practice. They were not concerned about traditions of the Church or teaching of the Fathers, believing that the grounds of religion are to be found in Scripture alone. Their reasoning was that, if the Bible contained everything needed for salvation of humans and the true knowledge of God, it must also contain a guide to the nature, organisation and administration of the Christian Church. Correct Church polity (government) was supremely important since it entailed either obedience or disobedience to the Word of God and thus to Jesus Christ himself. According to the Separatists the

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7 Ibid., p5
9 Ibid., p12
Church as then established by English Law was not in accordance with the Apostolic pattern of the New Testament. Being established by civil law, it was incompatible with the nature of the Church. These two reasons were fundamental in their decision to withdraw from the established Church. Their separation was not lightly decided upon; they did it only because they felt impelled to seek the way of church life enjoined in Scripture. Paul’s exhortation to the Corinthians to “separate themselves” and the declaration of Jesus that “where two or three are gathered in my Name, there I am with them.” (Matt. 18:20) were taken as clear indications that the Church was separated from the state. They therefore called the new groups which they formed “gathered churches” because they believed these groups were gathered by the Spirit of God, by the God who called to people: “Come ye out among them, and be ye separate, and touch no unclean thing.” and who through Christ had promised his presence to those gathered in his name. They also called them “gathered churches” because they believed churches to be just such societies of men and women who knew, and who manifested, the gifts and graces of God’s Spirit.

The idea of Congregationalism was first developed in the works of Robert Browne who believed that nobody is naturally a Christian, neither by birth, nor residence. According to his Separatist views you are assumed to be not a member of the Church until you have given adequate and satisfying evidence that you are one. Out of these committed and covenanted believers the Church formed itself and there was no Church apart from these. Browne could not accept a church whose limits were defined and whose duties were

1960, p28

Ibid., p30

prescribed in anything other than purely spiritual terms. Though he did not preach any absolute independency of each church from every other, he did insist on the Church's independency from every form of worldly government and worldly advantage. For him the Church is the "handpicked body of the faithful" and "holiness" meaning "separated" was the key-word. 14 Browne did not reject the authority of the queen but regarded her authority as civil, not ecclesiastical. The Church thus did not have to depend on her decision in church matters.

The Separatists could not remain in the Church of England and still hold a good conscience. In withdrawing they were not causing a schism, as they saw it, but separating themselves from the false Church in order to be gathered together into the visible community of saints. "They did not seek independence for its own sake, nor did they attempt to escape ecclesiastical authority, they sought 'to reveal and realize the true idea of the Church' and to assert the authority of Christ over and within His Church." 15 John Owen, primary Congregationalist apologist of the seventeenth century, stated that the Church's supreme allegiance was to Christ, its Head:

"The rule of the church is, in general, the existence of the power or authority of Jesus Christ, given unto it according to the laws and directions prescribed by himself unto its edification. Christ is the Supreme authority, the power of men is ministerial only." 16

The essence of Separatism was not complete independency. It was never the intention of Browne or other Separatists that each local church should be completely independent and unrelated to other churches, neither has this ever been part of genuine Congregational theory. Though each local church is self-governing, it can never be independent of other churches, especially of the same order. Browne firmly believed that when a local church could not arrive at a decision, or was not able to clearly discern the will of Christ in some matter, it should seek the guidance of other local churches.

"The definite need for inter-church counsel is recognized and Separatism, like Independency at its best, is not exclusive but ecumenical in design and purpose."¹⁷

Owen believed that a "mutual communion" of particular churches in which they have equality of power and order but not of gifts and usefulness "is the only way appointed by our Lord Jesus Christ...for the attaining of the general end of all particular churches, which is the edification of the church catholic, in faith, love and peace."¹⁸ Synodal gatherings were thus necessary, perhaps even inevitable.

When Queen Mary started to persecute the Brownists, many of them fled to Holland joining the congregations already established in Amsterdam, Middelburg, Utrecht and other cities. Thus at the beginning of the seventeenth century the majority of the Separatists were in exile and Separatism became divided into several groups of which two, the semi-Separatists and the semi-Congregationalists, represent early Congregationalism.

In these Dutch congregations Congregational polity was nurtured and became a working church order. From Amsterdam the Pilgrim Fathers set forth to the New World where they could put their new church order into practice without hindrance from traditional beliefs and customs. In his farewell sermon John Robinson challenged the emigrants not to become trapped by tradition, not even that of John Calvin, and concluded with words that have a central place in the ethos of Congregationalism:

"The Lord hath more light and truth yet to break forth out of His holy Word." 19

The Puritans settled in Massachusetts, built a town called Boston and a few years later, in 1636, founded the University of Harvard. Because of the influence of the Pilgrim Fathers the New England States were almost entirely Congregational, yet ironically, Congregationalism was put into practice helped by the State. 20 Congregationalism in the New England States of America thus developed parallel, yet differently from, Congregationalism in England. It is from this settlement in the New England States that the missionaries of the American Board of Missionaries would later be sent out to South Africa.

Congregationalism returned to England from Holland when Oliver Cromwell showed signs of becoming the deliverer of Puritanism. 21 Cromwell, a staunch Puritan, was planning a revolt against the king in England and the Puritans decided to return home to England after the overthrow of the English government, becoming the Lord Protector of the Commonwealth.

19 Routley, Op cit., p25
20 De Gruchy, Op cit., p52
21 Cromwell, a Congregationalist, overthrew the English government, becoming the Lord Protector of the Commonwealth.
since they reasoned they would be welcomed warmly and not rejected as by the royalist regime. Thus many congregations with their ministers returned to their native country. Cromwell was the one who made Independency, the name then in vogue, an English institution, settling its destiny as an always significant minority. It was during this time that the name Congregational also began to be used as a positive description of the church order of the Independents or Dissenters or Puritans. The ten years of the Commonwealth, when Cromwell ruled England as the Protector, became the classic age of Congregationalist doctrine. During this period the great works of Thomas Goodwin and John Owen, two of the most eminent Congregational theologians, were written. 22

At the Westminster Assembly which met in 1643 to draw up a Calvinistic Confession of Faith for the Presbyterians in England, five “Independents” or Congregationalists were present. The five agreed with all the doctrinal statements contained in the Confession but maintained the right of every congregation to govern itself. They defended their views on the basis of Scripture. On 29 September 1658 a synod of all the Congregational Churches of England and Wales was convened to draw up a declaration of faith as an expression of what was generally believed amongst Congregationalists. 23 This conference was held at Savoy and the declaration became known as the Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order which was the clearest expression of that which the Independents of those times believed and practised. A.G. Matthews, in the Introduction to the Declaration, described it as “a body of principles regulating Congregational Church life.” 24 This declaration, in fact,

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consisted mainly of the Westminster Assembly’s Confession of Faith which had been taken over verbatim and revised and adapted by John Owen to suit the requirements of the Congregationalists. Owen, who was Cromwell’s chaplain and Vice-Chancellor during the Commonwealth period, was a convinced Calvinist but stood for “the gathered Church”. John Owen rejected all liturgical worship because it conflicted with his understanding of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. The rock of his faith and his churchmanship was Holy Scripture against which he tested all theology. 25

The Savoy Declaration was not intended as an authoritative statement binding on all Independents; it was an expression of what was commonly believed by them. They were still convinced that Scripture contained a blueprint for church organization. Yet, the Savoy Declaration reveals a new spirit in the understanding of Scripture, viz. an appeal to the use of reason and prudence in liturgical practice and in the organization of the church, an appeal conditioned by the continual observance from the rigidity of the “general rules of the Word.” De Gruchy sees this as a significant and definite departure from the rigidity of separatism and as representing a move away from the letter of Scripture. 26

Congregationalism’s thinking on the relationship between church and state is one of the points made by the Savoy Committee of which this document can be regarded as a classic source. The Independents regarded civil authority as embodied in the magistrates in a similar way to the Separatists. For the Savoy Committee the magistrate was simply there

to make the world safe for the Church. They were more involved in the political struggles of the day and were not averse to using the State in their struggle for religious freedom.

"The Savoy Committee legislated for a Free Church, strong and pious enough to protect its own order and peace without the State's intervention except in cases of assault entirely from outside." 27

The Independents pleaded strongly for the liberty and spiritual autonomy of each individual church since religious liberty rather than uniformity was of vital importance to them.

"No authority outside the local church itself, whether it was the authority of an Assembly, Presbytery, Bishop or magistrate, could be imposed upon a congregation of Christ's people who had covenanted with Him and with each other to obey His dictates as their Head and their Authority." 28

During the post-Commonwealth period and especially the early 18th century Congregationalism fell into the "slough of despond". England was in a state of moral decline, religious indifference and increasing rationalism. The Church of England was formal, the clergy indifferent and the spiritual needs of the people were neglected. Congregationalists, Baptists and Presbyterians had emerged from a period of persecution into one of relative toleration, in which theological differences sapped most of their vitality. However, Congregationalism was renewed by the Evangelical Revival, a revival of English religious life centred in the work of George Whitefield and John and Charles

Wesley during the second half of the eighteenth century. The Revival in England was preceded by "The Great Awakening" of 1735 in America, which owed its origin to the work of Jonathan Edwards, a Congregational minister and strong Calvinist. George Whitefield was strongly influenced by Jonathan Edwards and shared his doctrinal position. Congregationalists, being suspicious of John Wesley because of his Arminian views, were quite happy to have fellowship with Whitefield and to allow him into their pulpits. It was through him that Congregationalism received the "fertilising power" of the Evangelical Revival and that English-speaking Calvinism took its share in the evangelisation of the world.29

The most significant important contribution which the Revival made to Congregationalism was upon its theology. Though rooted and grounded in Calvinism, Congregationalism had degenerated into evangelical inactivity and exclusiveness. The Revival provided "a vigorous experiential theology and a profound sense of fellowship" which opened the eyes of Protestantism to its worldwide responsibilities.

"Thus there came into being a Calvinism modified by the Revival which began to replace the older Calvinism of the Independents, and to restore the evangelical fervour and spirit exemplified in the formation of the Congregational Home Unions and the London Missionary Society."30

29 Wing, Op. cit., p75
But the Revival had the effect of stressing individualism which undermined the Congregational emphasis on the nature of the Church and churchmanship and it prepared the way for the decline in Congregational ecclesiology which became evident during the nineteenth century. At the same time, however, it provided impetus for Congregational unity, because between 1780 and 1810 associations of Congregational churches were formed in most of the counties with the object of helping poorer churches, founding new churches and doing aggressive evangelistic work. In 1781 the Hampshire Union was formed and many more followed during the next fifty years. The experience of the associations gradually demonstrated the importance and advantage of co-operation and fellowship among the churches, preparing the way for a wider union of churches. In May 1832 the Congregational Union of England and Wales was formed which brought with it a new sense of solidarity and power and the expression of the common conviction of Congregationalists throughout England and Wales with one voice. One of the first fruits of union was the “Declaration of Faith, Church Order and Discipline of the Congregational or Independent Dissenters” accepted by the Assembly of the Union in 1833.

The London Missionary Society

The London Missionary Society originated from the Evangelical Revival. While George Whitefield’s name does not appear amongst the names of the founders of the Society, it was his passionately evangelical spirit which communicated itself to the churches where he

31 Ibid., p88
preached and which resulted in a concern for the salvation of those who were lost in sin and misery at home and abroad. The Countess of Huntingdon was greatly inspired by Whitefield and devoted her energy and her wealth to the spread of the Gospel. Dr. T. Haweis, the chaplain of the Countess, attempted on two occasions to send students trained at the college founded by the Countess in Wales to the South Seas. Though both these attempts were not successful at the time, they did find their fulfilment when the London Missionary Society was founded in 1795 by a group of evangelical Calvinists, comprised of Congregational and Presbyterian ministers and evangelical Anglican clergymen. The origins of the LMS are briefly as follows.

When William Carey was in India as a missionary he wrote to John Ryland, President of the Baptist College in Bristol in July 1794, telling of his experiences. Ryland shared this letter with David Bogue, minister of the Independent Church at Gosport and James Steven of Scotch Church, Covent Garden who were moved by Carey’s experiences. Bogue and Steven met with John Hey, minister of the Independent Church at Castle Green, Bristol to pray and consult on the best way in which to arouse public interest in the grievously neglected duty of attempting to send the Gospel to the heathen. Bogue then drafted an appeal, “To the Evangelical Dissenters who practise Infant Baptism”, which was published in the *Evangelical Magazine* in September 1794. This appeal did three things: Firstly, it exhorted Christians of Independent Churches to obey God’s command to go and preach the Gospel to the heathen; secondly, it pointed out the facts of other denominations (Moravian, Methodist, Baptist) already engaged in missionary endeavours; and thirdly, it

32 Ibid., p88
mentioned practical ways in which the whole Church could be involved in establishing and maintaining a missionary society. As a result Independent churches in Hampshire started to pray for missionary work, George Burder and his colleagues from Warwickshire responded to and supported Bogue's appeal and John Eyre, editor of the *Evangelical Magazine*, made his magazine the channel for the new missionary movement.\(^{34}\)

The *Evangelical Magazine* of November 1794 contained a review, by Dr. Haweis, of a book by Melville Home, a minister of the Church of England, entitled *Letters on Missions addressed to the Protestant Ministers of the British Churches*. Haweis, in his review, challenged readers to start a society and mentioned that a total of 600 pounds had already been pledged towards sending missionaries to the South Sea Islands, one of the places (together with India) mentioned by Home as places where the need for missionary work was great. Home also suggested in the book that the evangelical churches make a united effort to establish a missionary movement. Eyre, who was greatly moved by the book and the review, discussed his thoughts on the matter with some ministers and they started fortnightly meetings to discuss and pray on the subject of missions at the Castle and Falcon in Aldersgate. Eyre called a formal meeting of ministers at Baker's Coffee House in London on 4 November 1794 to consider the practicability of founding a new missionary society. These ministers started to meet fortnightly and from these meetings

\(^{33}\) Wing, Op. cit., p75
flowed the initiatives of establishing a society, making appeals to churches via the *Evangelical Magazine* and keeping the interest alive by relevant articles.\(^{35}\)

George Burder of Coventry made an appeal in 1795 which was widely read and in which he requested that a meeting be held during the summer of that year at which a missionary society should be established. Each congregation had to send its minister "or some other intelligent person" to this meeting.

"Let us then, utterly and sincerely disclaiming all political views and party designs; abhorring all attempts to disturb order and government in this or any other country; vigorously unite, in the fear of God, and in the love of Christ, to establish a Missionary Society upon a large and liberal plan, for sending ministers of Christ to preach the Gospel among the heathen." \(^{36}\)

The London Missionary Society was thus constituted on 21 September 1795 on the first night of a week of meetings held in London. During this week the constitution of the new society (called "The Missionary Society") was accepted. The sole object of the Society was "to spread the knowledge of Christ among heathen and other unenlightened nations."

At the founding service the Rev. James Knight uttered the following words about the week:

"Another consideration that rendered these seasons unspeakably delightful was the visible union of ministers and Christians of all denominations, who, for the first time, forgetting their party prejudices and partialities,

\(^{35}\) Ibid., p13
\(^{36}\) Ibid., p13
assembled in the same place, sang the same hymns, united in the same prayers, and felt themselves one in Christ.\footnote{37}

The Society was directed by twenty-five directors of whom at the most 15 had to be resident in or near London in order to have monthly meetings. At the first meeting of the Board of Directors on 28 September 1795 the "Rules for the Examination of Missionaries" were adopted. A person wanting to be a missionary had to satisfy the Board that he had "an eminent share of the grace of God" and had to appear to have a call to the work of being a missionary. David Bogue outlined the "fundamental principle" of the Society which was later adopted on 9 May 1796:

"As the union of Christians of various denominations in carrying on this great work is a most desirable object, so, to prevent, if possible, any cause of future dissension, it is declared to be a fundamental principle of the Missionary Society that its design is not to send Presbyterianism, Independency, Episcopacy, or any other form of Church Order and Government (about which there may be difference of opinion among serious persons), but the glorious Gospel of the blessed God to the heathen...\footnote{38}

The converts themselves had to decide what form of Church government would be most suited to the Word of God.

\footnote{36}{Ibid., p21}  
\footnote{37}{Ibid., p38}  
\footnote{38}{Northcott, C. Glorious Company. London: Livingstone Press, 1945. p21}
Congregationalism in Southern Africa was born when the London Missionary Society sent Dr. Johannes van der Kemp to South Africa in 1799. Lovett, historian of the LMS gives a very prosaic description:

"From their earliest meetings the Directors kept the Cape of Good Hope in view as a most desirable and promising field of missionary labour. In the last year of the eighteenth century they were enabled to make good a foothold upon this Land of Promise. From that day to the present (i.e. 1899) the Society's wise labours, and the self-denying and noble efforts of their missionaries, have led to an ever-widening and more fruitful extension of Christian influence." 39

By 1818 the Society's missions in Southern Africa were scattered far and wide south of the Orange River: settlements had been made at Pacaltsdorp, Theopolis, Hankey, King Williamstown, Bethelsdorp, Caledon and Philippolis. The "missionary road" to the northern regions beyond the Orange River and the frontiers of the Cape Colony into Central Africa was opened by missionaries of the London Missionary Society such as Anderson, Moffat, Helm, Livingstone, Helmore and Price. 40

It had always been the policy of the London Missionary Society to build strong, self-supporting indigenous churches served by their own ministers. The churches in the Cape Colony were challenged from 1856 to 1881 to become self-supporting. Many churches responded to the call and land and buildings were handed over by the Society to the churches and land to the people themselves. By the close of the century the Society was

practically free from its pastoral charges in the Cape Colony, though it was not until 1942 that the London Missionary Society signed away the last of its title deeds south of the Orange River thereby passing on the inheritance of its history and traditions to the churches. These churches became part of the Evangelical Voluntary Union in 1860 which became the Congregational Union of South Africa in 1877. At the same time, the London Missionary Society continued the work under its missionaries in the rest of Southern Africa, notably amongst the Matabele and in Botswana (then Bechuanaland).

The LMS missionaries had, from the earliest years, formed themselves into a District Committee which administrated the funds made available by the Board, saw to the placement of missionaries, and supervised the work on the mission stations. In 1906 the District Committee decided to establish two Native Advisory Councils, one each for Matabeleland and the Tswana field. This was to satisfy the need and desire of the indigenous people to have a greater say in the affairs of the missions, but it would also serve as training in the principles of church government. At the same time the missionaries would avail themselves of the knowledge and influence which the black ministers had among their people. A Native Ministers' Committee was thus established and two of its members were appointed to serve on the District Committee. But this did little to dispel the feelings of dissatisfaction amongst black ministers who, in 1932, expressed their grievances in a submission to the District Committee. In it they demanded

\[41\] Ibid., p59
\[42\] As the missionaries made converts, some of them began to feel the call to be ordained ministers. They were trained and placed in congregations as assistants to the missionaries. The policy of the LMS
the right to receive or dismiss members, the right to sign membership tickets and to be consulted when school matters were discussed. They were then granted full authority in the exercising of ministerial functions under the missionaries as superintendents. 43

The District Committee was disbanded in 1943 and replaced by a Mission Council consisting of all the missionaries and nine Africans of whom five were ministers, two evangelists and two laypersons. At the same time three Regional Councils were established, one each for the churches in South Africa, Botswana and Rhodesia. These councils were predominantly lay in composition and thus became forums where ordinary members could voice their opinions. In 1954 the Mission Council was replaced by a Church Council which existed until the time of the formation of the UCCSA. 44

The American Board

The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions or the American Board as it was popularly known, was initiated in a haystack when five students of Williams College took shelter from a storm in 1806. They discussed the sending of the Gospel to foreign lands and prayed together about it. Out of this incident a small society was formed for those who shared their convictions, and when several of them became students for the ministry, they formed a branch of the society at Andover Seminary. The students were influenced by the Calvinistic revival tradition of Jonathan Edwards and his successors

and ABM was that they would eventually replace the missionaries taking full responsibility for the churches

which encouraged a widespread proclamation of the Gospel throughout the world. As a result of their enthusiasm the General Association of Congregational Ministers of Massachusetts, an organisation of ministers of the old Calvinistic school, appointed a board of commissioners to investigate their proposition. The American Board, also then a by-product of the Great Awakening, was founded at the first meeting of these commissioners in 1810 but it received its charter as an interdenominational board only two years later. 45

The newly formed American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions sent Adoniram Judson to consult with the Directors of the London Missionary Society in order to work out a relationship between the two Boards. Though the London Missionary Society expressed its willingness to accept American missionaries, they did not think that a missionary society jointly controlled from London and Boston would be practicable. The American Board thus became a separate society, nonetheless always remaining in close contact with the London Missionary Society. 46

The American Board’s involvement in Southern Africa was the direct result of representations from D. John Philip who was superintendent of the LMS in Cape Town (1822 - 1836) as well as a desire by the ABM to find a more healthy climate in Africa than the equatorial regions where they did not have much success. The Prudential Committee of the ABM sent out two groups consisting of three missionary couples each. One party

44 Ibid., p287
45 Ibid., p63
consisted of the Rev. Daniel Lindley from Pennsylvania, the Rev. Dr. Alexander E. Wilson from North Carolina, and the Rev. Henry J. Venable of Kentucky with their wives. They constituted the Inland Mission group with instructions to proceed from Cape Town in a north-easterly direction to set up work with Chief Mzilikazi’s people. The other group, consisting of Dr. Newton Adams of New York, the Rev. Aldin Grout of Pennsylvania and the Rev. George Champion of Connecticut, with their wives constituted the Maritime Mission. They had to seek work among the people of Chief Dingane in the Zulu territory.

Both of these groups had to consult John Philip with regard to the manner and means of approaching the chiefs as well as numerous other details of life in Southern Africa.47

The American missionaries arrived at Cape Town on 6 February 1835 and the Inland Mission went to Griquatown where they stayed seven months in order to learn Sechuana. This mission, however, seemed to be doomed from the start. Very soon after settling at Mosega the whole party, except Wilson, went down with fever and Mrs. Wilson died on 18 September 1836 after a short illness. More trouble followed when they got caught in the cross-fire of the Boer’s war against Mzilikazi when Mosega was attacked by Maritz and Potgieter on 17 January 1837. “(W)ith their house in flames, many possessions lost, themselves virtual prisoners of the Boer commando, and the bodies of their prospective converts strewn over the hillside, they decided to abandon the mission.”48 Nearly starving during their flight, the missionaries crossed a swollen Vaal River, circled around Grahamstown, and finally reached Natal and the Maritime Mission on 27 July 1837.49

48 Ibid., p14
49 Ibid., p14
The Maritime missionaries arrived in Durban on 22 December 1835, the wives having stayed in Port Elizabeth. They met with Dingane at his kraal in Mgungundlovu, but the chief would not give them permission to establish a mission near his capital. He, instead, supported his counsellors’ proposal that the missionaries build a house near Port Natal where they might apply again for a school to be started in Zululand once they had settled.

The missionaries accepted these terms, then Grout and Adams returned to Port Elizabeth to fetch the women while Champion remained at Port Natal to see to building operations. Arriving at Bethelsdorp they found Mrs. Grout critically ill and she died sixteen days later leaving a baby daughter of only a few weeks old. Back in Natal Aldin Grout and the Champions started to work at Hlominhleni near the Tugela River, but they called their station Nginani which means “I am with you.” It was decided that the Champions would work at Nginani, Adams at Umlazi and Grout would divide his time between the two stations.

When the survivors of the inland mission joined the maritime mission Lindley was located at Imfume on the Ilovu River not far from Umlazi, and Venable and Wilson near the military kraal, Hlangezwa, a site which they named Temba. After Retief and his Voortrekker band were massacred by Dingane the missionaries left Natal and returned to Port Elizabeth. Upon the suggestion of the ABM all them, except Lindley and Adams who stayed to rebuild Umlazi and Imfume, went back to America. Adams continued to work at Umlazi until 1847 when he moved to Amanzimtoti. Grout returned to work at

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50 Ibid., p18
Umvoti where the work progressed under his and his wife's ministry. Lindley, who served the trekkers for seven years, returned to the ABM in 1847 and worked at the Inanda location. Gradually the work of the American Board of Commissioners was established and grew in Natal. 51

From the beginning the Prudential Committee of the ABM had instructed their missionaries to "rear up Christian communities, which with the ordinary blessing of God, shall be able to stand and flourish without foreign aid." 52 Thus, the establishment of an indigenous church was a priority, but that implied a Zulu ministry which, in turn, meant their education and the availability of literature in the vernacular. A mission press was established to see to the publication of such literature. Therefore each mission was established on the principle of education as well as preaching. As the missions progressed they developed into a Zulu Church. As this happened, the missionaries were confronted by the dilemma of the extent to which they needed to retain oversight and the extent to which the Zulu people were to be allowed the freedom of ordering their own affairs. They were reluctant to entertain the ideal advocated by the American home boards that the foreign missions should be "self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating." In 1880 these boards voted that the churches under the American Zulu Mission should commit themselves to some definite plan of self-support which, to them, meant, "the whole or part support of a Native licentiate." 53 Churches who were not able to undertake full support could apply for a grant-in-aid from the Home and Foreign Missionary Society.

51 Ibid p22
53 Ibid. p124
The churches responded to the challenge in such a way that the majority were financially self-supporting within a few years.

In 1895 an international mission board conference met in Canada and passed several resolutions regarding self-support. The ABM secretary in Boston asked that these resolutions be made known to Zulu churches. The missionaries, thereupon, made their own analysis of the situation and made a decision which they translated into Zulu and distributed among the churches, encouraging them to accept full responsibility for self-support. However, in translating the word “self-support” they used a Zulu word which could also mean “self-government” and this was the way in which it was understood by many so that they regarded themselves free from missionary control. “After all, if you are called to pay for everything your self (sic), your natural assumption would be that you would also decide how your money should be spent.” 54

In January 1919 the Isu Elisha (“New Plan”) came into effect in Natal whereby a central fund was established, from which the stipends of ministers would be paid, as well as an Umlomo (the Executive Committee) with authority to regulate the placement of ministers. This un-Congregational way of doing things became necessary due to the fact that many local churches had become incapable of paying the stipends of their ministers and there was no machinery for transferring such ministers to other viable congregations. The autonomy of local churches would not be affected and the relationship between them and the Mission remained the same. In 1924, after a trial period of five years, the churches

54 Christoffersen, Op. cit., p100
voted in favour of revising and continuing with the plan. This revision became the first actual Constitution of a denomination which was now officially known as the "Congregational Churches of the American Board". "While the autonomy of the local churches was preserved in matters of membership, growth, discipline, local procedures, and the collection and use of funds for local purposes, ministerial matters were vested in the Umlomo, which was required to consult with the churches and men concerned." 55

This church order continued, with some minor revisions, to the mission's centenary celebrations in 1935 and for many years afterwards. "The constitution of 1924, and succeeding revisions have tended to pay lip service to Congregational policy, but their effect has always been to centralise authority and policy in the Council through the assessments levied there and decisions taken by the pastors in a block, often before the Council meetings began." 56 The clergy thus dominated decisions in the Council, not only because they had such great influence, but also because the laypeople were in the minority and most of them were illiterate.

In 1935 the Executive Secretary of the American Board, Dr. Frederick Goodsell, visited South Africa and urged the Mission to relinquish some of its control. The Mission still handled the funds, thus controlling the right to give and withhold grants coming from America, and as such, fulfilling a major role in the formation of overall church policy. In 1954 a Mission Council was formed on which nine representatives of the African Church were invited to serve, but they were a minority on a council predominated by missionaries. In 1960, however, at the instigation of Dr. John Reuling who was the Africa Secretary of

the American Board, a commission was formed to dissolve the Mission and formulate a Constitution for the Bantu Congregational Church which would make it into a fully autonomous, self-governing body. This Constitution was adopted in 1964 and the Bantu Congregational Church assumed full responsibility for running its own affairs. 57

The Congregational Union of South Africa

From the start the intention of the London Missionary Society was for its mission stations to become self-supporting as soon as possible in order that the Society might use its resources in other, more needed, areas of outreach. Towards the end of John Philip's superintendency the whole question was again seriously considered. The Society sent J.J. Freeman to investigate the position from May 1849 to April 1850 during which time he visited every mission station of the LMS as well as the French missions among the Sotho and the ABM work in Natal. Among other things, his mandate included reporting on the promotion of self-supporting mission churches, the recruitment and training of an indigenous ministry for Africa as a whole and the promotion of Christian Education.

In 1855 William Ellis came on a deputation to stimulate the mission stations to accept the responsibility of self-sustenance and, as a result, Philippolis, Dysseldorp, Oudtshoorn and George became self-supporting that year. After 1855 the missions were responsible for the majority of the expenses paid to maintain the stations, the LMS only paid the stipends of the missionaries. Over the next approximately 30 years the remainder of the churches

accepted the challenge of becoming self-supporting. “The withdrawal (of the LMS) was a gradual one, spanning thirty years and more - and if the Society kept the issue squarely before the churches, it was at least prepared to wait until they felt ready and able to accept the responsibilities of independence.” 58 The Society continued to support, even after withdrawal, particularly the training of brown and black people59 for the ministry.

One of the most significant results of the independence of the churches was the formation of the Evangelical Voluntary Union. The first move towards closer union of the newly independent churches resulted from an informal gathering of three ministers in Cradock, R.B. Taylor, Edward Solomon and T.D. Philip, in 1858. They decided to convene a meeting to discuss the possibility of some kind of alliance of churches who practised what they referred to as the “voluntary principle”. The voluntary principle is deeply rooted in Congregationalism, as illustrated by Saul Solomon, a deacon of Union Church in Cape Town and a Member of Parliament who introduced the Voluntary Bill to abolish all state grants to churches year after year for twenty-one years until it was passed in 1875. The belief behind the introduction of this bill was that the different religious communities of the Cape colony should, by their own efforts and resources, secure the means of religious worship and institution.60 The roots of the voluntary principle lie in the Anabaptist conviction that the church is a voluntary association of Christians patterned after the New Testament. They believed that, being a voluntary and free association implied a discipline

58 Ibid., p103
59 “Brown” refers to those people usually called “Coloured” and “Black” refers to those usually called “Africans”
60 Briggs & Wing, Op. cit., p111
and a way of life that could only be maintained if the church was a society "withdrawn", a
separate community, in particular separate from the state. It was thus as a result of their
belief in this principle that 14 ministers and 7 laymen met on 12-13 October 1859 at
Grahamstown where they proposed a "Union of voluntary evangelical churches in South
Africa". The proposed principles of association were:

1. "That every Christian church ought to be independent of government support,
and free from government interference."

2. "That every voluntary Christian church ought, if possessed of sufficient means,
to aid other churches of a similar character, whose circumstances may prevent
their making adequate religious provision for themselves, and that this duty is
particularly urgent in the present state of the country."

The Union of Voluntary Evangelical Churches of South Africa was thus formed, outlining
the relationship envisaged between the Union and its member churches as one

"which will secure all the advantages of mutual sympathy and aid when
seeking to promote common objects, and be a means of strength and
encouragement to each other at all times, without sacrificing or impairing
their individual freedom. The Union, when it shall be desired, will
cheerfully, according to its power, give its counsel and assistance, or
otherwise co-operate with a church in what it may deem a practicable
object; but it will rigorously abstain from any attempt at control or interference.

The perfect independence of the churches will ever be recognised and

62 Briggs & Wing, Op. cit., p113
maintained, as Christ intended them to be, without reference to social position, or other adventitious circumstances." 63

At the next meeting of the Union held in Port Elizabeth on 27-28 March 1861 the name was changed to the Evangelical Voluntary Union, thereby making the voluntary principle subordinate to the evangelical. The basis of the Union was expressed in the following principles:

1. It is the duty of every Christian Church to aid in the support and propagation of the Gospel;
2. The stronger churches are bound to render pecuniary aid to the weaker;
3. For the above purposes it is desirable that sister churches should form themselves into Associations.

In accordance with the third principle, the Union was therefore divided into the Eastern, Western and Kaffrarian Branches, each administered by a committee.

At the seventeenth annual meeting of the Union in 1896 a proposal was made to change the name to the "Congregational Union of South Africa" and that a committee be appointed to draw up a Constitution in accordance with that of the Congregational Unions of England and Wales, Scotland and America. This Constitution, however, had to be written in such a way that it did not affect the membership of any person who may not be a Congregationalist. On 6 July 1877, in Port Elizabeth, the change to the name was unanimously adopted and the Congregational Union of South Africa (CUSA) was born.

63 Ibid., p114
with provision in its constitution for the voluntary principle and for those who were not Congregationalists.

At the 1883 Assembly of CUSA ministers and representatives from the churches in the Eastern and Western Cape were, for the first time, brought together, and within a few years, all the churches in the Cape had joined the Union. At this Assembly, too, a fraternal delegate was chosen to represent CUSA at the annual meetings of the Natal Congregational Union, which had been formed amongst settler congregations in that colony, and the hope was expressed that a merger would be effected in due course between the two unions. "A rigid independence could not survive for long in the face of the churches' willingness to help one another and seek a wider fellowship with Congregationalists throughout South Africa." 64 Seventeen years later, in 1900, the uniting Assembly joining the two unions was held in Durban.

The Union, for practical purposes, functioned through District Associations of which there were six at the start. These Associations contributed greatly to the good administration of the denomination as well as to the growth of interdependence of the churches within the CUSA family. The growing family feeling was further encouraged and developed by the appointment, in 1920, of a Union Representative who, during the next five years, visited all the churches in CUSA. With such growth the need for a full-time secretary became so urgent that Vernon Miller was appointed in 1937. He served CUSA faithfully for 30 years until the formation of the UCCSA in 1967. "Vernon Miller's leadership was

64 Briggs & Wing, Op.cit., p212
responsible for consolidating the work of the Union, putting its finances on a firm footing and establishing a sound and effective administration." 65

At the 1945 Assembly it was decided to appoint a CUSA Council which was a deliberative body which came up with plans and made recommendations which could only be implemented by the Assembly or the Executive Committee. The Council played an important role in the life of CUSA and it was this body which, in 1959, took the first steps towards the formation of the UCCSA by suggesting that discussions be initiated which might lead to the eventual uniting of the three Congregational bodies in Southern Africa. At the 1960 meeting of the Council it was decided to draw up a memorandum which could serve as a basis for discussion at the meeting with the representatives of the London Missionary Society and the American Board Mission which was to be held at the end of that year. The sub-committee chosen to work on the memorandum made extensive use of a memorandum drawn up by the Revs. J. Wing and G.O.Lloyd. 66

In reporting to the 1963 Assembly the representatives of CUSA on the Joint Committee for Church Union said:

"For many years we have been aware of our common heritage within the Church of Christ, springing as we do from similar patterns of churchmanship. We have felt an increasing urge to come together in our work and witness that we might give a fuller expression to our Lord's High Priestly prayer, 'that they all may be one ... that the world...

65 Ibid., p281
may believe ...’ In the difficulties and tensions of our times we have
been more and more conscious of the need to consolidate our ranks
and to strengthen the service we render to the community.” 67

In its report to the 1564 Assembly the Executive Committee noted the “anxiousness” of
the bodies comprising the Joint Committee “that the union should be consummated as
quickly as possible.” 68

Coming Together

On the Witwatersrand the discovery of gold had brought Congregationalists from many
different parts of Southern Africa together. There they started worshipping and erecting
separate churches as members of the London Missionary Society, the American Board
Mission and the Congregational Union of South Africa. The need to bring these various
members of the Congregational family together was thus first felt on the Reef and resulted
in the formation of the Witwatersrand Congregational Church in 1937 uniting CUSA,
LMS and ABM. A united church was erected at Orlando, but due to tribal and language
differences and a continuous struggle for power, this venture came to an end in 1944. The
Witwatersrand Congregational Church, nevertheless, continued as a union of the Bantu
Congregational Church (of the American Board) and the London Missionary Society until
the formation of the UCCSA in 1967. The Witwatersrand Congregational Church, as a

66 CUSA Year Book 1961-1962. p58
67 CUSA Year Book 1963-1964. p42
68 CUSA Year Book 1964-1965. p38
forerunner of the UCCSA, proved that a wider union of Congregationalism in Southern Africa was possible.

The relationship between the LMS, ABM and CUSA had always been a close one. They used to send fraternal delegates to each others’ assemblies and council meetings and formed part of the Congregational witness in Southern Africa. Since there were no theological differences separating them, ministers moved freely from one body to another. The three bodies thus agreed to work together in areas of overlapping, resulting in united congregations being established on the Reef, Kimberley and Mafeking. Though difficulties did arise and one group or the other withdrew from all the schemes, the contact was not lost and a cordial relationship persisted. 69

The discovery of gold in the Orange Free State confronted the churches with the challenge of a large new area being opened up with the potential of enticing thousands of people. CUSA, who had a small work in the area, invited the ABM and LMS to consult with them on the possibilities of working together in the area. They were later joined by the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society and a joint council was formed in 1953 with the aim of establishing a United Church in the Orange Free State goldfields. The first united church was constituted on 6 February 1955 at Thabong in Welkom. The intention of the United Church, from the outset, was not to limit its activities to the OFS goldfields since it saw itself as a pilot project which would eventually lead to the union of all four churches. However, during the next couple of years it became apparent that the Paris Evangelical

Missionary Society did not fully share this vision, but the other three decided that the time had come for them, as Congregational Churches, to consider uniting with the others in Southern Africa. The Bantu Congregational Church (of the American Board) and the LMS called a joint consultation in 1960 at Wilgespruit to give preliminary consideration to the merging of the bodies and a continuation committee was elected. Meanwhile CUSA council had recommended to its assembly that negotiations be opened with the BCC and the LMS with a view to uniting the three Congregational Churches. 70

When the LMS and the BCC received the CUSA invitation they agreed to abandon their bilateral consultations and appoint representatives to the informal consultation proposed by CUSA. At the meeting, held on 23-24 May 1961, consensus was reached on the principles of union and a joint committee was constituted. The need for a continuing relationship with the “parent” bodies, the LMS in London and the ABM in Boston, was stressed and assurances from these bodies were secured. 71 The principles of union, as well as the proposed new name, the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa, were presented to the negotiating parties and immediately accepted by the LMS and BCC, but CUSA seemed to have some reservations about such a union of churches being referred to as a “church”, probably in accordance with early Congregationalist notions that only the local “gathered church” was truly church. In this regard, the then LMS church council secretary, J. K. Main, mentioned that the Congregational Principles of CUSA seem to be stronger than those of the LMS and BCC. He continued, “It seems to me that for Congregationalists to refuse to call themselves a Church because they are a union of

70 Ibid., p309
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churches is just about as stupid as it would be for a local Anglican or Methodist Church to refuse to call itself a Church because it is only part of a Church." 72 This hesitance on the part of the CUSA seems to have placed doubt in the minds of the other parties that union would be achieved by the envisaged date in 1967, but the name was accepted and a draft basis of union drawn up and approved by all in 1962. The joint committee prepared a constitution for the UCCSA and resolutions were passed by each of the assemblies of the BCC and CUSA as well as by the LMS church council in 1966 so that the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa could be inaugurated by the target date in Durban on 3 October 1967. "Thus was born a church which acknowledged a common ancestry in the arrival of the first LMS missionaries at the Cape in 1799; a church spread over five countries of Southern Africa - Botswana, Mozambique, South West Africa, South Africa and Rhodesia." 73

72 Letter from J.K. Main to Rev. M.O. James, general secretary of the LMS, dated 7 Feb. 1962.  

In this chapter we will consider the theological, ecumenical and social character of the UCCSA during the first twenty-five years after its formation. This particular period of time was chosen because it represents the period during which the Rev. Joseph Wing was General Secretary of the UCCSA. Wing was the most influential church leader in the shaping of the ethos of the UCCSA.

Theology

The theological basis of the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa was set out in the preamble to the Constitution adopted by the inaugural Assembly. The basis on which people gather together in true Reformed tradition is Scripture for “Scripture declares and faith accepts that the purpose of God from the beginning was to gather all people unto Himself in joyful and permanent communion...”74 Furthermore, the Church consists of those who believe in God as Father, accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and depend on the Holy Spirit for guidance and seek to live in the presence of God “according to all that He has made known or will make known to them.”75

In accordance with Congregational tradition the Church is seen as a corporate body, the life of which is most immediately expressed in the local church, and the wider fellowship is

74 UCCSA Year Book 1968. p11
realised mainly within the boundaries of "our denominations". The preamble states, however, that "the purpose of God will not be fulfilled until the barriers are broken down, and men (sic) accept each other, without reservation, as brothers, redeemed through faith in Christ by the grace of God made effective in us by the work of the Holy Spirit." The Church claims unity with believers everywhere and of all times who have submitted themselves to the Triune God and it endeavours to seek even fuller manifestations of that unity. The UCCSA thus joined the rest of the Church of Christ in seeking the "extension of God's kingdom in worship, fellowship, witness and service, by constant reformation according to His Word, and in obedience to His leading by participating in the ecumenical movement and sharing in the task of world evangelism." 

Belief in the Lordship of Jesus Christ is central to the theology of the UCCSA. Indeed, belief in Jesus as Lord and Saviour is the only confession needed to be accepted into membership of the denomination. But this does not mean that the UCCSA is opposed to creeds, confessions or declarations of faith:

"The traditional Congregational aversion to creeds as tests of faith must not be interpreted, however, as a complete rejection of articles of faith by Congregationalists. Most Congregationalists accept the ecumenical creeds and confessions of the Christian Church".

In a report to the 1980 Assembly of the UCCSA, the task force on the Nature of Congregationalism stated that the Church is compelled to reformulate its faith as it

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76 Ibid., p11
77 Ibid., p11
encounters new situations at each critical stage in its history. The first twenty-five years of the life of the UCCSA then, being a period of great unrest and upheaval in the subcontinent, necessitated constant reviewing of the faith and reformulation in order to establish what the action of the Church had to be in the constantly changing socio-political environment. If true to its confession, every action had to be performed in the light of what Scripture and in particular Jesus Christ demanded and as guided by the Holy Spirit.  

“In the light of what they believed to be the misuse of authority by bishops, our fathers affirmed that all authority belongs to Christ alone and that his authority is committed to the Church, at every level of its life, to be exercised in obedience to the Word (Bible) and under the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit.”

Important in the theology of the Lordship of Christ for Congregationalists in general and the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa in particular was the conviction that Christ’s authority is not only an authority over the Church as an institution but also and especially over individual Christians. Each individual member could and should act only under the guidance of the Holy Spirit as he or she read the Word of God. The action of the Church as a whole thus becomes the cumulative action of the individual members of the Church.

“Jesus Christ holds the people of God together in one Body under the authority of the one Word and in the fellowship of the one Spirit. Just as the Spirit gives different gifts of grace to the members of the Body, so he gives them different insights into the Word of God. Therefore, all the members have freedom of

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* Wing, Joseph, ed. *Jesus is Lord in Church and World.* Johannesburg: UCCSA. p5
belief in matters not at the heart of the faith or essential to the Church’s witness.

They also have a duty to one another’s insights in seeking to interpret the Word of God aright and in its full meaning. Especially they have a duty to listen to the corporate witness of the Church in its creeds and confessions of faith.

The Lordship of Christ was not only the confessed foundation of the UCCSA’s search for church unity during the period 1967 - 1992, but it also determined the denomination’s stand with regard to social justice and its relation to the State. The Twelfth Assembly meeting at Port Elizabeth in October 1978 stated it as follows: “Assembly affirms Jesus Christ as the Lord of all life and the only King and Head of the Church. It believes that the Church is set in the world to be a sign of the Kingdom of God and, as such, cannot be identified with any political party or system.” The same Assembly stated categorically: “The UCCSA maintains that the Biblical principle of the separation of Church and State is fundamental to the church’s life and prophetic calling in the world.”

The Lordship and Authority of Jesus Christ as King and Head of the Church and the authority of the Word of the Triune God were thus the principle tenets of the faith, formally confessed, of the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa during the first twenty-five years of its existence.

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78 Assembly Reports 1985, p126
79 Assembly Proceedings 1982, p10
81 Assembly Proceedings 1978, p34
82 Ibid., p13
Ecumenism and Church Unity

J.K. Main, the first chairman\(^3\) of the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa referred to unity as one of the most important challenges facing the newly formed union. “We need a dynamic. Is it too much to say that we need reformation, and is it too much to hope that a new reformation may come to the church as it seeks a new life in unity?”\(^4\) He referred here not only to the coming together of the three bodies to form the UCCSA, but also to the greater union of the Church of Christ which everyone should work towards. “We need a renewal of our own individual and corporate faith, but we need also a greater sense of involvement in the world in which we are called to proclaim our faith - and that means a real attempt to put that faith into terms which the world of 1967 can understand.”\(^5\) For Main the problem faced by the Church was how to reach ordinary people belonging to different cultures which comprised the communities which the UCCSA had to minister to. “It means participation in their hopes and fears, in their joys and sorrows, in their vague and sometimes incoherent aspirations, in their needs whether these be spiritual or material.”\(^6\) To deal with the problems of the communities, united Christian action was needed, as expressed as a recommendation in a report of a consultation (of CUSA) held at Graaff-Reinet on 29-30 March 1967 which called for consultation with other denominations at local church level. \(^7\) This would be one of the

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\(^3\) The title “Chairman” has now been changed (at the 1997 Assembly) to “President”. We shall, however, continue to use the title “Chairman” in this thesis.

\(^4\) UCCSA Year Book 1968, p52

\(^5\) Ibid., p52

\(^6\) Ibid., p52

\(^7\) Ibid., p65
first of many such recommendations which would come to Assembly during the next twenty-five years.

The need for united church action in ecumenical as well as social justice matters would become an often repeated principle in Assemblies and in correspondence to local churches. The “Message to the Churches”, for instance, which expounded on the first theme adopted by the new united Church, stated that it involved “a full understanding and appreciation of other churches and traditions and joint planning and action with other churches at local and denominational level.”88 In its report to the 1968 Assembly held at Port Elizabeth the Ministerial Committee referred to the shortage of ministers, especially in the rural areas and said: “It is clear that a ‘static’ concept of the minister’s calling and function in the modern world is totally inadequate for the needs of today. Much thinking will have to be done, new patterns of ministry will have to be tried and an ecumenical approach adopted.”89 With this great emphasis on ecumenism so early in its existence it is no wonder that the UCCSA was involved with negotiations with a view to union with other denominations in two separate groupings for most of the first twenty-five years, namely the Church Unity Commission and the Presbyterian/ Congregational Joint Committee. At the same time there was the ever present need to strengthen the ties between local churches within the UCCSA.

88 UCCSA Year Book 1969 p120
89 Assembly Reports 1985 p126
The Church Unity Commission

At the time of union the Congregational Union of South Africa had already been involved in unity talks with other denominations. At the inaugural Assembly CUSA reported that church unity talks between Anglicans, Presbyterians and Congregationalists had been taken a step further in 1967 when Methodist observers at the March meeting had declared their intention of joining the talks as full participants. There had also been observers from the Roman Catholic and Lutheran Churches and a decision had been taken to invite other churches to send observers. CUSA felt that it was time that the question of church union be taken to the laypeople in the churches "where the real ecumenical work has to be done." At the same Assembly the UCCSA decided to continue as a full member of the Church Unity Commission in South Africa.

The aim of the CUC, as stated in a report to the 1968 Assembly, was "to promote organic union between the Church of the Province of South Africa (CPSA), the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa, the Presbyterian Church of South Africa, the Bantu Presbyterian Church (BPC), the Tsonga Presbyterian Church (TPC) and the Methodist Church of South Africa (MCSA)." Such a union, the Commission believed, would be the "visible expression" of the Churches’ unity in Christ. Though this aim could not be achieved immediately it believed that organic unity was the ideal to be worked towards under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Commission saw its work as seeking a deeper understanding of and obedience to the will of Christ for his Church; establishing

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89 Assembly Reports 1985, p126
90 UCCSA Year Book 1968, p151
91 UCCSA Year Book 1969, p122
fellowship, mutual trust and respect among members of the participating churches and learning to understand the beliefs and practices of the various traditions represented. It therefore sought, from the participating churches, the mandate to continue to pursue the search for church unity on their behalf. The Commission recommended the establishment of a central secretariat to be funded by the churches and "strongly urged" churches "to co-operate as closely as possible in the sharing of buildings and the pooling of resources in every department of their work."\textsuperscript{92}

In December 1968 the Rev. J.W. De Gruchy, a Congregational minister, was appointed as part-time secretary of the CUC and a General Purposes Committee was elected to continue the Commission's work in the interim periods between its twice-yearly meetings. By September 1969 much progress had been made laying the basis of common understanding of the Church and the ministry. To expedite the work of the Commission, four sub-committees were formed: doctrinal, liturgical, scheme and structure, and buildings and practical co-operation. To develop local and lay participation, the Commission, in 1969, recommended to the assemblies of the churches that regional unity commissions be established which consist of a majority of lay members including men, women and young people.\textsuperscript{93} The need for a wider base of involvement in the search for union was stressed again in 1971 when the Commission emphasised the importance of involving people at all levels of church life and not to leave the search to a national committee only. Growing together through a common sharing in mission was seen by the Commission as an essential part of the search for union. It therefore encouraged the

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., p122
churches to work together on local projects of practical co-operation. At a national level, the Christian Education departments of the Church Unity Churches were already working together and a process had been started to get co-operation between the women’s, mission and publications departments.94

In the same report the Commission expressed its concern that African participation in CUC concerns was unsatisfactory. It therefore affirmed its commitment to seeking true fellowship and reconciliation between races within the churches since, without this, the search for church unity would be irrelevant. For the Commission it was important that white western ways of doing things not be imposed on the majority of church members. To this end an African Advisory Committee had been appointed to look carefully into the whole matter of African participation.95 It is interesting to note that the Chairman of the UCCSA at the time, the Rev. H.J. Hendrickse, remarked as follows in the foreword to the 1972 Year Book: "'One in God’s love' was the message of one of the banners of the Women’s Fellowship. I am happy to note that we are growing in that oneness, not only in our contracts with other denominations, but also in our determination to express that oneness which transcends race and colour."96

The 1972 Assembly received the Draft Plan of Union for study and comment and undertook to continue to encourage practical co-operation at every level.97 It was at this

93 UCCSA Year Book 1970, p139
94 UCCSA Year Book 1972, p290
95 Ibid., p290
96 Ibid., p2
97 UCCSA Year Book 1973, p142
time that the unity talks began to experience difficulties from within the Churches. The Plan of Union was seen by many, especially in the black community as irrelevant in terms of the real issues facing the Church in South Africa. The black members of the Commission also felt that mutual recognition did not exist between black and white members and ministers in any of the Churches and that reconciliation had to be effected at that level before mutual recognition across denominational lines could take place. Furthermore, the Churches could not agree on the issue about the inclusion or exclusion of the office of bishop in the plan of union.\footnote{In Touch: CUC News Bulletin Volume 2 no.18. March 1990. p4} It is, therefore, not surprising that the Assembly in 1977 noted and endorsed the Commission’s intention to suspend further work on the Plan of Union and the setting of intermediate goals which would prepare the Churches for organic unity. It approved, in principle, the preparation of a Covenant while also approving the plans for lay consultations. At the same time the publication of a common certificate of baptism and an ecumenical service book were also approved.\footnote{Assembly Proceedings ’77. p41}

At the 1978 Assembly the first draft of the proposed Covenant was accepted for study, comment and amendment.\footnote{Assembly Proceedings 1978. p17} The following year the second draft of the proposed Covenant was received and remitted to local churches and regional councils for study and comment with a view to ultimate acceptance.\footnote{Assembly Proceedings 1979. p31} The 1980 Assembly affirmed its commitment to organic and visible unity and directed the Church Unity Commission to proceed with the preparation of a full plan of union.\footnote{Assembly Proceedings 1980. p23} Once again, in 1981, Assembly affirmed its commitment to the search for union and requested local churches and regional
councils to study the Covenant and submit comments. 103 The 1982 Assembly accepted the Third Draft of the Covenant as well as the full implications of the mutual recognition of members and ministers outlined therein. Assembly also approved the amended form of the Model Constitution for United Churches. 104 At the 1983 Assembly the Executive Committee and Secretariat reported that some people had grown tired of waiting for church union to happen, but the UCCSA was committed to union because:

(a) the UCCSA is a united Church;
(b) at its inauguration in 1967 the UCCSA committed itself to union;
(c) the UCCSA and the Disciples of Christ united in 1972 and found mutual enrichment in union;
(d) the UCCSA is involved in almost every united congregation in South Africa;
(e) the UCCSA is a founder member of the Church Unity Commission and is fully committed to the SEARCH FOR UNION;
(f) the UCCSA had been engaged in union talks with the PCSA intermittently since 1904 and continuously since 1967;
(g) the UCCSA had always taken the Lord's High Priestly Prayer seriously and believed that unity in Christ should be made manifest in the visible unity and witness of the Church. 105

The Executive and Secretariat also reported that the CUC had suffered a “serious setback” when the CPSA only accepted the Covenant in principle. On their request, however, the Third Draft of the Plan of Union was prepared by the Commission, which was regarded as

103 Assembly Proceedings 1981, p25
104 Assembly Proceedings 1982, p17
105 Assembly Reports 1983, p17
a step in the direction of the goal of organic unity which was the main objective of the CUC. The report comments: “It is hoped that a clearer picture of the shape of our ultimate union will help many Anglicans to commit themselves to the intermediate proposals for the mutual recognition of members and ministers.” The third draft of the Plan of Union was received by Assembly and remitted to the regional councils and synods for consideration and comment.

In its 1984 report to the Churches the CUC sets out annexures to the Third Draft of the Plan of Union which deals with theological issues like the Faith, Baptism, Holy Communion, Profession of Faith and the Laying on of Hands, the Ordained or Special Ministry of the Church, the Rights and Responsibilities of Bishops and Presbyters and the Role of the Moderator. These annexures formed an integral part of the draft and were recommended to the Churches for study and comment in conjunction with the draft. The report also set out a proposed timetable for dealing with the Third Draft which envisaged the implementation of the Covenant in 1988. The CUC also commended to the Churches, for study, the document on “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry” compiled by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches and intended as a “spur to greater local effort in the search for union.” The first report of the Africanisation Committee, forming part of the CUC’s report, made recommendations to the Commission on the issues which had to be attended to for the Christian faith to become more

106 Ibid., p18
107 Assembly Proceedings 1983, p40
108 In Touch: CUC Newsbulletin Vol.2 No.17, August 1984, p6
109 Ibid., p6
acceptable to Black South Africans. Assembly received the annexures for study and comment, accepted, in principle, the timetable for the implementation of the Third Draft and took special note of the report and recommendations of the Africanisation Committee.

The CUC embarked on an educational programme for ministers, theological students and church members because it had discovered that ignorance, prejudice and myth had combined to confuse clergy and lay people with regard to the search for union. "Education and publicity must be given top priority if the commitment to union made by more than a million Christians on November 24th, 1974 is ever to become a reality." This was even more important in a South Africa which was in a state of crisis and where polarisation and division was also affecting the work and fellowship of the Church. "The unity of the Church would increase the credibility of its worship, work and witness in a divided country and offer a model for an alternative society, based on God’s Kingdom and his justice. To pray, as all Christians do, for the coming of God’s Kingdom on earth, is to pray for that love, unity and peace which are the hallmark of the Kingdom and the basis of the Church’s fellowship (KOINONIA)." The procedure for the acceptance of the Plan of Union and the Covenant as set out in this report of the CUC to the Churches was

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110 Ibid., p10
111 Assembly Proceedings 1984. p12
112 Assembly Reports 1985. p89-90
113 Unrest and violence had broken out throughout most of South Africa. A state of emergency had been declared which gave the government extraordinary and almost ruthless powers to restore law and order. Some of the ministers and members of CUC Churches had been taken into detention while others had been charged and were awaiting trial.
114 Assembly Reports 1985. p94
approved by Assembly. In an Assembly discussion on Church unity and Church Extension two goals were specified which called for all churches to embark upon teaching the gospel imperative on church unity and on regions and synods to establish at least one new CUC church during 1986. These goals “flowed out of a commitment to Church Unity and Church Extension.” The session also saw the need for investigating the reasons for church unity being problematic in some local settings. It seems that the commitment to church unity was only taken seriously at Assembly level and in some regions and local churches. It was a matter of concern to the UCCSA that Assembly resolutions were never really put into practice at especially local church level. This inability to close the gap between what Assembly resolved and local congregations practised is a weakness in the UCCSA which shall be more fully discussed in the final chapter of this dissertation.

The Commission, in 1986, ten years after the Soweto riots, in a Statement to the Churches, commented that, after reviewing its work over the previous eighteen years, it had decided that the situation in the country called for the future work of the CUC to lie in a radically different direction from the one which it had been following:

“The Commission recognises that now, when South Africa is in a state of political ferment, the strongest pressure for change is not in the area of Church structures. The demand for social justice in an undivided South Africa is the most urgent priority for most Christians today, and out of it has emerged a new form of ecumenism, which has united Christians at local level in common action, service,

Assembly Proceedings 1985. p42
and ministry in the many conflict situations around the country... The
Commission believes that the Church is confronted with a 'kairos',
a 'right time', which it cannot ignore. Ecumenical relationships must
reflect, primarily, a united witness for justice, reconciliation, and peace. 117

The Commission urged the Churches to renew the pledge they had made in the
Declaration of Intention in 1974 when they had committed themselves to seek the visible
unity which they believed to be God’s will for the Church. The Commission believed that
this unity could best be achieved if there was a greater Black representation in it to reflect
the membership of the participating Churches. 118 The Commission then laid down some
fundamental Principles of Union to be accepted by the Churches in place of the Plan for
Union.

The Executive Committee of the UCCSA realised that the failure of the Churches to reach
complete consensus on the Third Draft meant that the road to organic union would be a
long and tedious one, but, it commented, structural union was no longer a priority in the
South African context.

"The search for union has been overtaken by events. Ecumenism
is now experienced and practised in a different context - in the
pursuit of justice, in the solidarity of the oppressed, the detained
and those who are the victims of man’s inhumanity to man, whether
perpetrated by the system or by brother and sister on brother and sister.

116 Ibid., p65
117 Assembly Reports 1986, p106-107
118 Ibid., p107
There is nothing more ecumenical today than the funeral service of a victim of the current unrest. This is where people of all Christian communities 'feel' unity."  

Assembly, after a discussion of the *Statement to the Churches*, adopted the following recommendations **to be acted upon**:

(a) the granting of an extended mandate to the Commission which recognised the urgent need to grapple with the "kairos" of the Church in South Africa, the unity of which had emerged at the local level in the face of particular crisis needs and the continued quest for visible unity as pledged in 1974;

(b) the Commission's call for acceptance and adoption of the **Principles of Union** as a statement of fundamental principles which will form the basis of the continuing search for unity;

(c) that informal mutual recognition of members be given by all Church courts;

(d) that recognition be given on an informal basis for the exercising of a full ministry of Word and Sacraments in united congregations and other local situations to meet the needs imposed by the reigning situation in the country;

(e) that regional leaders be encouraged to participate in the meetings planned by the CUC throughout South Africa to prepare a strategy for ecumenical consultation and joint action;

119 Ibid., p21-22
(f) that five members be appointed to the Commission of which at least three should be black and that the reconstituted Commission be authorised to renew the existing CUC committee structures with changes to meet the needs of the moment. 120

A year later the Commission reported that it had received the extended mandate from the Churches and it was trying to relate the search for union to the contextual situation in Church and society. A new, unstructured unity was emerging in South Africa at local level and in response to crisis needs. The churches were exercising a challenging and compassionate role in unity and service.

"The Church Unity Commission, as a body, cannot initiate such action from a central office, but there are numerous places where the ministers of CUC Churches, and many others, have demonstrated a unity in Christ in response to human need, suffering and injustice which has had a profound influence on communities throughout the country. This not so much a 'search for union', as a discovery of unity in witness and service. It is a form of 'incarnational unity' where people come face to face with God and with one another at the place of their shared experience and need." 121

The CUC had, however, not abandoned the search for organic union - the commitment made via the Declaration of Intention in 1974 had to be re-affirmed by the Churches. Church leaders and the clergy were reminded that points 4, 5 and 6 of the Covenant had been accepted by all the Churches in 1982 whereby they had committed themselves to

120 Assembly Proceedings 1986. p30
pursue means of acting together in worship, witness and service; to seek the realisation of a fellowship that transcends tradition, nation, culture class and colour; to work together to spread the Gospel, for justice and peace and for the total well-being and freedom of all people. Regional church leaders had to work towards the attainment of these ideals. 122

There was, however, one point of the Covenant which had not yet been accepted by all the CUC Churches and that was the mutual recognition of members. The Commission challenged the Churches to implement this point as soon as possible, since it weakened the witness of the Church of Christ within the context of what was happening in South Africa. "Mutual recognition of members is a priority for the Churches in South Africa if they are to maintain the credibility of the Gospel of reconciliation in our divided society." 123

Assembly resolved that the implications of the Principles of Union be given careful study and that regional leaders be encouraged to participate in the consultations planned by the Commission. 124 In its next report the Commission could report that none of its members had gone back on the 1974 Declaration of Intention and that the Commission had grown, during the twenty years of its existence, in mutual love and respect. The search for visible unity was still the basis of the Churches' commitment to Christ and to one another. Though the Commission realised and re-affirmed that it had to be relevant and contextual, it could not abandon the "search for union" for which it was brought into existence. 125

121 Assembly Reports 1987, p121
122 Ibid. p123
123 Ibid., p124
124 Assembly Proceedings 1987, p29
125 Assembly Reports 1988, p62
The main factors which continued to be a barrier to organic unity were not theological in nature.

"Tradition dies hard and there is a strong fear that Church union will result in a monolithic structure in which the distinctive ethos of the uniting Churches would be submerged. The Commission, therefore, is committed to the promotion of a form of union which is based on trust and mutual respect, and not on the elimination of diversity."126

As the next step in the search for union the Commission urged the Churches, again, to move immediately to the mutual recognition of members. The Commission saw its role in the future as that of assisting local churches to rediscover themselves and each other.

"The Commission’s pre-occupation with denominational structures and plans of union over the past twenty years has ignored the fact that the local congregation is the Church in microcosm and the spearhead of its mission - if unity and mission do not happen there, they do not happen!"127

The Commission celebrated its twenty-first year of existence by rejoicing in the fact that all the Churches had at last accepted mutual recognition of members. This, the Commission believed, would enable it to make a more effective witness in the separated South African society and it would strengthen the Churches’ call for the dismantling of all apartheid structures.128

126 Ibid., p62
127 Ibid., p66
128 Assembly Reports 1989. p123-124
The 1990 Assembly affirmed United Congregations as an expression of the unity sought by the Churches and resolved to co-operate with attempts to improve liaison between these congregations and the participating denominations. Assembly re-affirmed its undertaking to consult partner Churches and to consider co-operation before developing congregations in new areas. The 1991 report of the Commission, however, lamented the fact that many people were unaware of this pledge or simply ignored it. The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, which had become part of the ecumenical calendar over many years, was still being ignored or rejected by some clergy. Though efforts had been made to unite the departments of the Churches, these departments still continued to struggle on their own shoe-string budgets, refusing to explore joint programmes as a matter of course. In the light of this report, Assembly again re-affirmed its commitment to consult partner Churches before embarking on schemes of extension in order to avoid duplication and competition.

The Presbyterian/ Congregational Joint Committee

The 1964 Assemblies of the PCSA and the CUSA had already decided to re-open conversations with a view to the union of the two Churches. It was decided, in principle, that the closest possible liaison should be established between the two Churches with a view to the co-ordination of existing work, co-operation, and the elimination of overlapping in the establishment of new work. A Joint Committee was set up in the

129 Assembly Proceedings 1990. p26
130 Assembly Reports 1991. p110
131 Assembly Proceedings 1991. p54
Transvaal in 1966 to co-ordinate the development of African work in that area and at its first meeting this committee decided to recommend to their respective Assemblies that immediate steps be taken to explore and implement co-operation and joint action between Presbyterians and Congregationalists at all levels of church life, a recommendation which was accepted by both Assemblies. The Joint Committee was thus established consisting of five representatives from each denomination and chaired by Rev. H.H. Munro with the Rev. J. Wing as secretary.\textsuperscript{132}

This Committee reported to the 1971 Assembly that much of the work of local liaison committees in the Eastern Cape, Transvaal and Western Cape had been frustrated by strong local loyalties and a desire to maintain a denominational identity. With regard to formal union negotiations the opinion of the committee was that these should be initiated as soon as deemed practical after the union of the PCSA, the TPC and the BPC on the one side, and the UCCSA and the Disciples of Christ on the other, had been effected.\textsuperscript{133} In the meantime it would be important for the Churches at local level to establish good working relationships among themselves. The work done by local liaison committees thus became crucial, therefore the 1972 Assembly urged them to "extend and intensify their activities to promote union at local level and to stimulate interest in the ultimate union of the PCSA with the UCCSA."\textsuperscript{134} At the same time Assembly approved the Model Constitution for United Presbyterian/Congregational congregations directing it to be used in all places where united congregations had been or were to be established. Assembly also accepted

\textsuperscript{132} UCCSA Year Book 1969. p123
\textsuperscript{133} UCCSA Year Book 1972. p297
\textsuperscript{134} UCCSA Year Book 1973. p146
the overture of the PCSA which requested the engagement of the two denominations in formal conversations with a view to union. The existing Joint Committee was charged with the responsibility of preparing a scheme for the organic union.\footnote{Ibid., p147}

But while negotiations towards organic union were in progress, the difficult task was the one of convincing the members of the Churches that Church unity was a priority. This is evident from the efforts made by the 1978 Assembly in this regard, requesting, among other things, the local churches and regional councils to consider the following:\footnote{Assembly Proceedings 1978, p10}

"The churches need to show that God's will for South African society is unity, not division. It is, therefore, essential to demonstrate that in Christ's Church all groups can be united in one Body in a meaningful way. One of the obstacles in the past has evidently been fear of domination by one group or another. Those in predominantly White Churches are afraid of being dominated by a Black majority. Those in predominantly Black Churches fear the prospect of being overwhelmed by White leadership. No one of the four denominations (BPC, TPC, PCSA and UCCSA) fully reflects the composition of the South African society. The union of these four churches would more accurately reflect this society. We, therefore, believe the call for union comes to us at a time of crucial challenge for the Church and for the community of which we are part. At a time like this, we believe that union would be a significant witness to the conviction that people of
different cultures and backgrounds can nevertheless be united in Christ.”

In 1979 Assembly instructed the Joint Committee to prepare and submit to the Churches a Scheme of Union. The existing scheme of union, as amended, was adopted as the Basis of Union between the Presbyterian Church of South Africa, the Reformed Presbyterian Church, \(^138\) the Tsonga Presbyterian Church and the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa. \(^139\) The following year it was reported to Assembly that all the regional councils had adopted the Scheme of Union. Assembly received the Draft Constitution of the United Church in Southern Africa (Presbyterian/Congregational) and instructed the secretary to send copies to local churches for comment. Synods and regional Councils were instructed to vote on the draft at their annual general meetings in 1981 so that a final vote could be taken at Assembly 1981.\(^140\) This decision was taken after the Joint Committee had, in its report to the Churches, expressed its conviction that organic unity had to be accomplished as soon as possible because, if this did not happen then, it would never happen and the Churches would find themselves irrelevant within the context of the South African society.\(^141\)

The timetable for Union was accepted by the 1981 Assembly where it was agreed that the 1983 Assemblies of the UCCSA and PCSA be held at the same time and place. Assembly was urged to engage in a campaign to involve local church members in preparation for

\(^{137}\) Ibid., p18-19  
\(^{138}\) Formerly the Bantu Presbyterian Church  
\(^{139}\) Assembly Proceedings 1979, p30  
\(^{140}\) Assembly Proceedings 1980, p21  
\(^{141}\) Assembly Reports 1980: Joint Committee Report, p1
union. 142 At the 1983 Assembly, held in Boksburg, the Manual of Law and Procedure was accepted as the basis of Union and sent to the regional Councils and synods for ratification. After the resolution was passed, "Assembly expressed its joy and thanksgiving in praise-singing and prayer." 143 The joy which was expressed should be seen against the background of the Executive Committee report which sounded a pessimistic note in reporting that "certain misgivings in regard to union are being expressed in the UCCSA and, more particularly, in the PCSA, which indicate that the commitment to union is not as definite as we may have imagined it to be." 144 In view of this, it was the opinion of the Executive that there was a need for more contact at the local level than there had been up to that moment.

The big disappointment came in 1984 when the Joint Committee reported that negotiations would be discontinued due to the fact that the agreed upon percentage of votes needed for union had not been attained. Only seven presbyteries of the PCSA had voted in favour of union whereas at least eight had to say yes for negotiations to continue. The presbyteries which voted in favour represented 56.3% of the total votes recorded. In the UCCSA all the regional councils, except the Algoa region, were able to muster more than 75% of the votes needed for union. The Algoa region could only attain 66% of the votes in favour of union. Organic union was thus defeated by a very slim margin and had to be abandoned in accordance with the agreement reached between the two Churches. 145

142 Assembly Proceedings 1981, p11
143 Assembly Proceedings 1983, p9
144 Assembly Reports 1983, p18
The Joint Committee, at its final meeting, tried to analyse some of the reasons behind the reaction. It identified, among others, a general failure to get leaders of the two Churches together at local level to promote mutual knowledge and understanding; a widespread lack of knowledge of the issues involved as well as the proposals being made to resolve such issues; considerable theological turmoil in both denominations; racial and financial fears, and considerable disagreement on the kind of unity Christ wills for his Church. 146

"The Committee records this with the deepest regret. As a Committee we have worked for the proposed union because we believed it was God’s will for us at this time and because the Assemblies have, year after year, supported us in that belief. We record our conviction that by failing to unite we are depriving one another of the opportunity to contextualise and further deepen our understanding of the Gospel’s offer and demand in this sub-continent. Neither denomination, as it now is, reflects the fullness of Southern African society and the United Church would have been a more faithful reflection of that fullness." 147

Assembly re-affirmed the arrangements concerning the mutual eligibility of ministers, the Memorandum of Association, the Property Agreement and the Model Constitution for United Congregations. It also agreed to the establishment of a Committee on

145 Assembly Reports 1984 :Joint Committee Report, p1
146 Ibid.p1
147 Ibid.p1
Presbyterian/Congregational Relations as a Standing Committee with three representatives from each Church. The purpose of this Committee was to promote and encourage integrated worship, mutual eligibility of membership, the establishment of fraternal relationships at all levels of Church life and consultation regarding evangelism, Christian Education, stewardship and other areas of church life with a view to the pooling of personnel and resources and co-operative effort. Assembly instructed regional councils and synods where there was an overlap to establish liaison committees with the same terms of reference as the Committee on Presbyterian/Congregational Relations (CPCR).

Assembly recorded its "profound regret at the failure of the proposed scheme of union with the Presbyterian Church of South Africa. At the same time, it gives thanks to God for the fellowship in Christ that has been built up over the many years of negotiations with the PCSA. Assembly believes that a bond has been established between our two Churches which must be maintained by the confirmation and implementation of existing agreement, by close liaison at Assembly, regional and local levels and by a clear and continuing commitment to do nothing separately which can be done together." 148

Assembly also re-affirmed its support for the search for union to which it was still committed in terms of its 1971 resolution and the services of commitment held on 24 November 1974.

The newly established Committee on Presbyterian/Congregational Relations set out its role in its first report to Assembly in 1985. It saw itself promoting, facilitating, monitoring

148 Assembly Proceedings 1984, p13
and co-ordinating the areas of joint action such as initiating new joint work through Church Extension Committees, but it would not promote or negotiate the organic unity of the UCCSA and the PCSA since the Assemblies had not given it that mandate. The Principles of Co-operation formulated by the CPCR were adopted by Assembly in 1986. These principles included the following:

(a) that full consultation take place between the two Churches and, where possible, the other CUC Churches in all areas where new work is contemplated or planned;

(b) that the first Church to move into the area concerned arrange a meeting with the other potential parties;

(c) that, where only a Presbyterian or Congregational church exists in a particular area, the local church gives serious consideration to reconstituting itself as a United Church, without necessarily forfeiting its distinctive heritage and ethos as a former Presbyterian or Congregational church;

(d) that there be a full exchange of minutes and other information between the church extension departments of the two denominations.

Assembly also approved the principle that united congregations be established wherever possible with as many CUC partner churches as are willing to participate in joint work.

Despite the fact that both denominations had accepted the basic principles in 1986, the CPCR reported in 1987 that the lack of contact and co-operation between Presbyterian and Congregational churches was still a matter of concern. There was a need for closer

149 Assembly Reports 1985, p95-96
150 Assembly Proceedings 1981, p11
151 Assembly Reports 1985, p95-96
co-operation leading to joint action. "The Committee is fully cognisant of the fact that the abandonment of any formal proposals for the union of the PCSA and the UCCSA has removed one of the major incentives for united work - it is difficult (supposedly for local churches) to see where a local union of Presbyterians and Congregationalists is leading." According to the Committee some serious tensions were being experienced even in some areas where united work was established, disrupting what was often the fragile basis of local unity. "Denominational loyalties are strong and practical issues rather than principles of union are frequently the cause of misunderstanding and division." But the CPCR also saw signs of hope and encouragement since many united congregations were fully integrated and growing in strength and influence. In fact, the following year the Committee could report that it was finding its work increasing as more and more United Churches were being established. In addition it was involved in the maintenance of established United Churches and the solving of specific problems which had arisen. Increasingly the Committee was fulfilling an important role in problem-solving and supporting some of the new work. Some difficulties were being experienced with new work being started without the Committee being contacted in compliance with Assembly resolutions requiring contact with other denominations before commencing new work. The 1989 report seems to be almost a duplication of the previous year’s one with the mention of increasing responsibilities due to a steady increase in the number of united congregations which needed encouragement and inspiration. The need for liaison.
committees in Natal, the Eastern Cape and Orange Free State was growing, but the same problems were still being experienced with regard to the consultation of the CPCR when new work was being started. However, the Committee had to report in 1991 that no response had been forthcoming in the Orange Free State and Natal to the Assembly request that liaison committees be established and this was complicating the work of the Relation’s Committee. Assembly resolved to repeat the request.

The delegates of the UCCSA and the PCSA who had attended the Rustenburg Conference in 1991, requested that the Assemblies reconsider the question of union between the two denominations. This matter was then referred to the CPCR with an instruction from the PCSA Assembly that it identifies the perceived problems in the way of such a union and how they are to be addressed. The Committee reported the following problems as perceived by it to the 1992 Assembly:

(a) the PCSA turning down the opportunity to unite in 1984;
(b) the fear of losing denominational identity;
(c) a general apathy among ministers and members towards ecumenical issues;
(d) especially within the PCSA there was a concern with regard to pensions and stipends;
(e) fear of a black majority in the United Church;
(f) PCSA fears that there will not be sufficient authority in the new structure and that there is too little authority over local congregations within the UCCSA;

155 Assembly Reports 1989, p130
156 Assembly Proceedings 1991, p92
157 This was a conference held at Rustenburg, Transvaal in November 1990 where 230 representatives of approximately 100 Christian denominations, church associations and interdenominational agencies met. The purpose was to try and discern the will of God for South Africa under guidance of the Holy Spirit.
The Relations Committee left it to the Assemblies to make a decision about how they would deal with these perceived problems, but they were convinced that they had to be dealt with at all levels, the Churches had to be encouraged to find each other and any further co-operation had to be built on the existing agreements and commitment.\textsuperscript{158}

Unity within the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa

In 1972, just after the UCCSA and the Disciples of Christ had united, the chairman of the UCCSA at the time, Rev. D.R. Briggs, mentioned that people were referring to the UCCSA as "trend-setters" because it had been involved in two uniting acts in five years. He ascribed this partly to the brand of churchmanship of Congregationalists which emphasises unity in diversity. Though each local church is different in size, composition and the way it seeks to fulfil its mission, they are all united and this can be seen in the way they care about one another at regional and Assembly levels. "We have, in fact, found the secret of real unity through our diversity, and we maintain that this is the key not only to the re-union of the Church, but to many of the problems in our society too."\textsuperscript{159} He went on to say that many stresses had been experienced within the UCCSA since its formation, any of which could have split the church with factions or divided it all over again, "(b)ut

\textsuperscript{158} Assembly Reports 1992, p121
\textsuperscript{159} UCCSA Year Book 1973, p7
the love of Christ has controlled us, to join us together even more strongly. These words proved to be somewhat prophetic, because Rev. Briggs had no way of knowing what problems regarding its unity still lay ahead for the UCCSA. It is significant that Briggs referred to union being visible at regional and Assembly levels! No mention was made of the situation at local level.

The issue which would cause the greatest dissension among churches belonging to the UCCSA was the denomination’s affiliation to the World Council of Churches. When the WCC started to give financial aid to movements involved in the struggle for liberation (and regarded by many whites as “terrorists”), there were many local churches which wanted the UCCSA to withdraw from the WCC, but this did not happen. The 1972 Assembly accepted the following resolution:

"The Assembly of the UCCSA abhors and rejects violence and terrorism, in all forms, as self-perpetuating and alienating forces which are contrary to the teaching of Christ and a denial of the reconciling power of the Cross. Violent action carries within itself the seed of its own destruction and invariably obscures the purpose for which it is perpetuated by the reaction of horror which it engenders in the public mind." 161

Assembly, however, resolved to remain part of the WCC because it realised the need for constant dialogue with the world ecumenical body. To spurn contact with the WCC just because it seemed to have a closed mind on certain issues and tended to treat South African representatives badly would only ensure that the voice of South Africans was not

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160 Ibid., p7
heard in the WCC. Assembly thus affirmed that continuing dialogue with the World Council was essential.

That this decision caused a lot of strife during the next few years can be seen in the fact that Assembly found it necessary, in 1979, to re-affirm the Covenant accepted in 1967 by the uniting churches as the basis of the UCCSA's corporate life. It also re-affirmed that the local church is the focal point of the Church Universal, and that the authority exercised by the Assembly and regional councils is a ministerial and not a magisterial authority. A committee was appointed to prepare a statement on Congregationalism with “minority rights” as part of its terms of reference. This resolution was apparently made to try and protect some of the members of local churches whose rights were not being acknowledged by others who wanted to sever from the UCCSA. This became apparent when the Secretary reported in 1980 that the work and witness of the UCCSA had been seriously handicapped during the preceding year by the internal strife which was experienced by many local churches where different factions were trying to gain control of the churches' administration. The UCCSA was "perplexed and puzzled" by the refusal of some local churches to dialogue with the representatives appointed by the Executive Committee and by their determination to sever all ties with the UCCSA.

It was thus with deep regret that Assembly noted the decisions of the Cape Town Union Church, the Sea Point Congregational Church, the Maitland Congregational Church and

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161 Ibid., p131-132
162 Assembly Proceedings 1979. p8
163 Assembly Reports 1980. p1
the St. David's Congregational Church, Port Elizabeth to sever all ties with the UCCSA. Assembly directed the Executive Committee to make a careful study of "break-away" movements and to examine ways and means of maintaining contact and fellowship with those who had severed from the UCCSA. At the same time the Constitution of the UCCSA was amended to include procedures whereby severance from the denomination could be effected. These procedures included the giving of ninety days notice to all members of a special meeting where severance would be discussed, a two-thirds majority vote in favour of severance and the appointment of a minister by the regional council to preside at such a special meeting. The reason for the amendment of the Constitution in this way was because of the procedures followed by some of the churches when they severed and the fact that the decision to sever had not been unanimous in all cases. Churches did not want to agree to dialogue unless the UCCSA was willing to accept categorically certain conditions laid down by the severing churches. Referring to these churches, the Executive Committee commented:

"We are saddened by the desire of these historic Congregational Churches to sever all ties with the denomination to which they have belonged for so long, and with which their history is so closely bound. We are still persuaded that differences need not divide and that, where there is a genuine desire for KOINONIA (fellowship), the point is never reached when the gap is so wide that dialogue becomes impossible. The UCCSA has never disputed the right of the local church to sever its ties with the UCCSA. the Executive Committee is of the opinion, however, that the process leading to severance should be

\[164\] Assembly Proceedings 1980. p.9
one in which there is adequate time for reflection and some kind of protection of minority groups. It is for this reason that a procedure for severance has been formulated as an amendment to the Constitution. 165

Apart from the strife caused by affiliation to the WCC, there was also some concern about the degree of racial integration or lack thereof which could be seen within the UCCSA at local church level. This concern was voiced at least once, in 1977, by the incumbent chairman, the Rev. B.K. Dludla:

“It may be pleasing for us to be here together. But the moment we move out of here or from any other assembly, we become divided and estranged as ever. We have conformed to this world and not been transformed by the renewal of our minds, in order to prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect (Rom. 12.2). Human laws have become more binding to our consciences than God’s law.” 166

He went on to point out that the UCCSA had been the pioneer in negotiating unity talks with other denominations, “(b)ut, distressingly, not once have we given thought to the fact that we ourselves are not fully integrated at congregational level.” 167 Dludla referred to the tendency of local churches, even his own, to recruit members only from a particular racial group, the one to which the particular congregation belonged. The excuse usually given for this practice is the one of language, but that problem, he says, does not seem to

165 Assembly Reports 1980, p5
166 Chairman’s Address, 23 September 1977, p5
167 Ibid., p6
exist when business is practised. The language qualification is not a spoken one but is understood. He continued:

"In some isolated instances certain church members have left their church where the minister and the church council or deaconate decided to admit into full membership persons of a different race, or allowed a mixed gathering for purposes of worship... Some of our church people when they find themselves in communities which are not of their own race, they are not invited to full participation in the life of the existing church in that community." 168

That the Executive Committee realised that racial harmony was to be crucial as far as unity within the UCCSA was concerned, can be seen in the comment made in its report to Assembly in 1971:

"It is the opinion of the Executive Committee that a full recognition of interdependence is the only way forward if the UCCSA is to express its convictions regarding racial matters in practical forms. This may involve change, both in existing attitudes and in organisational patterns, if racial justice and reconciliation are to be achieved within the context of the Church's life and work." 169

The Church and Society report of 1977 again highlighted the need for sound human relations when it referred to the effect that the South African society had on the Church:

"Notwithstanding the fact that the UCCSA witnesses in its own life to an

168 Ibid., p6
allegiance which transcends race and political boundaries and in which Jesus Christ is acknowledged as supreme, the UCCSA is caught up in a situation of escalating violence and deteriorating human relations in which issues of Christian principle often become blurred by groups or national identity and interests. Our spiritual unity in the Church has often been a facade hiding the division and hurt in our real life outside the Church.”  

An attempt at changing the face of the Church to make it less racially segregated and more in accordance with the principles for which the UCCSA stood, was made in 1980 when Assembly resolved that the process of integration at theological education level had to be accelerated; that theological students be placed for field work on the basis of a cross-cultural pattern of ministry; that vacant churches be encouraged to consider all ministers on the Roll of Ministers as being eligible for call or appointment to any local church; that local dialogue be initiated between local churches with a view to taking practical steps towards the initiating of team ministries and integrated congregations in particular towns or areas.

"Assembly notes that resolutions and documents have little impact on people and their attitudes. Doing things together as ministers, persons and congregations is essential to understanding. In order to speak honestly to one another we must become acquainted with each other’s life-style. It is only in this way that we shall help one another to be faithful to the Gospel."  

169 UCCSA Year Book 1972, p191
A note of warning is sounded, however:

"Time is no longer on the side of gradual change. Political and social pressures may overtake the Church in South Africa as they have done in Zimbabwe. The Church must lead the way, not follow the train." 172

In 1986, again, Assembly called on churches to show that the Church was a changed community:

"Recognising that the suspicion, hostility and polarisation which characterise the life of Southern Africa have invaded the Church, the Assembly calls on our local churches and members to demonstrate to the world that through Jesus Christ we can transcend and overcome them. Assembly affirms that the Church must be seen to stand for justice and reconciliation, both within its own structures and in society - Christians are called to be heralds of "a more excellent way", the way of love." 173

The problems regarding the unity or lack thereof within the UCCSA stemmed from the failure of the Assembly to convince local churches and regions/synods to act in accordance with Assembly resolutions. Local churches and regional councils/ synods did not feel compelled to put into practice each and every decision taken at Assembly level. As Congregationalists, this was their prerogative, of course, but it meant that many important actions, crucial to the witness of the UCCSA were ineffective. An important question within the UCCSA has thus always been the extent to which local churches and

170 Assembly Proceedings 1978.p34
171 Assembly Proceedings 1980. p27
172 Ibid. p28
regions/synods could be coerced into applying all Assembly resolutions, especially since such decisions, as far as Congregationalism is concerned, is regarded to have been taken under the guidance of the Spirit of God! This question will be discussed more fully in the final chapter.

**Social Justice**

If the Churches were struggling to be united within and among themselves, it was just a reflection of the division and separatedness of the South African society. The first twenty-five years of the existence of the UCCSA were also the most turbulent in the history of the sub-continent and the most traumatic for most of its peoples. As law after apartheid law was being passed and implemented, the more divided the country became and so the resistance against those laws grew and violence escalated. Apartheid legislation brought in its wake the socially disruptive evils of family breakdown, alcoholism and moral decay. The war on the country's borders and in neighbouring countries caused instability, and accompanied by the drought conditions which existed, caused poverty, hunger and homelessness. It was against this background and under these conditions that the relatively young United Church had to establish its ethos and be of moral significance.

173 *Assembly Proceedings 1986, p34*
Human Rights

The 1969 Executive Committee report to Assembly expressed its concern about legislation and contemplated legislation which would "place an increasing and almost intolerable burden on the African and Coloured people." The report continued:

"It is easy to be conditioned by the society in which we live and accept as normal and right some things which deny basic Christian insights as to the dignity and worth of men and women." 174

The Church and Society report cast more light on the legislation by referring to the great concern given to many people in South Africa by the Population Registration Amendment Bill and the Bantu Laws Amendment Bill. The Executive Committee strongly endorsed the statements issued by the South African Institute for Race Relations and the South African Council of Churches on the two bills. The SAIRR's statement on the Population Registration Amendment Bill stated that the bill had caused much confusion "as to the destiny of the small minority of people whose appearance, associations and descent do not happen to coincide." 175 The SAIRR therefore pleaded that these people be allowed to remain in the racial category in which they feel most at ease and that they be allowed to appeal against classifications. According to the SACC, the Bantu Laws Amendment Bill provided for "unchecked and limitless power over the work opportunities of African people in South Africa" which no one should have over the lives of others, since it is in conflict with the Christian understanding of Man and the democratic principles which have evolved it. 176 The Council rejected the subjection of certain people to discrimination in employment opportunities on the grounds of race alone.

174 UCCSA Year Book 1970, p84
175 Ibid., p91
176 Ibid., p52
Assembly commended the Rondebosch Congregational Church in Cape Town for its resolution based on its study of the SACC’s “Message to the People of South Africa” in which the church had, among other things, the following to say:

“We bear a responsibility for the situation here, for the Christian believes that the unity of the Body of Christ is broken by racial discrimination and injustice and the humanity of all races is degraded by apartheid... We affirm that every man is equally precious to God regardless of colour, race or cultural background; that it is possible for the various racial groups in our Country to live together in harmony, and that all should be adequately represented in the governing of the country in which we are all living.”

After a deportation order was served on one of the UCCSA’s expatriate church workers and the Johannesburg and Durban offices of the Church had been visited by the police in February 1971, the Executive Committee sent a letter to all local churches giving a factual account of what had happened as well as the stand of the UCCSA on the matter:

“As a Church we are not ashamed of anything we have said or done; neither are we prepared to repudiate the actions of our members who have demonstrated their concern and compassion for the victims of apartheid in practical ways. We have nothing to hide. We have stated our Christian convictions in regard to freedom and justice publicly and demonstrated our belief in the dignity and worth of all men openly. The

177 Ibid., p92
United Congregational Church of Southern Africa has not sought a confrontation between Church and State, but it has pledged itself ‘to work for justice, freedom and racial reconciliation in Southern Africa’, and this it will continue to do, ‘by means consistent with the Gospel’. We refuse to be intimidated by recent Government action, or to stand by and watch the erosion of those liberties which are an integral part of our Christian heritage.

Throughout history there has often been tension between the prophetic witness of the Church and the official policies of the State. This is the kind of tension which South Africa is experiencing at the present time. The State interprets it as a threat to its own security; the Church sees it as a genuine concern for South Africa’s highest good and the welfare of all her peoples. It is a tension from which we cannot escape and in which we dare not acquiesce if we are to be faithful to the truth of the Gospel.”

In 1972 Assembly passed a resolution commending to local churches “the need to give prayerful thanks for the courage of those who have been restricted, banned, deported or otherwise silenced or deprived of liberty for conscience sake.” It also encouraged churches to support in practical ways the dependants of those who had suffered such violations of their basic human rights and to continue any work which they had been engaged in. Assembly urged local churches to ask themselves in honesty whether they were letting their voice be heard in the “defence of human rights, Christian values, and a

178 UCCSA Year Book 1972. p192
way of life for our country no longer deformed by barriers erected along the lines of race and colour." 179 Churches were urged to actively participate in all ecumenical efforts designed to further Christian witness on social issues and to prevent that such witness be suppressed by secular authority.

Because the UCCSA believed in basic human rights based on democratic principles, it also defended the right of freedom of expression and of the press. In 1979 Assembly commended those sections of the media which had fearlessly published facts which were in the public interest. Freedom of speech and of the press were necessary for the communication of the Gospel and also to expose malpractice in public and private affairs as well as for the defence of justice.

"This Assembly believes that it will be in the best interests of the nation if the Government desists from promulgating further legislation curtailing Press freedom, and repeals those measures in the Police Amendment Act and the Inquests Amendment Act which limit reporting on matters of concern to the public. Restrictive measures which prevent open enquiring invariably lead to the repression of truth and the evasion of justice." 181

The 1981 Assembly decided to take the South African Associated Newspapers to task in a letter which: (a) criticised the Government ban on Post as yet another infringement of the freedom of the press and an attempt to stifle all opposition, in that case the voice of the majority of South Africans; (b) regarded the summary dismissal of Mr. Alistair

179 UCCSA Year Book 1973, p136
180 Ibid., p136
181 Assembly Proceedings 1979, p16
Sparks as Editor of the *Rand Daily Mail* as a sad commentary on press freedom and the silencing of prophets for profits.

"Mr. Sparks' political discernment lay in the fact that he saw South African politics not only in terms of the Government and the Official Opposition, but in the emergence of a Black political consciousness which ultimately would be more influential in determining the future of South Africa than the policies of White politicians." 182

Assembly found the political control of the press in Zimbabwe and Mozambique equally disturbing. It believed that press freedom which is abused or misused was preferable to a press which exists primarily to propagate the ideology and views of the ruling party. "A free press is essential to a free society." 183 This principle was again emphasised in 1982 when Assembly viewed "with grave concern the further controls imposed on the press by the provisions of the Newspaper Registration Amendment Act and the Protection of Information Act." 184 Assembly called for the withdrawal of these Acts and affirmed its support for a free and independent press as a prerequisite for the dissemination of every aspect of the truth, and also for ensuring that the public is kept informed through the medium of the press, and not indoctrinated. 185

It was because of its belief in freedom, justice and human rights as founded on the Gospel that the UCCSA refused to accept the policy of apartheid and continuously called for the replacement of that system by one which was more just. The 1980 Assembly stated

182 *Assembly Proceedings 1981*, p.35
183 Ibid., p.36
184 *Assembly Proceedings 1982*, p.29
categorically that the UCCSA did not and never did support Communism or any other ideology and refused to identify with any such ideology. This conviction was repeated in 1983:

“In matters of social concern it (the UCCSA) has endeavoured to use its prophetic voice and to exercise its social responsibility by speaking and acting on the basis of Biblical and theological principles. This has enabled the Church to subject all parties and policies to the scrutiny of the Gospel rather than take up an entrenched position which supports a party policy whether it is right or wrong.”

It believed that the situation of injustice in South Africa was contrary to the teaching of Scripture in regard to love of neighbour and social justice, and that fundamental change was necessary. Assembly therefore called on its members to demonstrate that the UCCSA is a Church “with the poor” by adopting a simplified lifestyle, by renouncing waste, and opposing extravagance in personal living, clothing, housing, travel and church buildings.

To what extent this appeal was taken seriously by local churches is not known, but judging by the extravagant church buildings that were still being built, one cannot help but think that it did not have much of an effect. A criticism one can thus level at Assembly decisions is that it very often made appeals to and resolutions calling on local churches to do certain things without setting up a process or instituting some practical steps to try and make certain that such appeals were taken seriously or resolutions were implemented.

185 Ibid., p29
186 Assembly Proceedings 1980, p31
187 Assembly Proceedings 1983, p30
At the same Assembly grave reservations were expressed about the purpose and effectiveness of the proposed State President’s Council.\textsuperscript{189} Assembly called for the inclusion of all blacks and the replacement of the appointment system with one whereby the people elected their own representatives.\textsuperscript{190} Assembly reaffirmed its conviction that South Africa is one country and that all its people had to be entitled to full citizenship rights within a unitary system of government in which every population group was adequately represented.\textsuperscript{191} The 1982 Assembly rejected the President’s Council as constituted since it was not representative of all the people of South Africa; it was a nominated, not elected, body; it only served the interests of a section of the total population of South Africa, as an instrument of separate development it could never meet the political aspirations of those who want a unified South Africa in which racial separation and discrimination are totally rejected and also because it was sinful to spend millions on the President’s Council while hunger, poverty and need were realities. Assembly reiterated its appeal to the Prime Minister strongly urging him to convene a National Convention representing all the people of South Africa, including the Homelands, to formulate a constitutional framework for a fully unified South Africa.\textsuperscript{192}

The call for a National Convention had been made, for the first time, in 1976 when the UCCSA issued a letter to Church and Nation, and had been repeated every year since then.

\textsuperscript{188} \textit{Assembly Proceedings} 1980. p31
\textsuperscript{189} This council was an attempt by the Nationalist government to give the Indians and so-called Coloured people some kind of representation at the highest level of decision making. The representatives were, however, not elected by the people whom they were supposed to represent, but appointed by the State President. Blacks did not have representatives on this council since they, in accordance with government policy, had their own Homeland governments.
\textsuperscript{190} \textit{Assembly Proceedings} 1980. p31
\textsuperscript{191} Ibid., p32
on the grounds that political reform was the concern of all the people of South Africa who were entitled to be part of the decision-making process which determined their destiny. The 1983 Assembly, therefore, rejected the constitutional proposals for the same reasons recorded against the acceptance of the President’s Council at the 1982 Assembly. They were unacceptable because they did not make provision for all the people of South Africa; while making provision for limited elections, these would only be representative of a select few and the proposals would only serve a section, albeit an enlarged one, of the total population. The constitutional proposals with their three-tier parliament still offered only a segregated instrument of government, based on the policy of separate development. The Blacks, who formed 73% of the total population, were completely ignored. “This Church has consistently called for the dismantling of the apartheid structure, not for its refurbishing so that it looks more attractive.” Assembly, therefore, maintained the stand which it had consistently upheld:

“1. That all the people of South Africa are entitled to the same basic human rights and those who limit the rights of others circumscribe the area of their own rights.

2. That a policy of shared power, in which the human rights and responsibilities of all are recognised for the benefit of every person and group and the deprivation of none, is the only way to justice and peace in South Africa. The extension of privilege to

192 Assembly Proceedings 1982. p19
193 Assembly Proceedings 1983. p30
194 Ibid., p31
some, and not to all, can so easily widen the chasm which separates people in South Africa, causing hurt instead of healing.195

Assembly repeated its call for a National Convention representing all the people of South Africa, with a view to preparing a new constitution which guaranteed the personal and political rights and duties of all South Africans in a shared nationhood and a common society. Assembly also requested the South African Council of Churches to appoint a commission of experts to prepare documentation, which would include the constitutional alternative, for participation in a National Convention.196

The 1984 Assembly recorded its deep consternation at the blatant collaboration of some of its ministers with the implementation of the new constitution of South Africa, an action which had publicly identified the UCCSA with a political party and the system of apartheid. Concern was also recorded at the collaboration of some UCCSA ministers with the implementation of apartheid by accepting public office in government or semi-government structures in the Homelands and so-called independent states. Assembly therefore resolved to dissociate itself from the actions of such ministers and to urge them to resign from the ministry of the UCCSA.197

When, eventually in the late 1980's, there were signs of change taking place in South Africa, Assembly affirmed that process of change as well as the fact that the Government and the African National Congress were engaged in pre-negotiation talks. It called for a

195 Ibid., p32
196 Assembly Proceedings 1983. p34
rapid repeal of all remaining apartheid legislation, for an end to the violence which had cost so many lives and for increased tolerance and patience during the pain of change and transition. Assembly hoped that the pain would be found to be the birth pangs of a new, just and truly democratic South Africa.\textsuperscript{198} With this aim in mind the Assembly called on the government to establish a Constituent Assembly and an Interim Government.\textsuperscript{199}

Violence and unrest

The UCCSA took an unequivocal stand against violence in all its forms and this stand was repeated at various times when appropriate. In 1972 the Assembly adopted a resolution on violence which was re-affirmed in 1978. According to this resolution, Assembly abhorred and rejected violence and terrorism, in all forms, as self-perpetuating and alienating forces contrary to the teaching of Christ.\textsuperscript{200} But, though this stand was supported by most of the members and churches comprising the UCCSA, it was in the action towards violence that great and deeply rooted differences existed which would eventually lead to the severance of a few churches from the UCCSA.

The whole issue was brought to the forefront by the “Programme to Combat Racism” (PCR) of the World Council of Churches to which the UCCSA was and is affiliated. Whenever this programme was discussed from 1970, the members of Assembly agreed on certain fundamental principles regarding violence and the need for social change, but they

\textsuperscript{198} Assembly Proceedings 1990. p49-50
\textsuperscript{199} Assembly Proceedings 1991. p61
\textsuperscript{200} Assembly Proceedings 1978. p12
were divided in their attitude to the actions of the programme. The tension caused whenever the PCR was discussed, could not be resolved, so marked were the differences and so deep did the feelings run. The 1978 Assembly, nonetheless, re-affirmed its 1972 resolutions which were unequivocal in the rejection of violence as a means to bring about change and also to maintain an oppressive system. The Church and Society Department of the UCCSA stated that the denomination would never condone unbridled killing of innocent people. Everyone in Southern Africa had been caught up in the escalating violence so that the issue had become an emotive one in which the group interests had played a significant role. The Department stated the dilemma of the UCCSA:

"We find ourselves with members who are involved on every side of the conflict - in the Defence Forces of South Africa, Botswana, Rhodesia and Mozambique and in the liberation movements. It is a situation in which the Church must state its principles, as we have done again in the ... resolution, and at the same time, care for and support all its people, whatever their loyalty may be."201

The Church and Society Department continued by challenging the World Council of Churches to examine its own attitude towards violence in the light of Scripture:

"When all is said and done, we know and the World Council knows that the state of violence already exists in Southern Africa and we must beware lest our vehemence in rejecting violence becomes an excuse for our own lack of effort in bringing about rapid social change by all means consistent with the Gospel."202

201 Churchsoc no.21, October 1978, p2
by all means consistent with the Gospel.\textsuperscript{202}

This was followed up by the 1979 Assembly resolving that the UCCSA would remain a member of the WCC but that it would bring the following concerns to the attention of the world body: (a) that people who are desperate sometimes resort to violence because they believe there is no other way to overthrow the oppressive regime. Violence then escalates since those in power strengthen their own violent response, and innocent people are caught in the cross-fire; (b) that, in Southern Africa, the situation had changed in that, increasingly, blacks were fighting against blacks in a struggle for power, not liberation; (c) that violent revolutions in Africa had tended to end in one-party states rather than democracy, often with catastrophic results; and (d) that the Church had to combat racism but it also had a healing and reconciling role which necessitated change by non-violent means. The UCCSA, therefore, urged the WCC to reconsider the statement made by Dr. Carson Blake, former General Secretary of the Council, when the PCR was inaugurated:

"Violence and the counter-violence it produces are not the best ways to obtain real peace or true justice; non-violent methods are at all times to be exalted as the more excellent means to obtain these goods and that, even when violence is being used, the first task of the Christian Church is to encourage people at the first opportunity to leave the battlefield and seek the conference table."\textsuperscript{203}

The UCCSA was convinced that a call to non-violent action by the Church would only be heeded if accompanied by effective action to combat racism and injustice.

"In Southern Africa today, the Church is called to live the more excellent
way it preaches; nothing less will make it an ALTERNATIVE SOCIETY.

Unless this happens, the Church will lose its credibility amongst Black young people, many of whom have already left the Church disillusioned." 204

In 1980 Assembly made the following resolution regarding the World Council of Churches:

"Assembly, while recognising that certain aspects of the Programme to Combat Racism are open to serious criticism and continue to cause division amongst Christians, acknowledges that the Church must care for the children and young people beyond the borders of South Africa. We believe that many of them have been driven into this situation by racism, institutional violence and constant harassment in the land of their birth. The Church has a pastoral responsibility for them without necessarily approving their political ideologies or methods. Assembly, therefore, calls upon the WCC to strengthen this caring role by liaising with the Churches in all the countries concerned." 205

Assembly reaffirmed its conviction that justice, reconciliation and change had to be brought about by concrete non-violent means and it called upon the WCC to concentrate on programmes to combat racism which had been known to reconcile racial groups. 206

After a bomb blast in Pretoria the Church and Society Department made a press release on 27 May 1983 which was later ratified and endorsed by Assembly. The press statement

203 Assembly Proceedings 1979. p28
204 Ibid., p28
205 Assembly Proceedings 1980. p14
abhorred not only the blast but also the retaliatory raid which the South African Air Force made on Maputo. It continued:

"In a part of Africa where injustice and strong emotive issues are the main causes of violence, this Church repeats its conviction that full consultation between all the peoples of South Africa is the only way of effecting peaceful change and establishing a just social order."\(^{207}\)

The 1984 Church and Society report to Assembly sketched the background against which the report was being compiled as one in which arson, looting, wanton destruction, school strikes and exploding bombs were causing terror, fear, chaos and hatred. The causes for the violence included the putting up of rents in townships during an economic recession, a rapid increase in the price of essential foodstuffs and widespread unemployment which were making it difficult for black people to make ends meet on their inadequate incomes. There was also resentment at inferior education in black schools, grievances about corporal punishment and the lack of pupil participation in school affairs.\(^{208}\) The report comments on the actions against the perpetrators of the violence:

"Tougher tactics on the part of the authorities may stay the violence of the unruly, but they will not deal with the basic cause of the trouble, which is the apartheid system, which denies human dignity and perpetuates inherent injustice."\(^{209}\)

\(^{206}\) Ibid., p14  
\(^{207}\) Assembly Reports 1983, p11  
\(^{208}\) Assembly Reports 1984, p17  
\(^{209}\) Ibid., p18
Assembly received this section of the report with "deep concern". It resolved to record its shock and anger at the irresponsible and uncontrolled actions of some members of the South African Police and the manner in which some unruly elements in the areas concerned hijacked a legitimate protest. Assembly expressed its distress and concern regarding the manner in which the Government refused to admit publicly the root causes of the unrest which could only increase unless genuine grievances were heard and dealt with in a way which recognised the human dignity and rights of all South Africans. It called upon all its ministers and local churches to offer support and the facilities of the churches to those affected by the unrest and expressed its solidarity with the tenants, workers, students and parents in their struggle for justice and a participatory society. Assembly also called on the Government to consult with the acknowledged leaders of the communities and students concerned and pledged itself to pray and strive for a society in which the rights and responsibilities of all South Africans are recognised believing that this would be the only way to stop the recurring unrest which had become endemic since June 1976. A special plea was made to all protesters not to undermine legitimate protest by resorting to violence and on the police to exercise the utmost constraint in controlling unrest. 210

After the elections of the new three tier ("tri-cameral") parliament 211 violence reached crisis proportions in 1985 and the Government proclaimed a state of emergency which only caused more violence and killing, like the killing of school children in Uitenhage on

211 Three chambers were created for whites, coloureds and Indians to conduct their own affairs. Blacks had their own homelands.
28 March. Assembly called on the State President to terminate the State of Emergency and to release all those detained in terms of the emergency regulations.\textsuperscript{212} The Church and Society Department reported to Assembly in 1986 that the violence had not abated and that members and ministers of the UCCSA had been detained during that year. A disconcerting tendency was the violence perpetrated by some members of the community against others. The report stated:

"Acts of brutality, violence and murder performed, very often on the innocent, cannot be condoned in any circumstances, whoever the perpetrators may be... Bombs, necklaces, land mines and machine guns will not advance the cause of justice and peace, neither will they assist in the maintenance of genuine law and order."\textsuperscript{213}

Assembly affirmed that the State of Emergency could never create conditions under which peaceful change could be effected and called on the State President to terminate it immediately, to release all detainees and political prisoners and to lift all banning and restriction orders.\textsuperscript{214}

On 4-8 May 1987 representatives of churches, trade unions, women's, youth and anti-apartheid groups from South Africa, Namibia and other parts of the world met in Lusaka, Zambia, at the invitation of the Programme to Combat Racism of the WCC under the theme "The Churches' Search for Justice and Peace in Southern Africa. The chairperson of the UCCSA was unable to attend the consultation due to visa problems. A statement,

\textsuperscript{212} Assembly Proceedings 1985. p15
\textsuperscript{213} Assembly Reports 1986. p134
\textsuperscript{214} Assembly Proceedings 1986. p31
called The Lusaka Statement was issued and sent to all the institutions represented at the consultation. Assembly accepted the statement and referred it to local churches, synods and regional councils for careful study. It also directed the Church and Society Department to convene a meeting of regional and synod convenors of Church and Society to consider the statement and the manner in which the Church could assist in the process of change. 215

The South African government, in an attempt to suppress the violence and unrest, declared a State of Emergency in the most troubled areas of the country. This allowed for military presence in most of the townships and more detentions without trial. According to the 1988 Church and Society report approximately 2300 people were being detained at the time without recourse to a public trial. On 24 February 1988 seventeen organisations had also been banned. 216 This report called for the continued seeking of non-violent ways of expressing the Church's abhorrence of apartheid and its rejection of legislation which prevented people from participating fully in the struggle for justice and peace. 217 The 1989 report of the department referred to the meeting between President P.W. Botha and Nelson Mandela in July 1989. The report, prophetically, saw the real importance of this meeting in the symbolism of Mandela leaving prison to go to the seat of government, something which would create its own momentum and raise hope and expectation among black people which the government would be "stupid" to frustrate. 218 Indeed, the

215 Assembly Proceedings 1987. p21
216 Assembly Reports 1988 p164
217 Ibid., p165
218 Assembly Reports 1989. p94
“Release Mandela Campaign” was the response of the people and it culminated in the release of Mandela a few years later.

At the end of 1989 F.W. De Klerk was elected State President of South Africa. This heralded in a new era of South African history which would eventually lead to majority rule in the country. In a speech on 2 February 1990, De Klerk announced measures which included new freedoms for political movements and possibilities for negotiations. He also announced the release of more than 600 State of Emergency detainees and that exiles would be allowed to return home.\textsuperscript{219} But though the De Klerk government continued to remove statutory apartheid by repealing the Group Areas Act, the Population Registration Act and the 1913 and 1936 Land Acts, the violence in South Africa did not subside. In fact, the 1991 Church and Society report identified the continued violence as one of the major obstacles in the way of negotiations between the South African Government and the African National Congress. An estimate of 1000 people had lost their lives in political violence since the beginning of 1991. Assembly noted with concern the escalation of violence, the assassination of activists, and the allegations of the involvement of the government in the destabilisation strategy. It recognised with gratitude the efforts of religious leaders and the business sector to end the violence as well as the willingness of liberation movements, political parties and trade unions to search for peace. Synods and regional councils were instructed to embark on a programme of “de-schooling” of people in violence and to organise educational events with this aim in mind.\textsuperscript{220}

\textsuperscript{219} Assembly Reports 1991. p68
The 1992 Assembly noted the breakdown of negotiations towards a constitutional settlement in South Africa resulting in social, political and economic turmoil. It therefore issued a press release urging a resumption of negotiations with the aim of establishing a unitary, non-racial, democratic and peaceful country; the installation of an interim government; the election of a Constituent Assembly to prepare a new constitution and the participation of the Church in the process to monitor, facilitate and mediate.  

Bannings and detentions

Detentions, deportations and bannings were synonymous with the system of apartheid and therefore featured very frequently in Assembly discussions from the early 1970’s to the early 1990’s. After the detention of the Dean of Johannesburg in 1971 the Church and Society Department of the UCCSA wrote an “Open Letter” to the Minister of Justice in which it expressed the Church’s grave concern at the violation of a fundamental human rights principle of justice which holds that a person detained for an alleged offence should be charged timeously or released. The death of Steve Biko in prison and the shocking circumstances surrounding his death shook the whole world in 1977 and brought the question of detention without trial sharply into focus. At that time the Assembly passed a unanimous resolution assuring the family and friends of Steve Biko of its love, sympathy and concern as they were mourning the passing of him who died in the struggle for a free

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220 Assembly Proceedings 1991, p61
221 Assembly Proceedings 1992, p68
222 UCCSA Year Book 1972, p214
South Africa. Assembly could not acquiesce in a system which deprived millions of South Africans of their basic human rights and it deplored and rejected the security legislation which detained, deported and banned those who worked for justice and peace without recourse to a court of law. 223

When the matter of detainees was discussed in 1979, Assembly instructed the Secretary to appeal to the new Minister of Police and Prisons to allow all prisoners, including those convicted on charges concerning state security, to pursue their formal education on whatever level they aspired. The Secretary also had to appeal to the Minister to review all orders banning and detaining people without trial, to charge or release all those affected by such orders and to end the system of banning people who had already served sentences when they emerge from prison. 224 The following year Assembly expressed its grave concern about the way in which personal freedom was being limited by the arbitrary and sometimes absolute powers assumed by the State and delegated to Ministers of Justice and Police and to the South African Police. Assembly reminded the Government that, although rulers had been given Divine authority to formulate laws and maintain justice, such laws had to be subservient to the moral law of God and serve the common good, not merely maintain the status quo. Therefore Assembly called on the Government to charge or release all political detainees and to lift all banning orders or charge the banned persons.

223 Assembly Proceedings 1977. p22
224 Assembly Proceedings 1979. p23
in a competent court of law.\textsuperscript{225} This appeal was repeated in 1981 when Assembly deplored the banning and detention of students and other leaders.\textsuperscript{226}

Again in 1982 Assembly deplored the arbitrary manner in which detentions and bannings without trial continued unabated in the alleged interest of State security. It called on the Government to return to the rule of law, to recognise that evidence obtained from detainees under extreme psychological pressures and other means used to interrogate them should not be accepted in courts of law; to release all detainees not immediately charged and to end the practice of detention without trial; to lift all banning orders and to release all political prisoners and prepare for a new, negotiated, just and peaceful dispensation in South Africa by releasing such leaders as Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu.\textsuperscript{227} The same Assembly placed on record its disappointment at the failure of the Rabie Commission to bring forward serious proposals for a different method of maintaining law and order in South Africa. Assembly totally rejected the continuance of detention without trial and other repressive measures contained in the Act and called for its immediate repeal. It called on all members of the UCCSA to work for meaningful change in South African society. Assembly regretted that dialogue, persuasion and appeal had only had a minimal effect on legislation and official Government policy. Being persuaded that resolutions passively protesting against injustice were not powerful enough as instruments of change, Assembly called upon its members to give expression to their unwillingness to condone

\textsuperscript{225} Assembly Proceedings 1980. p32
\textsuperscript{226} Assembly Proceedings 1981. p38
\textsuperscript{227} Assembly Proceedings 1982. p22
injustice by refusing to comply with those aspects of security and racial legislation which the UCCSA had constantly opposed.\textsuperscript{228}

Hearing about a vigil on detention being held in Johannesburg, the 1983 Assembly, meeting in Boksburg, sent greetings to the vigil and assured them of its shared concern for those held in detention and its abhorrence of the system:

“Our voice has often been heard in protest against the manner in which detention is enforced. We will not be silent and our voice joins with yours in further protest.”\textsuperscript{229}

Assembly also recorded its grave concern at the detention of respected community leaders in the Ciskei, the silencing of all opposition and the banning of trade unions. It called on the Ciskei Government to restore the rule of law by charging or releasing detainees and to restore to workers the right of collective bargaining through trade unions.\textsuperscript{230} In 1984 Assembly called on the Minister of Law and Order to charge or release all those who were detained during the elections to the House of Representatives and House of Delegates and as a result of the recent unrest.\textsuperscript{231}

The 1986 Assembly was informed about the new Security Legislation which had come into effect with the proclamation of the State of Emergency. The Public Safety Amendment Act gave the Minister of Law and Order almost unlimited powers to, among other things, detain and arrest people without a warrant or any obligation to make their

\textsuperscript{228} Ibid., p27
\textsuperscript{229} Assembly Proceedings 1983, p13
\textsuperscript{230} Ibid., p40
\textsuperscript{231}
names known publicly. The Internal Security Amendment Act proposed a new form "preventive detention" of up to 180 days, without charges being preferred and without trial. Assembly abhorred and rejected these laws. In 1987 Assembly recorded its profound regret that South Africa, instead of promoting and protecting the interests of children, treated them like criminals when no crime had been alleged:

"This is an ugly scar on South Africa's national life and we call on the Minister of Law and Order to charge or release any children who may still be in detention."

Assembly also called on regions, local churches, ministers and members to protest all detentions and bannings in their communities, to maintain contact with detainees and to offer pastoral care and friendship to them and their families.

Though many letters of protest were written by the general secretary of the UCCSA to the appropriate authorities over the years in review, it is interesting to note that most of them did not even warrant a letter of acknowledgement. The exceptions were two letters written to the State President in 1985, one dated 31 July and the other 12 December.

The first letter was written in protest against the declared state of emergency, deploring the institutional violence which had been intensified by this declaration. The Church, therefore, called on the State President to end the state of emergency immediately. In his reply the State President expressed his perturbation at the "sweeping statement" made

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231 Assembly Proceedings 1984, p25
232 Assembly Reports 1986,p128-129
233 Assembly Proceedings 1987, p20
234 Ibid., p20
about institutional violence, denied that the state of emergency had engendered counter-
violence, found it "deplorable" that the Church prescribed a particular political programme
to him and "strongly advised" it to "re-examine your dedication to Christ and His
fundamental message of love and forgiveness."236

The other letter was written to inform the State President that the UCCSA supported Dr.
Nico Smit's attempt to make contact with the ANC. The State President noted the
contents of the letter "with interest" and stated the government's willingness to dialogue
and consult with institutions which denounced violence, but that the ANC had indicated
by word and action that it was committed to violence. He concluded:

"Whilst your church is free to speak to whom it wishes, my Government,
a Christian Government, will continue to denounce violence and will
also in future exclude from consultations those who do not share the
same principles."237

Conscientious Objection:

In accordance with its stands on human rights and on non-violence, the UCCSA upheld,
supported and fought for the right of a person to be a conscientious objector. The Church
and Society Department reported to Assembly in 1969 that the Chief of Personnel of the

235 It may be that there were other responses but that they appeared in documents which were not
available to be researched.
236 Assembly Reports 1985. p102-103
Defence Force, in an official letter to the SACC, had made an important policy statement that an applicant's personal convictions rather than the tenets of his Church were the real considerations with regard to conscientious objectors. Yet the 1971 Assembly noted with concern the inflexible attitude of the authorities towards young men who, for reasons of Christian conscience or moral and ethical convictions were unable to accept any form of military service. Assembly particularly deplored the so-called "cat-and-mouse" method of imprisonment in military detention centres and believed that alternative avenues of specifically non-military service should be provided for bona fide conscientious objectors.

In 1979 Assembly expressed its concern about legislation on conscientious objection which granted the right to be exempt from military service on religious grounds only to members belonging to religious organisations with a pacifist tradition or confession. A basic tenet of Congregational belief is the liberty of individual conscience under God and God's Word. The UCCSA, therefore, though it does not legislate to its members on such issues as military service, strongly supported those who objected to military service on religious and moral grounds. Assembly also recommended that appropriate representations be made, in consultation with other denominations, to the Secretary for Defence in which an extension is requested of the provisions for conscientious objection in terms of Section 67(3) of the Defence Act of South Africa to allow for non-combatant forms of service for conscientious objectors and alternative forms of non-military national service.

237 Assembly Reports 1986. p130
238 UCCSA Year Book 1970. p93
239 UCCSA Year Book 1972. p172
service for those who refused to serve in the South African Defence Force. Assembly pledged financial assistance for the establishment and support of a Voluntary Service Corps for conscientious objectors who refused to serve in the SADF. Local congregations were urged to discuss the ethical issues involved in the military service in South Africa.241

Assembly followed this up by affirming, in accordance with historic Congregationalism, that the UCCSA was a Church by the tenets whereof its members may not participate in war if they as individuals were convinced, on the grounds of Scripture and conscience, either that the particular war was not "just and necessary" or that all war was contrary to the teaching of Christ. Assembly forwarded this resolution to the Minister of Defence and the SADF. Assembly also called on the Government to recognise genuine conscientious objection on religious or moral grounds without regard to the objector's church affiliation; to conduct all trials for such persons in a civilian court or tribunal and to introduce legislation providing for alternative forms of national service for conscientious objectors.242 This resolution, with certain amendments, was adopted again in 1981 and a committee was appointed to prepare, in conjunction with the Secretariat, a statement on the ethics of war and conscientious objection for use in Christian Education programmes, confirmation classes, the counselling of conscientious objectors and Congregationalists facing the prospect of being called up by the Defence Force. The Committee also had to prepare a report for Assembly to make a decision in the light of Scripture and the

240 Assembly Proceedings, 1979, p38
241 Ibid., p22
242 Assembly Proceedings, 1980, p29
traditional tenets of Congregationalism as to whether it was right for Congregationalists to 
serve in the SADF. Assembly also expressed its love and concern for members of the 
UCCSA and others who had suffered for their convictions and assured them of its prayers 
and support.\(^{243}\) The 1982 Assembly re-affirmed the right of conscience, under the Word of 
God, in the Christian response to war as such or to a particular war. It regarded this 
principle as being of universal application and would advocate the right of conscientious 
objection in any and all of the countries in which the UCCSA operated.\(^{244}\) The Committee 
on Conscientious Objection presented a first document to be sent to local churches, 
ministers and students for the ministry for study and comment, whereupon, among others, 
the following resolution was adopted:

"Assembly urges all people concerned to consider carefully and 
with prayer, what the Word of God, supremely revealed in Jesus 
Christ, reveals the will of God to be with regard to doing military 
service, taking up arms or being conscientious objectors on either 
side of the conflict in South Africa or Namibia, and in the other 
countries of our constituency. It reminds them that it is not only 
their moral right but their moral and spiritual duty to do what they 
believe is God’s will, whatever the civil or social consequences.\(^{245}\)"

In 1983 the Church and Society Department reported to Assembly that the Defence 
Amendment Act would come into operation in January 1984. According to this Act a

\(^{243}\) ![Assembly Proceedings 1981. p41](assembly_proceedings_1981_p41)
\(^{244}\) ![Assembly Proceedings 1982. p27](assembly_proceedings_1982_p27)
\(^{245}\) ![Ibid., p28-29](ibid_p28-29)
Board for Religious Objectors would be established on which ministers of the UCCSA might be invited to serve. The UCCSA welcomed the positive aspects of the Act which allowed for the recognition of conscientious objection based on what the individual believed rather than on the tenets of the religious body to which he belonged; it allowed for alternative service outside the SADF, something the UCCSA had been asking for since 1971 and that the allocation of such service would be done by a Government Department rather than the Department of Defence. There were, however, aspects of the law which were unacceptable to the UCCSA: it only made provision for objection on religious grounds and not moral, ethical or philosophical convictions; it provided only for religious pacifists, excluding the objector whose objection was based on the theological principle of a just war; the prison sentences proposed were too extreme; the composition of the proposed Boards seemed to be directed at testing an objector’s belief rather than his sincerity. Assembly, therefore, while it appreciated the positive aspects of the Act, found the new provisions for conscientious objectors as a whole unacceptable and it urged the Government to phase out conscription. Assembly directed that no minister of the UCCSA should serve on the proposed Boards for Religious Objectors but encouraged them to give evidence regarding applicants who appeared before these Boards.246 At the next Assembly it was resolved that the 1983 decision be re-affirmed regarding UCCSA ministers serving on the Boards and that everything possible be done to give moral support and pastoral care to objectors who belong to the UCCSA.247 The Committee on Militarization and Conscientious Objection reported on members of the UCCSA serving prison sentences because they had conscientious objections to serving in the SADF.

246 Assembly Proceedings 1983. p35
Assembly remembered them and assured them of its continuing support and encouragement for their moral heroism and for their right to object to military service on grounds of conscience. It enjoined all ministers to mention the collective stand of conscientious objectors against military service and for a choice of civilian national service to anyone in their congregations who might wish to support it.\textsuperscript{248}

In 1990 Assembly called for the end of all trials of conscientious objectors, especially in the light of the proposed amnesty for political prisoners. It committed itself to oppose military service and encourage conscientious objection among its members should any government come to power that once more uses that power to impose or maintain a basically unjust and discriminatory political system in South Africa. Assembly supported conscientious objection to serving in the SADF until such time as a more just political system was in place. It instructed the Committee to give thought to and report back on the kind of military and peace issues the Church was likely to face in a post-apartheid, democratic society.\textsuperscript{249} In its final report to Assembly the Committee therefore gave its thoughts on the Church and the Military in future: the Church must continue to uphold the basic principle that Jesus Christ is Lord over the whole of life and thus test every area, including the military by the revealed will of Christ; the Church needs to be vigilant with regard to issues of militarism and militarisation; ministers and members of the UCCSA must exercise a Christian conscience in all situations in which they might be called upon to be involved in violence; any future SADF must be challenged with the same moral and

\textsuperscript{247} Assembly Proceedings 1984, p22
\textsuperscript{248} Assembly Proceedings 1989, p29
\textsuperscript{249} Assembly Proceedings 1990, p24-25
religious fervour with which the past SADF had been challenged for upholding injustice and trampling upon conscience; the same challenge to white members of the Church in the past with regard to military service and participation in war must be made to all members with regard to participation in military activities in the future. Assembly resolved to refer these directives to the Executive Committee for acceptance as a policy document and dismissed the Committee with thanks.

Marriage and family life

The system of apartheid had very many negative effects on the lives of people, especially black and brown people, and especially on the families of such people. The UCCSA tried to address the issues around marriage and family life in accordance with its belief in the sanctity of these institutions.

The introduction to the “Public Questions” report to the second Assembly stated that the Church should make its voice heard and its presence felt as it witnessed to the claims of Jesus Christ being Lord of all life and every part of life. In life there is no relationship more significant to Jesus than that of the family. The report, therefore, expressed its concern about the harsher implementation of laws and policies which had the result of

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250 Assembly Reports 1991, p117
251 Assembly Proceedings 1991, p57
252 The name was later changed to Church and Society
almost totally breaking up the healthy and happy family life among many of the African population. **253** Assembly then resolved to issue the following press release:

"The United Congregational Church of Southern Africa, recognising the sanctity of Christian marriage and the great importance of the family within the economy of God, and in the life of the nation, associates itself with other Churches in expressing deep concern at the practical effects of many laws and much administrative action upon African marriages and the stability of African Family Life. It agrees to join with others in pressing for a change in policies and laws which result in the denial of the sacred ties of marriage and the destruction of family life." **254**

Reporting on the removal of black people to new residential areas, the Rev. S.W.T. Luzipho commented that a disturbing feature of the urban townships and village management boards was the endless process of the disintegration of family life. Newly married young people were being separated from one another by application of Section 10 of the Natives' Urban Areas Act which meant that men were debarred from marrying women of their choice if they happened to live outside their township. This system encouraged concubinage, immorality, bigamy and divorce. **255**

The 1977 Assembly re-affirmed the sanctity of marriage as a divine institution and the rights of families to live together near the place of work of the breadwinner as well as the

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**253** UCCSA Year Book 1969. p99  
**254** Ibid., p100  
**255** UCCSA Year Book 1970. p161
need to strengthen home and family life in order that children may be raised in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Assembly deplored a statement allegedly made by a government official stating that African custom condoned adultery. Assembly could not condone as Christian any government legislation or policy which broke up family life and which forced married men to live in single-sex hostels, since such a system would increase the incidence of prostitution, adultery and homosexual relationships. Assembly therefore requested the South African Committee of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches to issue a joint statement coming from all the member Churches of the WARC in South Africa "upholding marriage as an institution ordained by God, as a sacrament of human society and that families may be reared and trained in Christian truth, love and discipline."256 The WARC member Churches were also requested to make joint representations at the highest level, calling on the government to desist from further enforced removals of black people and also to make more adequate provision for housing for blacks in urban areas.

Two years later Assembly adopted a resolution asserting the right of every person born in South Africa, no matter his or her race, to choose his or her place of work and to sell his/her labour on a free market. Assembly, therefore, rejected the Government's policy of restricting the Western Cape as a "Coloured labour preference area". It condemned the consequences of this policy, namely the separation of African workers in the Western Cape from their families for long periods of time; the resultant breaking-up of families and the development of juvenile delinquents due to the absence of paternal control; the

256 Assembly Proceedings 1977, p23
suffering caused when families do not receive a due share of the breadwinner's income; the insecurity of Africar jobs in the Western Cape and the regulations preventing them from leaving an unsatisfactory employer for a more satisfactory one; the Government's past attempts at depriving Africans of their work by forcing employers to reduce the number of Africans in their employment; the Government's refusal to build sufficient housing for Africans in the Western Cape resulting in the rising of shanty towns like Cross-roads and the bulldozing of shanty towns without providing alternative accommodation for the residents.257

In 1980 Assembly called on the South African government to repeal the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act and Section 16 of the Immorality Act and to discontinue the practice of restricting a marriage officer's designation which enables him or her to solemnise marriages only within certain racial groups and/or provinces.258 A year later Assembly resolved to recall all its people to the sanctity of marriage as a divinely ordained institution requiring life-long fidelity; to work by all means and in conjunction with other Churches to dismantle a social system which legislates for the enforced separation of husband and wife and the division of families; to associate itself with the memorandum prepared by the bishops of the CPSA which called for the repeal of the Mixed Marriages Act and Section 16 of the Immorality Act and to make joint representations with the CPSA to the Prime Minister in this regard. Assembly called on all ministers and church members to give moral support to marriage officers who acted according to conscience in performing the religious parts of wedding ceremonies for people in love and who wished to be married.

257 Assembly Proceedings 1979. p21
across racial lines but being legally prevented from doing so by the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act. 259

The 1982 Assembly, believing that there is no Scriptural or theological impediment to the marriage of persons of different race, reiterated its total rejection of the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act and Section 16 of the Immorality Act. It instructed the Secretary to inform Bishop Philip Russell of the CPSA260 that the UCCSA re-affirmed its decision to petition the Prime Minister to repeal these two Acts. It also called on marriage officers, when faced with couples in love who wanted to get married across racial lines, to make them aware of the consequences of such a marriage and to solemnise their marriage should there be no other obstacles. The Marriage Register had to be completed and sent to Department of Interior only if the couples concerned were aware of the possible consequences and still desired it, otherwise to register the marriage with the central office of the UCCSA. Assembly assured such couples of its concern and support.261

The effect of government taxation on marriages and families was the subject of a 1983 resolution. Assembly upheld marriage and the family as divinely ordained institutions and deplored all legislation which may weaken the permanence of marriage and lead to divorce. It also regarded legislation which controlled the migratory labour system as being

258 Assembly Proceedings 1980. p28
259 Assembly Proceedings 1981. p42-43
260 The bishops of the CPSA had prepared a memorandum calling for the repeal of the Mixed Marriages Act and Section 16 of the Immorality Act in 1980-81. The 1981 Assembly resolved to associate itself fully with this memorandum and to make joint representations, with the CPSA, to the Prime Minister. A letter to this effect was addressed to Archbishop Russell.
the major factor in the break-up of marriage and family life and therefore as morally indefensible. Assembly deplored legislation which discriminated against people on grounds of sex or colour, and affirmed the dignity and rights of women as persons and rejected any law which treats a woman as a minor. It, therefore, called on the South African Government to repeal all legislation which discriminated, directly or indirectly, against women as persons and/or threatened the stability of marriage and family life and to introduce separate taxation for married persons.  

The Church and Society department reported to Assembly in 1984 that a Parliamentary Select Committee on the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act and Section 16 of the Immorality Act had been appointed in June 1983 and that the Committee’s terms of reference had been extended to allow it to report on the desirability of these two Acts. According to the Minister of Internal Affairs a number of “mixed marriages” had been registered. Assembly welcomed the report of the Select Committee on the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act and Section 16 of the Immorality Act and expressed the hope that no adverse action would be taken regarding existing marriages deemed to contravene the Act.

Because of the crisis being experienced in marriage and family life at the time, Assembly resolved in 1984 that local churches and Regional Councils be urged to prioritise Home and Family Life in confirmation training and education programmes, to include marriage.

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262 Assembly Proceedings 1983, p39
263 Assembly Reports 1984, Report no. 9, p11-12
264 Assembly Proceedings 1984, p24
counselling such programmes in regard to both preparation for marriage and equipping
married people to cope with the stresses and strains of marriage; to participate in task
forces set up by regional councils and other ecumenical and social organisations. The
1985 report of the Department referred to the family as the basic unit of society, which
when threatened, causes the very fabric of society to be threatened.

"In the stresses and strains of the social ferment which is taking place
throughout Southern Africa today, there may be a tendency to ignore
the family and its needs. In fact, the strains on the family - detentions,
bannings, unrest, school boycotts, unemployment, strikes and the unsettled
life of the refugee - all have their repercussions in the life of the family."

Two years later the Department reported that "(n)othings more threatened in Southern
Africa today than marriage and the family. They are threatened by the migratory labour
system, by inadequate and insufficient housing, by forced removals, by exile, by social
ferment and political tension." In the light thereof, Assembly reaffirmed the sanctity and
centrality of marriage and family life as divine ordinances and social institutions. It
resolved that marriage and family life issues, as reported, be referred to regional councils,
synods and local churches for study and appropriate action at local level. Assembly also
directed that a sub-committee be appointed by the Church and Society Department to deal
with the issues raised as well as related matters in consultation with the SACC Division of
Home and Family Life. This sub-committee was appointed with Edith Mkwanyana as
convenor. The committee saw its role, among others, as unifying family life, working in

265 Ibid., p25
266 Assembly Reports 1985 p107
267 Assembly Reports 1987 p147
close co-operation with other church departments and community organisations, gathering information on resources and disseminating it to local churches as well as urging them to make use of local resources and resource persons.269

In the 1990’s there was a shift in the focus on marriage and family life issues when it became important for the Church to debate moral issues like child abuse, the marriage of same sexed couples and abortion. Assembly resolved that the Church and Society, General Purposes Committee continues its research on child abuse, marriage of same-sexed couples and abortion.270 Upon the recommendations of the Joint Departments271 the 1992 Assembly resolved that ministers get more in-depth training in marriage and family counselling; that pre-marital counselling be given to all couples; that local churches embark on a marriage enrichment programme; that lay persons be trained to assist ministers in marriage and family counselling; that programmes to enhance family relationships be designed and distributed to local churches; that social support groups for senior citizens, single parents and single people be set up in local churches; that a resource library be developed to provide resources and information on different issues to help churches in their ministry and that ministers be encouraged to undergo regular training in marriage and family counselling by professional organisations like FAMSA and

268 Assembly Proceedings 1987, p22
269 Assembly Reports 1988, p170-171
270 Assembly Proceedings 1991, p62
271 The Christian Education, Church and Society and Mission and Evangelism Departments of the UCCSA
that such training also be included in the training of theological students and probationers.272

Conclusion

The ethos of the United Congregational Church during the first twenty-five years of its existence was clearly based on and motivated by what the Church believed the will of God was at each particular moment in time. It tried to be obedient in character as well as in living, to the commands of Christ and in accordance with Christian principles. This can be seen in its commitment to church unity and in its working towards a just and peaceful society.

The UCCSA’s commitment to church unity was based on its belief in and obedience to the High Priestly Prayer of Jesus Christ in John 17:20-23:

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you have given me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” [NIV]

The need for the visible unity of the Church of Christ was stressed time and again, because the UCCSA believed that the only unity that was possible, that would convince the world, was a unity that could be seen. To this end the UCCSA, five years after its own union, united with the Disciples of Christ; to this end the UCCSA, within twenty-four hours of its formation, decided to promote organic union with the CPSA, the PCSA, the BPC and the TPC and continued the search for union within the Church Unity Commission for the next twenty-five years; to this end the UCCSA continued with negotiations towards unity with the PCSA which had started in 1904 and worked to achieve until 1984; to this end the UCCSA spent a lot of time and money (which was never in abundance), because it believed that "(t)he unity of the Church would increase the credibility of its worship, work and witness in a divided country and offer a model for an alternative society, based on God's Kingdom and his justice."273 Thus, an integral part of the ethos of the UCCSA was its conviction of and all-out commitment to the visible, organic unity of Christ's Church.

But the UCCSA was also convinced of obedience to Christ in the fulfilment of his mission in the world when he said: "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." (John 20:21 NIV) and his mission, as stated in Luke 4: 18-19, was to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. De Gruchy refers to this mission manifesto of Jesus as "a profound expression of the meaning of shalom."274 The UCCSA was committed to work for that shalom and prepared to accept the consequences of the

273 Assembly Reports 1985. p94
fulfilling of its prophetic role in apartheid South Africa. That meant a tireless struggle, following the example of Jesus, to re-establish social relations on egalitarian lines, to regain the wholeness of individual people by fighting for their freedom from the various forms of bondage in Southern Africa which destroyed the quality of life as God intended it, and to strongly challenge the social and economic injustices which were part and parcel of the society of which the UCCSA was part.275

From the very beginning the UCCSA accepted the challenge of the Gospel when the first chairperson, the Rev. J.K. Main, said in his address that the mission of the Church was to be involved in the world in which we live, the world as it is, not as we think it ought to be:

"It is to be involved in the world of computers and electronic brains, the world of supersonic flight and of H-bombs, the world space flight and of famine, of Vietnam and Race Riots, of LSD and of Purple Hearts, of Tsotsi's and of shebeens; but also the world of great achievement and of growing responsibility, which has produced the World Health Organisation, Oxfam and Bread for the World."276

For the next twenty-five years the UCCSA was deeply concerned about and involved in the lives of the people around them; those who suffered as a result of apartheid legislation, who were banned, imprisoned, deported; those who were unemployed and hungry; those who were discriminated against; those who were separated from their families and uprooted by the Group Areas Act; those who were forced to flee out the country and live

274 De Gruchy, Christianity and Democracy, p47
275 Applying De Gruchy's exposition of the mission of Jesus in Ibid., p47-48 to the UCCSA.
276 UCCSA Year Book 1968, p51
as refugees in neighbouring countries; those who were being persecuted because they believed in fighting only in a just war.

According to Albert Nolan the Church preaches the gospel by its witness:

"The witness of the Church is its activity of practising what it preaches. On the one hand, this is done by gathering together a community of believers that can be an example, a sign or sacrament of the salvation we are hoping for. On the other hand, the Church practises what it preaches by actions or campaigns and by social services such as feeding the hungry or running hospitals and schools." 277

The UCCSA as far as possible tried to practise what it preached: it not only prayed for the hungry, but also encouraged local churches and members as well as regions to make personal donations, have special collections and hunger drives to alleviate unemployment and poverty. 278 The Church not only criticised the government for the crisis in black education, but it urged local churches to find ways and means of supporting students and teachers who were still out of school. 279 The Church not only spoke out against the demoralising effect of the abuse of alcohol, but the Outeniqua region submitted a memorandum of protest to the magistrate every time he had to consider the granting of a liquor licence. 280 Assembly not only protested against the legislation which required ministers to apply for permits to enter black townships, it refused to have its ministers

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277 Nolan. God in South Africa. p209
278 Assembly Proceedings 1977. p22
279 Assembly Proceedings 1978. p34
280 Assembly Proceedings 1979. p17
apply for permits, no matter what the consequences. These are but a few examples of the UCCSA’s attempts to practise what it preached as a Christian witness in Southern Africa.

Yet, it is important to point out that, though Assembly tried to make resolutions which it believed was in accordance with its conscience and the will of God for the Church, these resolutions very often (maybe even more often than not) never got to the point of being implemented at regional and local level as effectively as intended by Assembly. This ambiguity in the UCCSA, namely that what Assembly preached was not always what local churches and regional councils practised, has always been and still is a major problem in the Church which influences the habitual character and disposition, the moral significance of the UCCSA most profoundly. We will thus discuss this more fully in the final chapter of this dissertation.

\[28^{1}\] Assembly Proceedings 1980 p28
CHAPTER 3: THE ROLE OF JOSEPH WING

In this chapter we will look more closely at the role played by Joseph Wing in the formation of the UCCSA and its ethos. Wing was the General Secretary of the Church for the first twenty years of its existence, retiring at the end of 1987 when he became the first full-time president of the Federal Theological Seminary at Pietermaritzburg for three years before retiring at the Kuruman Moffat Mission in 1991. We will try to show that the search for Christian unity which became such an integral part of the UCCSA witness and its prophetic role in apartheid South Africa was strongly influenced by the leadership and vision of Joseph Wing. Furthermore we would like to show how his roots, his personality, his character, his theological training and beliefs and his experience made him the right person at the right time for the formation and ethos of the UCCSA.

Joseph Wing was born in London on 09 January 1923, the son of a draper. His early years were spent in Highgate where he was born. The family moved to Wanstead in 1931 and attached itself to the Congregational Church. After receiving his elementary education in a local school, Wing was educated at Aldersbrook School, Manor Park, London. He was then articled to Slaughter and May, a London firm of solicitors, from 1940 to 1941.

282 Most of the biographical information come from two undated sources, handwritten, by Wing himself, found among other documents at the Kuruman Moffat Mission. It seems likely that they were prepared just before his death for record purposes.
A conscientious objector, Wing was drafted on to the land in 1941 and continued to work as a farm labourer for the duration of the Second World War. In 1944 he became the chairperson of the Epping Forest Auxiliary of the London Missionary Society. It is during these war years, writes Wing, that his views changed so that he entered Paton Congregational Church College and, later, Nottingham University to train for the ministry in 1946. From November 1945 to September 1946 he served as lay pastor at the East Ham Congregational Church and as student pastor from July to September 1947. From 1948 to 1950 he served the Wirksworth Congregational Church as student pastor. He graduated with the Diploma in Theology and the Diploma of Social Science in June 1950. Wing then did post graduate studies in Social Anthropology, History of Missions and Theory and Practice of Education at St. Andrew's College, Selly Oak, Birmingham and Birmingham University from 1950 to 1951. On 30 September 1950 he was ordained in the Wirksworth Congregational Church.

In 1950 Wing was appointed by the London Missionary Society to South Africa and he was stationed at Taun and the Kimberley District as missionary-in-charge in 1951. He stayed there for seven years. He learnt, very quickly, to speak Sechuana fluently. On 14 May 1951 he married Marjorie Pegg. For two years Wing was seconded to the De Beers Co. Ltd. as Senior Welfare Officer for Africans and, in 1959, he accepted a call to the Yeoville Congregational Church (CUSA) where he served as full-time minister for 3 years and continued on a voluntary basis for a further four.

Wing does not explain now and why his views changed.
In 1962 Wing returned to the service of the London Missionary Society and was stationed in Johannesburg where he served as missionary in the Witwatersrand Congregational Church. The high regard which both the LMS and CUSA had for the work of Wing can be seen in a letter from Vernon Miller, secretary of CUSA to J.K. Main, secretary of the LMS in Southern Africa on whose request Wing had returned to the LMS. Miller states that CUSA is "exceedingly sorry" to lose Wing from their ministry. He continued:

"The only comforting thought is that he will still be with us here in South Africa and will, I am sure, help to foster the very friendly relationships which have always existed between CUSA and the LMS. As far as CUSA is concerned, we have been delighted to have him with us and have valued greatly the help he has been able to give with our African work in the Free State. We regard his going, therefore, as a matter of the most sincere regret and only wish it had been possible for him to continue in our ministry." 285

Wing served as secretary of the Witwatersrand Christian Council from 1959 to 1965 and then became the first General Secretary of the UCCSA in 1967 serving for twenty years until 1987.

The Ecumenist

In a tribute to Wing Desmond Van der Water refers to him as the "last missionary of the London Missionary Society who had become one of South Africa's most beloved church

284 Challenge no. 9. September 1992, p7
leaders and our best ecumenist.” According to Van der Water, Wing had, by the time he moved to Johannesburg, already developed a deep concern about the division in the churches. “He prayed, as Jesus had prayed in John 17:20, for unity amongst Christians. And then in his typical quiet and unobtrusive way he began his great life work - bringing Christians together into the oneness of Christ.” Wing worked tirelessly for the unity of all Christians because he believed that it was God’s will especially in a country as divided as South Africa. In many of his sermons and papers he was very outspoken and very emphatic on the issue of unity:

“The distinctive thing about the Church of Jesus Christ is its FELLO’VSHIP, ITS TOGETHERNESS, ITS UNITY. Pentecost reversed all that had broken fellowship - the Church was born on the Day of Pentecost, not to establish a new religious organisation or to introduce a new way of worship. The Church was born because the followers of Jesus were all together in one place and together received the transforming and enabling power of the Holy Spirit; they became a fellowship of those who knew God to be their Father, who confessed Jesus Christ as Lord, who were filled with the life of the Holy Spirit and who loved one another.”

He goes on to say that love, unity and peace, the Spirit’s gifts, are not particularly evident in a divided Church.

“A divided Church is limiting the Spirit’s power in South Africa today.

285 A Letter dated 28 September 1960
287 Ibid., p6
A lot of the Church's energy and most of its money are being spent on
maintaining denominational structures and buildings WHICH
ENTRENCH OUR DIFFERENCES AND KEEP US APART."\textsuperscript{289}

Joseph Wing saw mission as the basis of unity - it was the object of the incarnation of
Jesus that the world might be saved and that the Church might be one so that the world
might believe, in accordance with the High Priestly Prayer of Jesus.

"The important thing about Church unity ..... is not a united structure
or a common organisation. What we must seek increasingly is a unity
of mission, because it is the Church's mission which is the source of its
unity."\textsuperscript{290}

The role played by Wing in the uniting of the Congregational Union of South Africa, the
London Missionary Society and the Bantu Congregational Church to form the United
Congregational Church of Southern Africa in 1967 was very significant. Van der Water
refers to Wing as "the obvious choice" to become the first General Secretary of the
UCCSA\textsuperscript{291} and the 1961-62 Yearbook of CUSA refers to a memorandum drawn up by
Wing and G.O. Lloyd. of which "extensive use" was made by the committee chosen by
the CUSA Executive to draw up a memorandum for proposed union talks between the
three bodies.\textsuperscript{292} Wing was the Secretary of the Central Regional Committee for the Wider
Union of Congregationalism and as such played a pivotal role in the negotiations. His
concern for the success of the unifying process can be inferred from a letter written to
J.K.Main at a stage when the proposed union seemed to be jeopardised by a rearguard

\textsuperscript{289} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{290} Preparation Notes on "Nature and Mission of the Church"
concern for the success of the unifying process can be inferred from a letter written to J.K. Main at a stage when the proposed union seemed to be jeopardised by a rearguard action of ministers who presumably were part of the CUSA Executive in Cape Town. He wrote:

“I would, I think, agree with you that there is little hope of achieving union on the due date in 1967. But if we could get a firm undertaking from the Assembly that the date of union be postponed until 1968 to give CUSA time to sort out some of its problems and that, come what may, we shall unite in 1968, then I think we might save the situation. But if that does not happen and an indefinite postponement is sought, then I am pretty sure that the CCA and LMS people will ‘cry off’ and lose confidence in the negotiations.”

In a very brief letter to Vernon Miller, Secretary of the CUSA, Wing mentions his intention to attend the Assembly, but explains that he would be a little late since he would be arriving from England and leave immediately for Cape Town where the Assembly would be held. He would be attending the Assembly “not ... to fight, but simply to hear what lies behind the motion of the Executive from those who formulated it and, if necessary, to correct a few wrong impressions and make out a case for the Central Region.”

It is not clear what the objections to the proposed union was, but that Wing was able to convince the objectors and make it possible for union to be effected in 1967, says a lot for his commitment and determination. It would be this commitment and

293 Letter by Wing apparently to J.K. Main. The first page of the letter seems to have gotten lost, therefore it cannot be said with certainty who the addressee was.
294 Letter by Wing to Vernon Miller, dated 04 October 1966.
determination to make a success of the UCCSA that drove him to pour so much energy into nurturing that newly established unity during his first few years in office.

Van der Water puts it as follows:

"Simply, quietly and tirelessly Joe nurtured, consolidated and strengthened this still very fragile unity of Congregational Churches. He travelled far and wide in South Africa, Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. He encouraged ministers in remote areas and challenged synods and local churches with a vision of unity in Christ across the barriers of race, class, nation and culture."[295]

Wing himself says that much of his time during the twenty years that he served as secretary of the UCCSA was spent in an attempt to hold everything and everyone together in one denominational structure.

"Our outward unity, however, has not always reflected the state of our life together. Maintaining outward interdependence and unity at the expense of truth and integrity could be counter-productive in the long term, and if I were to have time of service over again, I might do less of it than I felt compelled to do in the infancy of the UCCSA."[296]

Wing touches here on an issue which seemed to trouble him quite a lot, namely, the fact that the UCCSA’s unity seemed to be evident only at Assembly and Regional Council or

Synod meetings or events. That unity did not filter down to local church level where each congregation functioned independently and members of neighbouring churches usually met only at regional events. Wing seems here to feel that his energy had been wasted in trying to keep a semblance of unity going which was not a reflection of the real state of affairs in the UCCSA. He says:

"The UCCSA has called upon the local church repeatedly TO BE THE CHURCH. We have often discovered, however, that the local church has been obsessed with its own domesticity. There is often a gap between what the Assembly thinks the local church should be and do and what the local church itself wants to be and do... The Assembly makes its resolutions... but the resolutions have not moved from precept to praxis."²⁹⁷

On another occasion he wrote that the UCCSA believed that its supreme loyalty had to be given to Jesus Christ and that the cause of God's Kingdom must have absolute priority. That supreme loyalty should have been the binding force in the UCCSA, but other loyalties had been made subservient to it; Christ's Lordship over the whole of life was not being fully acknowledged. It is at that point that tension and division arose in the Church which called the Church's integrity into question.²⁹⁸

Wing was thus very critical of any sign of narrow denominationalism, because it went against everything he believed in as a true Congregationalist. He was proud to be a Congregationalist and proud of the Congregational heritage, but he was no

²⁹⁷ Ibid., p7
denominationalist; he was an ecumenist, believing in the unity of all Christians in Christ. In a sermon preached at the 21st anniversary of the Federal Theological Seminary he said:

"They (the Christians) haven't abandoned their old denominational structures - they are still in tact - and let's face it we are proud of what we are ... and sometimes we glory in the fact that we are Congregational or Anglican or Methodist or Presbyterian ... more than in the fact that we are Christians. In most cases our labels are more obvious than our love for one another...Most of us are still more at home in the denominational set-up and tend to be threatened by the ecumenical one." 299

In the same sermon Wing pointed out the irony that the Churches had to be forced out of their denominationalism to unite their theological training by the Bantu Education Act and the Group Areas Act. Preaching at the opening of a church hall in Coronationville, he said:

"This hall is for every member of the Christian family in Coronationville...it is erected by the Congregational Church but not for the Congregational Church..... It is erected for the glory of God and the good of men and women in Coronationville." 300

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298 *Churchsoc no. 21.* October 1978.
299 *Sermon 2 preached at Fedsem, 1977(?)*
300 *Sermon* preached at Coronationville, date unknown.
Joseph Wing saw the Church as the one body which was representative of the total life of South Africa; the microcosm of what South Africa ought to be. It was, therefore, imperative for the unity of the Church to be a visible unity:

"An invisible Church denies St. Paul's teaching about the Body of Christ. A body which is invisible is not a living organism but a ghost.

As far as I can see there is no support in the New Testament for an invisible Church in South Africa, or anywhere else on earth for that matter.... The Church in the world is a reflection of our Lord's incarnation, and its oneness, its unity, has to be seen to be believed.... The Church in South Africa practises its own apartheid, and its division into Anglicans, Methodists, Dutch Reformed, Roman Catholics, Presbyterians and Congregationalists pre-dates by 200 years the introduction of apartheid as an official policy of the South African Government in 1948! Denominational differences in South Africa deny the unifying power of the Gospel in a segregated society."  

A.W. Stops once described Joe Wing as "a man of the hour, a man for all seasons, and a man for all churches." It was perhaps these characteristics of Wing which made him the ideal person to try and unite Christians in South Africa. According to Van der Water Wing worked for unity in the Church in South Africa from the moment he arrived in Johannesburg. Soon he was involved in the Witwatersrand Council of Churches and the Christian Council (forerunner of the South African Council of Churches). He played a

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301 Sermon/Paper entitled "From Black Sash to Black Theology", 1974(7)
302 Cited by Van der Water in Challenge no.9. p7
major role in the drafting of the SACC’s constitution and for decades served on various committees, commissions and executives of the Council. It is therefore not surprising that he was asked in 1983 to compile “An Outline of the History of the SACC”. But it was as Secretary of the Church Unity Commission that he did the most towards the achieving of organic unity of South African Churches. Sometimes he was criticised from within UCCSA circles for being more concerned with getting the Churches together than with Congregational matters, but his response was:

“The evaluation that our commitment to unity has been misplaced is fully justified if we believe that the main task of the UCCSA is to give Congregationalism priority over the Gospel. But the unity we have found in the UCCSA and the unity we continue to seek is not an adjunct to the Gospel, it is part and parcel of the Gospel.”

He regarded the single confession on which Congregationalism is based, i.e. JESUS IS LORD, as the simplest of all confessions but the most profound in its implications. Even though it is the distinctive Congregational confession of faith, it is common to all Christians and it has made Congregationalism ecumenical in outlook and has enabled Congregationalists to work with and to unite with other Christians.

Wing’s commitment to the unity of Christians was deeply rooted in his belief in the incarnation which, to him, was a visible sign of God’s love, not only for believers, but for

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302 Cited by Van der Water in Challenge no.9, p7
304 Sermon at the centenary celebrations of Congregationalism in Johannesburg, 1989. p9
all humanity. He believed that the unity of the Church is based on mutual love, but it seemed that Christians did not love one another as God loved them.

"Fellowship based on love is the lifestyle of the Church; being a Christian means life together in the Church because there is one God and Father of us all, we are one family and the household of God. The unity of the Church, like the unity of a family, is one and indivisible. The unity which the Spirit gives, already exists, it is not a Plan of Union still to be formulated and approved by the hierarchies of the Churches. The unity of the Spirit is not the product of our theological thinking or of our church polities. We are called, not to create unity, God in Christ through the Spirit has done that already, we are called to make unity visible."  

For Wing it was important for the Church to demonstrate that reconciliation was possible in Christ, especially in a world and a country riddled and torn apart by conflicting factions. The Church had to show that old quarrels can be healed and differences overcome because God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. God has committed the ministry of reconciliation to his Church. He believed that unity, not separation, is God's will for the world and for the Church. Therefore Church unity and the unity of humanity are indivisible. Although the Church has valiantly fought against compulsory separation in South Africa, it has practised and was still practising a policy of ecclesiastical separation. Even after 20 years of negotiation the Church Unity Commission had not reached the point where complete mutual recognition of ministers amongst member churches had been.

305 Sermon 3, apparently preached at Fedsem, undated, untitled.
reached. Wing admonished Christians for often saying with St. Paul that, in Christ, there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female, but not going further by saying that in Christ there is neither Catholic nor Protestant, Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Anglican, Baptist, Congregational or Pentecostal. 306

"Unity is not just the fruit of the Gospel; it is an integral part of the Gospel. The purpose of our Lord's holy birth and incarnation was to reconcile heaven to earth, a holy God and a sinful humanity and the purpose of our Lord's death upon the cross was to break down the middle walls of partition which separate us and to make one body by the cross... We must pray for and seek union in order that the Church may become more relevant, less concerned with the maintenance of the Church and more concerned about the needs of the world." 307

In another address he criticised the hypocritical attitude of the Church which advocates the abolition of separation in society whilst promoting it within its own life and structures.

"The Church does not practise the principles it advocates for society in the Church." 308

One of Wing's fears with regard to the Church was that the day would come when South African society would be free of the separation caused by the system of apartheid, but that the Church would still be divided. Preaching to theological students at the Federal Seminary, he said:

"Your Church and my Church have condemned it (apartheid) in the

306 Ibid.
307 Ibid.
The strongest possible terms for more than forty years. And at the same
time we've practised it - in the appointment of clergy; in complying
with the Group Areas Act and in so many other ways....And one of
the real dangers that faces the Church is that, when apartheid is no
longer the policy of this land, it may still be practised by the Church.....
We don't know where the Church is going in relation to Christian unity.”

In a sermon preached at Johannesburg he had the following to say:

“To be the Church means being together in the one Body of Christ.
The New Testament knows nothing about separate development
among Christians, in fact it declares that the unity of Christ's people
in him and with one another is a sign and a symbol of the unity of
humanity.”

and:

“It is my prayer that when apartheid is dismantled, it will not be
perpetuated in the Church of God, and that every congregation
will be non-racial, not only in name, but in composition, and that
our separated denominations will sink their differences and manifest
the unity for which our Lord prayed.”

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309 Sermon 4, preached at Fedsem, untitled, undated.
311 Ibid., p11-12
For someone who worked so hard and believed so sincerely in Church unity as being the
will of God, it was indeed a very deep disappointment that, after many years of
negotiations, his dream was shattered when first the Presbyterian/Congregational union
failed to materialise and then the CUC union talks almost petered out. He saw the Church
speaking with many different voices, not with one voice and observed that he gained the
impression that often the Church preferred competition to co-operation and finance to
fellowship. For 21 years the Churches had been trying to come closer together, but except
for thirty to forty united congregations throughout South Africa, the Churches had not
united. At the time Wing said:

"Those of us who have been working and praying for unity for years
are disappointed and frustrated by the slow progress in union
negotiations, we would like to see more churches uniting, but instead
there would appear to be more churches dividing." 312

Speaking to the theological students with what seems to be a note of weariness and
derespontency but not lacking humour, he said:

"I speak today as one who is about to pass the torch to you, the torch
which kindled the light of this seminary, the torch of unity and
reconciliation. It is a flickering torch. The promise of unity has been
present for 21 years, but it has not been fulfilled. It has not been fulfilled
in this seminary, still less has it been fulfilled in the Churches. All
promising schemes of union have failed at the point of acceptance, and
ten years after the acceptance of the Declaration of Intention to seek

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union, the CUC Churches are now beginning to talk about taking a tentative NEXT STEP. One step a decade justifies the parody of a favourite hymn - 'Like a mighty tortoise moves the Church of God...' 313

But in what was probably the last paper he wrote, a chapter in a book on the London Missionary Society published in 1994, two years after his death, he was much more harsh in his criticism of the CUC Churches' failure to unite:

"The inability of the church in Southern Africa to demonstrate its own unity during the four decades of apartheid in South Africa, throughout a 15-year civil war in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), and in the prolonged struggles which preceded independence in Namibia and Mozambique, has been a serious indictment of the church's integrity. The churches' repeated advocacy of reconciliation between conflicting political interests in Southern Africa has not been matched by a marked willingness on the part of Christians to reconcile their own differences." 314

Wing and social justice

Central to Wing's theology was the importance of the Incarnation, God in Christ reconciling himself with the world. Not only was it the basis of his steadfast belief in the unity of all Christians, but it was also the foundation of his deeply rooted belief in the contextual nature of the Gospel. For him Jesus Christ was God in context, God reaching

313 Sermon 5, preached at Fedsem, untitled, undated.
out to the poor, the oppressed, the marginalised people of his day and impinging on every area of human life. Believing strongly that Christians should strive to be like Christ, Wing was outspoken and fearless in the struggle for justice and reconciliation in South Africa:

"The Church lives in the present tense. That is the incarnational process which began when God in Christ entered the context of human life. 'The Word became flesh and lived among us' (John 1:14). So as the church carries out that mission, it is set in a context, the context of Southern Africa, committed to its people, responding to the needy and seeking justice and peace. So it is a visible sign of the body of Christ." 315

In his outline of the history of the South African Council of Churches, Wing opines that the history of any institution is shaped by the existential situation in which it is called to operate. He continues:

"That is true of the Church of Jesus Christ, which has to be contextual if it is to be relevant. All that we have sought to do in this Council is to make the unchanging Gospel relevant in a changing society and a changing world. To the extent that we have been true to the standards of God's Kingdom, to that extent our work and witness will be woven into the pattern of God's purpose. To the extent that we have failed to reflect God's Kingdom and purpose for the Church and our country, to that extent our work and witness will have made no contribution to the..."
common good. Of that we must leave God to be the arbiter and continue to live and work according to the guidance he gives, through his Holy Spirit.” 316

To Wing the need for active involvement in the world around us (he would probably not see it as a “need” but rather as a God-given command) was the essence of being the Church of Jesus Christ in the world. He saw Christian discipleship and Christian social responsibility as inseparably linked since, if they were separated, the Church would cease to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth.

“And the Church in South Africa today cannot ignore current events. A Church which is preoccupied with its own domestic concerns only is proclaiming a Gospel of irrelevance, not the ‘Gospel of the Incarnation.’” 317

Preaching to students at Fedsem, he said:

“Justice for the poor and the oppressed is not a by-product of the Christian message, it is the very essence of it.... Jesus did not see sainthood in terms of withdrawal from the world but as a process of living in the world, not according to the world’s standards, but according to the Kingdom of God and his justice.” 318

315 Ibid., p47
316 Wing, J. “An Outline of the History of the SACC”. p11
317 Wing, J. “The role of the Church in the New South Africa”. p2
Similarly, in a talk to young people on the topic of being a Christian without being rejected by the community, he stressed the importance of a practical Christian life lived in accordance with the principles laid down in God’s Word:

“It is not ‘GOING TO CHURCH’ that makes you a Christian, but ‘BEING THE CHURCH’ in the community and in society at large. ‘BEING THE CHURCH’ makes you a Christian in practice. It marks you off as one whose life and work are motivated not by self-interest, but by the standards of the Kingdom of God and of his justice.” 319

Being the Church to Wing meant being the Church for other people. Because Jesus was the Person for others, his Church had to be the people of God for others.

“The Kingdom of God is concerned with JUSTICE, JOY AND PEACE, and the Church is being called to witness to these things here and now. God is not above this world but in it. His purpose will not be made plain at the end of time, but in time, which means that God is not immune from evil and suffering, but involved in it.” 320

He, however, made it very clear that being involved in the lives of people as Jesus was, could and usually does mean being crucified:

“We all prefer the cushion to the cross, but if we are to be the Church for others in the same way as Christ was the man for others, we have

319 Wing, J. “How can I be a Christian without being rejected by the community?” p1
320 Sermon 6, undated, untitled.
no choice - we must reach out in love and compassion to a city, a country in desperate need of what the Gospel has to offer, whatever the cost. Because the way of the cross is always the costly option and never the cheap one!”

Being one whose “heart burnt with an unquenchable fire for justice and peace in South Africa”, Wing never hesitated to be at the forefront of initiatives that would bring about justice and peace. Over the years he was part of many church delegations which called for the abolition of apartheid and an end to unjust rule. He met with the government at the highest levels to convey this message. In 1981 he was arrested and detained for participating in a march to John Vorster Square in Johannesburg. He was prepared to pay the price no matter what the cost. For Wing it was imperative that Christians should be socio-politically involved without compromising their calling to be prophetic witnesses to the supreme Lordship of Christ in the world. Withdrawal from the world for Christians was never an option to be considered; they have the responsibility to establish God’s reign of peace and justice in the world.

“Our loyalty now is to South Africa, and we cannot dissociate ourselves from the nation in which we live and have a part .... We are bound up together in the bundle of life with every other person in this country. We have a duty to the State and we must discharge that duty as Christians, whether we agree with the policy of the government in power or not, because by discharging these duties we are helping to maintain the moral

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321 Centenary Sermon. Op cit., p8
order in this land, which, as yet, does not acknowledge the order of Jesus Christ. And until the order of Jesus Christ is acknowledged in this country it is our responsibility to carry out our duties as citizens faithfully and well and to try and bring the order of Jesus Christ to bear on the existing national and social order......by playing our part in the ongoing life of this nation which with its multi-racial composition can become, under God, an example to the rest of the world.”

Social involvement, however, can never be exercised by the Church identifying fully with a current political system. Though church members should be encouraged to exercise political options in accordance with their Christian principles, the Church itself is called to prophetic participation in the life of society, not political participation. For Wing this position “acknowledges that every political movement, like the Church itself, falls under the righteous rule of God. This means that, although the Church must constantly point out the inadequacies of a particular political system or society, it must never abandon it!” Consequently, as far as Wing is concerned, the Church must take the risk of participating in the practical process of change and reform and that, to him, meant the engagement of the Church in social analysis on issues affecting the communities of which it is a part, issues like teenage pregnancies, alcohol- and drug abuse, unemployment, political tension and trade unions. The aim of the social analysis is to become an effective

322 Challenge no. 9, Op.cit. p7
324 Wing, “The role of the Church”, p5
and active agent of change in society. Because God had no intention of disengaging himself from involvement in Southern Africa, disengagement could never be an option for the UCCSA, Wing wrote in his secretarial report to Assembly in 1983:

"This Church has a divinely-conferred responsibility for the pastoral care and physical and spiritual welfare of the people within its bounds, irrespective of the political system under which it might be compelled to live and work. It is called to minister to the victims of sin and of a sinful society - to withdraw would be to deny what we are affirming in this Assembly, namely, that Jesus Christ is the LIFE OF THE WORLD. This means that Jesus Christ is the LIFE of Marxist Mozambique, of democratic Botswana, of socialist Zimbabwe, of neo-colonial Namibia and of separated South Africa - of all the countries in which the UCCSA is called to serve. There is not one of these political regimes with which we as a Church would identify completely, either in theory or in practice, but ever since its conception in the days of the Roman Empire the Church has had to minister in an alien society under political and social conditions which deny the standards of God's Kingdom and justice."

Wing was of the opinion that the Church does not compromise its position by serving the world in every political circumstance; it only did that when it conformed to the pattern of the world and helped to bolster an unjust political system.

325 Ibid., p8
326 UCCSA Reports 1983, p1
An integral part of the mission of the Church, then, as far as Wing was concerned, was to get in touch with people where they are; to know what they are doing and to help them to do it better, if what they were doing would not prove to be problematic. Preaching on the topic, "The relevance of the Christian Faith for Today", he said:

"By becoming flesh the Eternal Word adapted to our human needs - the Gospel of the Incarnation which comes down to where people are and touches them just where they need to be touched." 328

Since situations and conditions under which people live are never static, the Church needs to be dynamic in order to minister to people where they are. In this regard Wing was very critical of the Church, and especially the UCCSA at local level, because to his mind it tended to be more of an establishment than a living organism.

"The commission of Jesus to his disciples was a roving one. Mobility, not establishment, was to be the lifestyle of the Church! ..... The history of the Church in South Africa, even our own denomination, has reflected a pattern of establishment rather than mobility, and even the pressures which our socio-political situation has brought to bear on our work and witness have not helped to make us one." 329

It was this tendency towards stagnation in the Church, especially the UCCSA, which made that Wing had mixed feelings about the erection of church buildings. He was more than

328 Sermon 7, untitled, undated.
appreciative of the social significance of such buildings in communities which had been disrupted by the Group Areas Act and moved to unfamiliar and unfriendly surroundings, because he believed the buildings provided a focus for community life and eased the transition caused by resettlement. But, on the other hand, buildings tended to “ground” the Church, as it were, so that they became the central focus of many congregations. Wing, therefore, posed two questions which he suggested needed to be answered by the UCCSA and the Church as a whole:

“Is Church Extension and the erection of church buildings our top priority? If that is the case, is there not a danger of the investment we have in church property rooting us to the ground and prevent us from being both the Pilgrim People of God and a Church for others, particularly the poor?”

Though buildings are necessary, Wing’s concern was that they can and do make the Church static; tied up in its own concerns to such an extent that it had time for little else:

“Mission,” he said, “is wherever we are and our local churches do not always realise that, anymore than the UCCSA itself does. So much of our activity, at every level of the Church’s life, is seen in terms of maintenance rather than mission. Many of our people are organisation-orientated when it comes to the Church. They see

331 It is interesting that Wing here seems to differentiate between the UCCSA and local churches, as if the latter are not, in fact, the UCCSA. Maybe it was subconsciously, an allusion to the de facto situation in the Church in which many of the local churches indeed did not feel compelled to be the UCCSA in the sense of following Assembly resolutions with action. The matter will be taken up again in the final chapter.
it as an organisation which has to be kept going at all costs, and not as an organism which has life within itself and demonstrates its life by growing. Mission is the Church in the context of its situation, committed to serving the needs of the people and to the establishment of justice and peace in Southern Africa, the visible signs of God's reign.  

In a paper in which he gave an overview of the first twenty years of UCCSA existence and presented at the Minister's convention in 1989, Wing sounded a warning to the UCCSA to beware that property did not become one of the main reasons for its existence as a Church and a substitute for the real mission of the Church in the world.  

For Wing there was a very close connection between the unity of the Church and its social responsibility. The unity of the Church formed the basis for its social action, and not vice versa and the source of both was the incarnation, God becoming human in the person of Jesus Christ. He believed that Christians had to be united in order that the Church might become more relevant, less concerned with its own maintenance and more concerned about the needs of the people living in the world of which the Church was a part. It was, therefore, with much anguish that he viewed the inability of the Churches to unite:  

"It is midnight in South Africa today, the darkness is so deep that we can hardly see which way to turn. It is midnight in our social and political order... It is midnight too in our..."  

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333 Ibid., p10  
personal and family lives - fear haunts us, anxiety, depression, the break-up of family life are at the order of the day! Worst of all, it is midnight in the Church; the Church does not speak with a clear, unequivocal voice, it is deeply divided on fundamental issues.335

A cause of grave concern for Joseph Wing with regard to Church unity and social action was that it seemed to him that the Church was not practising what it was preaching, resulting in it losing its integrity and consequently being scoffed at by the world. He saw the Church as having played a significant role in the dismantling of apartheid, but though its prophetic voice had been loud and clear, its prophetic action had not always matched its prophetic words.

"The justice which the Church has demanded of the State has not always been reflected in the politics of the Church!" 336

He cited this as the reason why black young people had not always looked to the Church as an ally in their struggle for basic human rights. Many of them saw the Church as part of the establishment, an institution dedicated to the maintenance of the status quo. They maintained, in Wing's opinion with some justification, that the Church had acquiesced in Bantu Education by letting the schools go; in the Group Areas Act by moving when it was told to move and in the Homelands by leading members allowing themselves to be co-opted despite the fact that these repressive acts had all been condemned by the Church.337

It was, therefore, Wing's considered opinion that the Church had a lot still to do in order to speak with one voice and act in accordance with its convictions:

337 Ibid., p4
"We shall have to dig up a lot in South Africa before the changes we desire and the justice and reconciliation for which we are striving are realised in Church and State. We shall have to dig up racial prejudice, denominational pride and blatant self-interest until we reach the solid rock on which a free and just society and truly united Church can be built - 'for other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.' 338

Conclusion

Undeniably Joseph Wing was indeed the motivating power behind the formation of the UCCSA and its habitual moral character for the first twenty years of its existence and to a lesser extent during the last years of his life. The high esteem in which he was held by all and sundry who knew him was evident in what people had to say about him. On the one hand there were ordinary people like the residents of the Pevensy township who attended the services Wing used to hold in the Underberg and sent him a "Thank you-because-you-did-so-much-for-others" card signed by everyone of them, because the services "had such nice meanings to them." 339 On the other hand there was Archbishop Desmond Tutu who is on record as having said, "I have relied on Joe's support and advice at critical times in my own life, and I have yet to regret acting on that advice." 340 Wing had the kind of

339 Thank you card sent to Wing when he left Natal, probably in 1991.
personality which endeared him to people and this was one of his greatest assets in taking
the lead in the bringing together of Christians with different creeds and polities. His
honesty and integrity earned him the respect of everyone who got to know him, so much
so that they were prepared to listen to him and to share his enthusiasm for church unity
and social involvement. Van der Water quotes an observation made by Basil Manning
about Joseph Wing, an observation which he (Van der Water) believed reflected the
sentiments of other black ministers:

"Given the level of awareness in those days (1960), I was struck
by this 'different' white man in apartheid South Africa who
seemed unconcerned about the restrictions, formal or informal,
placed upon whites in their contact with black people. He was
constantly in and out of Newclare, seemed to have good working
relationships with black leadership in the Church from Soweto
to Springs, in Natal or the Orange Free State." 341

There can be no clearer evidence of the high level of trust and acceptance there was for
Wing among Christians of all races, colours and creeds in Southern Africa. This is also
confirmed by Barrie Scopes, Africa Secretary of The Council for World Mission in 1992:

"I have many memories of Joe and always of such an alive person,
concerned for others - carrying their luggage, transporting them,
comforting and encouraging. He knew and cared for so many people
and had done so much to help others and bring reconciliation and
understanding in South Africa.... And I remember how well he

341 Ibid., p6
Another asset of Wing in the establishing of the ethos of the UCCSA was his great capacity for work. He never seemed to allow himself some time of rest and usually had to be compelled by the UCCSA Assembly to take a vacation. After the very first Assembly Cyril Kemp, in giving his impressions of the inaugural Assembly, commented:

"It would be easy to overlook, almost take for granted, the smooth running and organisation of this inaugural Assembly; but that would be to disregard the tremendous skill and industry displayed by the Secretary of the new Church. To Rev Joseph Wing must go all credit and sincere congratulations for the triumphant success of the Assembly...." 343

Ten years later, Rev. B. Dludla, in his Chairperson’s Address expressed the same sentiments:

"Prior to this Assembly, Joe has worked harder than ever before when his colleague (John Thorne) left to join the South African Council of Churches. It must have been a gruelling task compiling all the reports and to submit his own which covers a wide range of the Church’s activity and other related bodies. I cannot satisfactorily pay a

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proper tribute and indebtedness to Joe for his tower of strength and magnitude of vision. 344

At the same Assembly a motion of gratitude and appreciation for the work of Wing was made by Rev. K.R.M. Gardener and accepted by a standing ovation. 345

The Central Committee of the Church Unity Commission which Wing served as secretary for 16 years, in 1989 expressed its deep indebtedness to him for his dedicated service. In addition to being secretary of the UCCSA, he carried out his task at the CUC "with an enthusiasm and commitment which will be difficult to emulate and impossible to repay." Referring to Wing as "Mr. Unity", the CUC commented that if the measure of success which had attended the Commission was in no small measure his personal achievement. 346

In its report to Assembly in 1993, paying tribute to Wing, the CUC regarded him as being primarily responsible for the achievements of the Commission. Though others played a role, the report said, it was Joseph Wing who "kept the show on the road with his unbounded enthusiasm, meticulous attention to detail, insatiable appetite for work and wide ecumenical experience." 347 His experience in ecumenical matters certainly helped to make him the right man at the right time for the UCCSA. In seeking the help of Wing for a research project, Frank Chikane, General Secretary of the SACC, spoke of his "wealth of information, experience and literature on the Ecumenical Movement." 348

343 UCCSA Year Book 1968, p54
344 Chairman's Address. 23 September 1977, p3
345 Assembly Proceedings 1977. p8
346 Assembly Reports 1990. p150
347 Assembly Reports 1993. p29
If Wing had weaknesses, and he certainly admitted to having some, they were not that evident in his ministry in Church and society in Southern Africa. The many sincere tributes paid to this man throughout his life bear ample testimony to this. Van der Water sums it up:

"The wisdom and sensitivity of Joseph Wing touched the lives of many people in a personal and profound way. Many of us as young ministers looked up to Joe as a wonderful example of how to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, a minister of the Word and a servant of the people. He was always ready to serve, and no task was too menial for him. He never expected to be served by others, because like Jesus he had given his life for others (Mark 10:45). He was a living example of genuine Christian humility. Nothing seemed to ever get him down. He was always smiling, always able to see the amusing side of things. Joe Wing made being a good Christian look so easy and natural."  

In 1991 Joseph and Marjorie Wing returned to the place they had first come to in Africa, the Kuruman Moffat Mission, and there Joseph Wing died on 29 July 1992.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSIONS

The decision by the Congregational Union of South Africa, the Bantu Congregational Church and the London Missionary Society in Southern Africa united in 1967 to become one Church instead of a "union" of churches was one which have a very profound effect on the functioning and ethos of the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa. For D.R. Briggs, writing in 1996, this decision not to form a union or even federation of local churches, but a Church, with a conciliar structure and a covenant as its founding principle, represented a new kind of polity for Congregationalists "whose implications many of our people have yet to realize and understand." In looking critically at the formation and ethos of the UCCSA from 1967 to 1992 I shall try to show that it was mostly because the "people" within the UCCSA did not fully understand the concept of being a Church rather than a union or federation of churches that unity within the UCCSA and the effectiveness of its ethos were problematic during the years under review. Central to this lack of full comprehension of the nature of the union was the apparent ignorance of or disregard of the demands made by the covenant which the uniting bodies entered into and which was to be the binding factor within the UCCSA at Assembly, regional and local level. We shall look at the way in which the formation as well as the ethos of the UCCSA was affected by the decision to become a church with a conciliar structure.

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Formation

In explaining the covenant model of being the Church as represented by Congregationalism Briggs contrasts this model with other "hierarchical" models which have "higher" and "lower" courts. The covenant model of the Church, as found in Congregationalism can, according to Briggs, best be illustrated by a circle with a cross at its centre with dots around the cross and arrows linking the dots to the cross and to each other. The cross symbolises the presence of the risen Christ among his covenant people which constitutes the local church. The dots symbolise the members and the arrows linking them to the cross symbolise the covenant relationship which they entered into when they became Christians. The arrows linking the dots with each other represent the mutual covenant between the members which they entered into by virtue of their covenant with Christ. Briggs expands this model to show that the same relationship exists between churches within a particular region via the Regional Council as well as between the various regions within the UCCSA via the Assembly. He thereby illustrates that when the Regional Council or Assembly meets it is as much the Church meeting as is the case with the local church:

"...we believe that the Church is the Church, fully and completely, in each of its dimensions, because Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church, is there among his covenant people gathered in his name, among his covenant churches - there in all his risen, exalted glory, with the full authority and power which have been committed to him in heaven and on earth. He is there in the gathered local church, wherever it might
be located, however large or small its numbers, no matter how stately or primitive the building in which it meets. And, because his presence makes the Church, but also because he cannot be divided, the local church is still as fully the Church as any other dimension of it. In the same way the Regional Council, the Synod (where there is one), and the Assembly are each the Church, fully, completely, and for the selfsame reason: Christ is there in glory, with supreme authority.\textsuperscript{351}

It is thus clear that, in the covenant model, the Lordship of Christ is fundamental and the relationship of one member with Christ links him/her not only to each and every other member within his/her own congregation but also with every other member in his/her region through the Regional Council and further to each and every other member of the wider UCCSA via the Assembly. When a person thus joins a local church he/or she not only accepts the Lordship of Christ but also the ministerial authority of the Assembly, as the widest dimension of the Church, and that of the Regional Council as part of his/her covenant responsibility. The same is, as a matter of course, true of any local church which is part of or becomes part of the UCCSA. It seems that it is exactly this aspect of the covenant relationship which members and local churches seemed to have difficulty with understanding.

The decision to become a Church rather than a union or a federation seemed to be aimed at establishing a closer fellowship among churches within a region and regions within the wider UCCSA.\textsuperscript{351}
UCCSA. It was hoped that the covenant relationship which existed among members within a local congregation would be extended to the churches making up the region and farther to the regions comprising the UCCSA. That this fellowship was evident at Assembly and at Regional Council meetings can be seen from comments made by the Reverend Mr. H.J. Hendrickse, chairman of the UCCSA 1971-72 and the Rev. Mr. D.R. Briggs, chairman in 1972-73 respectively:

"I am happy to note that we are growing in ...one-ness, not only in our contracts with other denominations, but also in our determination to express that one-ness which transcends race and colour."352

and:

"Each of our local churches is different - in size, in composition, in the way it seeks to fulfill its mission. Yet these local churches are united to one another; we may see this working itself out in the way they care about one another, as well as at the Regional Council and at the Assembly levels. We have in fact found the secret of real unity through diversity, and we maintain that this is the key not only to the re-union of the Church, but to many of the problems in our society too."353

On the other hand, it is also true that, when the division in South African became greater because of the application of the apartheid laws, the new-found unity within the UCCSA took a dive. This led Joseph Wing, the Secretary of the UCCSA, to remark to ministers at a convention held in 1989:

352 UCCSA Year Book 1972, p1.
"A covenant was the basis on which the UCCSA was constituted, and it has been the basis of our continuing life - or should have been... Interdependence has been achieved to a greater or lesser extent at Regional and Synod levels... We have often discovered, however, that the local church has been obsessed with its own domesticity. There is often a gap between what the Assembly thinks the local church should be and do and what the local church itself wants to be and do."

The division within the UCCSA, and especially along racial lines, was even more vividly sketched by the Rev. Mr. B.K. Dludla when he addressed the Assembly during his term of office as chairman:

"It may be pleasing for us to be here together. But the moment we move out of here or from any other assembly, we become divided and estranged as ever...

I once had a missionary family join my church. Beyond that I have not made any effort to recruit outside the black constituency. My excuse is that the doors are open for anyone who may come... Or your excuse may be that the other people will not understand the language spoken by the regular worshippers. But that language problem ceases to exist when it comes to business transactions...

However, in the church one is expected to be absolutely conversant

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354 UCCSA Year Book 1973. p7
If he/she must qualify. This is not said, but it is understood. In some isolated instances certain church members have left their church where the minister and the church or deaconate decided to admit into full membership persons of a different race, or allowed a mixed gathering for purposes of worship. Some of our church people when they find themselves in communities which are not of their own race, they are not invited to full participation in the life of the existing church in that community.\(^{355}\)

It was inevitable that the UCCSA would be affected by the division in South African society, but we must not forget that South Africa is but one of the five countries in which the UCCSA operates. Though it is true that situations in the other countries were different, these countries were, to a lesser or greater extent, affected by the policies of apartheid South Africa. What happened in South Africa, however, so dominated Assembly agendas that members from other countries sometimes felt that the UCCSA was only concerned with the churches in South Africa. Yet the feeling of being one was strong enough to carry the Church through the difficult years, so much so that the General Secretary remarked in his overview of the developments in the Church after 20 years:

"Even the creation of Synods in the countries outside South Africa, to deal with their own special concerns, has not diminished the sense of inter-dependence or deprived us of the enrichment which being together in an international church brings."\(^{356}\)

And the 1987 Executive Committee report to Assembly commented as follows:

"The UCCSA has had little in the way of superstructure or infrastructure during the first twenty years of its life; the CONGREGATIONAL WAY is not dependent on such things. But we are dependent on Christ and on one another and it is that INTERDEPENDENCE which has characterized our life together in the UCCSA."\(^{357}\)

It thus seems that being a Church had the desired effect of uniting and keeping the churches comprising the UCCSA together, despite the strain that was placed on that unity by so many external and internal factors. The covenant made at the inaugural Assembly to "work, worship and witness together" seemed to have helped in binding the diverse elements which constitute the UCCSA together in much the same way that a local church is usually able to remain intact through turbulent times. Yet, the decision to be a Church rather than a union of federation of churches also impacted greatly on the ethos of the UCCSA as we shall see in the next section.

**Ethos**

As we have seen in Chapter 2, the ethos of the UCCSA from 1967 to 1992 was one dominated by ecumenism and the fight for social justice in the subcontinent of Africa. The

\(^{355}\) *Chairman's Address*. Op. cit., p6


\(^{357}\) *UCCSA Reports 1987*, p5
engagement in union negotiations as well as unified action in social justice matters were greatly facilitated by the fact that it was one Church being involved in such activities and not a number of churches. Even though the church at all levels, and especially at the local level, were consulted in all matters concerning church union and social justice, being together as one Church had the effect of helping people to consider more than just their own parochial interests and look at the needs and witness of the Church in its wider sense.

The commitment of the UCCSA to church unity was such that the Church united with the Disciples of Christ within five years of its own formation and that it sought union with the Presbyterian Church of South Africa at the same time as being engaged in negotiations with the Church Unity Commission Churches. Another indication of the Church’s commitment to unity was the fact that all but one of the regions in the UCCSA succeeded in attaining an overwhelming majority in favour of uniting with the other Churches and the defeat in that region was by a very narrow margin. The failure of the Churches to unite, apart from factors within the Churches themselves, should be seen against the wider background of what was happening in Southern Africa, particularly South Africa, and in Africa as a whole. As mentioned above, the policy of apartheid brought division and polarisation in all areas of societal life, the Church being no exception. In its submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 1997\textsuperscript{358} the Church acknowledged its failure in this regard:

\textquote{The UCCSA was not unmindful of the fact that there was something}

\textsuperscript{358} This Commission, under chairpersonship of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, was appointed by the South African government to investigate and possibly redress the human relations violations of the apartheid era with a view to facilitating the peace and reconciliation process in the country.
hypocritical about condemning apartheid in the state and yet being a racially divided church itself. Resolution after resolution was passed, and church programmes were introduced to enable black, coloured and white members and churches to be integrated - with little success. Even attempts to move ministers into cross-cultural and cross-racial settings were not pursued with much vigour. It is with shame that the church must confess that for all the evil of apartheid, 10am on a Sunday morning remained the most segregated hour in the country!...

We can think of many reasons for this, including the geographical divide brought by the Group Areas Act, and the normal desire of people to worship God in their own home language and culture. Nevertheless, when the church needed to witness to the gospel in the face of apartheid it did very little in the way of ordering its own life and worship so that it could be a sign of the Kingdom midst the turmoil of the world. Thus the lofty and clear statements against racism, oppression, injustice and exploitation seldom became a reality in the day-to-day life of the church. ③59

The Black Consciousness movement and the movement in Africa to rid itself of the tutelage of parent Churches overseas were factors which have to be taken into consideration when the failure of the Churches to unite is evaluated. For black people in South Africa there were other, more important, things on the agenda than Church unity -

③59 Submission of the UCCSA to the TRC of South Africa, October 1997, p9
many of them were not even sure if they wanted to be part of the Church at the time, in terms of it being relevant to their existence in South Africa. Wing makes the following comment:

"In South Africa the growth of Black Consciousness changed the whole pattern of inter-racial contact and dialogue. The call went out for people to affirm who and what they were and to reject preconceived patterns to which they were to conform by colonial and oppressive structures...
The oft-repeated calls for Christian unity and racial reconciliation went unheeded."[^360]

Given the division within and outside the Church in South Africa, one can only conclude that the time during which the UCCSA tried to be part of making the unity of the Church a visible unity was not the best time to be engaged in such an endeavour. That the Churches came so close to making unity a reality must be contributed to the commitment of church leaders, especially Joseph Wing, to the cause. If it were not for their untiring efforts under greatly unfavourable conditions the little success that was achieved would not even have been achieved.

That the UCCSA tried to be of moral significance in South African society cannot be denied. That the inherent weaknesses in the Church were exposed and its commitment to the covenant stretched to its fullest extent is also something which has become clear. As a Church the UCCSA could initiate and participate in social justice programmes more.

[^360]: UCCSA Reports 1987, p2-3
readily than would have been the case had the union been a "looser" one. At the same time action at local church level, where action had to be effected, was never what Assembly intended it to be, because of an apparent misconception about local church autonomy and a lack of understanding what the covenant relationship really demanded. That this was something which the Church leadership realised fully can be seen by so many references to the problem, like this one, for instance:

"Assemblies are essential because it is the UCCSA gathered to discern the will of God and to determine how best it can advise its local churches to implement that will..."

People in fellowship with one another are people who have entered into a covenant relationship. It is the covenant relationship between God and with man that binds church member with church member, local church with local church, local church with region/synod, region/synod with region/synod through Assembly...

It is sad to say that many members of local churches do not understand the meaning of covenant relationship. Because of this lack of understanding, there is a lack of commitment to the local church. This lack of commitment is observed in the failure of individual members to participate in the worship, witness and service of the local church.

There are local churches who still cling to the idea of independence. The
gospel of interdependence which has been preached repeatedly has not found favour with such churches.\textsuperscript{361}

However, despite the fact that the UCCSA realised what the problem was, it failed to address the problem effectively. I believe that this was so because of a reluctance on the part of Assembly to follow through the covenant relationship to its fullest extent, that is, also taking disciplinary action where it became necessary. Procedure 19 of the Constitution of the UCCSA, dealing with Church Discipline, states:

"As a people in covenant with the Lord, the Church is called to be holy, to live according to the Spirit of Christ, and to share in Christ's saving mission in the world.

The Church can only reach towards this high calling if, trusting in the covenanted grace of God, it fulfils its side of the Covenant by earnest endeavour to walk in the ways of the Lord. This is to say that it must live a disciplined life within the covenant...

Because the church is a 'school for sinners', its members do not consistently keep the terms of the covenant: they doubt, they falter, they fall into error, they sin. Much of the healing and reconciliation which is needed takes place privately, or informally within the congregation. But from time to time it becomes necessary for the congregation to

\textsuperscript{361} Assembly Proceedings 1990, p72
take formal disciplinary steps in relation to individuals who have acted contrary to the spirit and will of Christ and so doing have harmed the life and witness of the Church. 362

What applies here to the local church, applies equally to the Regional Council and to Assembly when it comes to disciplinary action against local churches. If Assembly is "the UCCSA gathered to discern the will of God and to determine how best it can advise its local churches to implement that will", then it follows that the local church, if it wants to do the will of God as discerned by Assembly, has no option but to implement decisions taken by Assembly. Local churches, then, may differ in the way in which they implement those decisions, but they may not refuse to implement them. Refusal or failure to do so would be an action "contrary to the Spirit and will of Christ" as discerned by Assembly and as such it would make those local churches liable to disciplinary action. Either that or Assembly has to admit that its resolutions are not the discerned will of God for the UCCSA. In failing to take disciplinary action against local churches, and maybe even regional councils for failing to implement Assembly resolutions, the UCCSA not only violated its own Constitution and weakened its witness as part of the Church universal, but it also failed in its commitment to the covenant. This failure had a very adverse effect on the ethos of the UCCSA

Why was there a reluctance on the part of the UCCSA to take disciplinary action against those local churches which so flagrantly refused to implement Assembly resolutions?

362 Constitution of the UCCSA, p37
Briggs refers to two possible extreme approaches to discipline: one in which the main purpose is to punish and the other where there is a tendency to overlook the transgression, one in which unchristian behaviour is tolerated, ostensibly to show Christian patience and to keep the peace. About this approach to discipline Briggs says:

"...what it actually exhibits is the laziness or the moral weakness of those who refuse to take the action needed to purify the body of its uncleanness and to bring the offender to his or her spiritual senses. This, too, is a denial of covenant responsibility, and needs to be shown up for what it really is: contempt of Christ's covenant with us." 363

Hard words, no doubt, but true nonetheless. And I believe that this is the reason why the UCCSA persisted in "urging" and "calling on" local churches and why resolutions on resolutions were made and passed on and numerous appeals made to no avail: the UCCSA was afraid to take action because it wanted to keep the peace; it was afraid that another breakaway would occur, something which Congregationalism seemed to be very prone to. In the process it denied its covenant responsibility and diminished its moral significance in a South Africa calling out for social justice. What could have been done, in view of the Church's reluctance to discipline local churches, was to embark on a well-planned programme of educating local churches on the meaning of the covenant, since that was the need identified.

However, a very encouraging and refreshing aspect of the ethos of the UCCSA is its willingness to do critical introspection and to change or adapt in the light of what it

believed to be the discerned will of God for the Church. This can be very clearly seen in the response of the UCCSA to the Kairos Document. Assessing the response of the English-speaking Churches of South Africa to the Document, Des van der Water found the UCCSA to be the one amongst these Churches which regarded the challenge presented by the Document with the greatest degree of seriousness. The response of the Church was to embark on a far-reaching process which was not only aimed at changing the structures of the Church but also the society in which the Church operates. What emphasised the commitment of the UCCSA to fight for a just social order was not only its determination to change its own structures, ministry and mission, but also the urgency with which it regarded the challenge of the kairos:

"The initial reception of and response to the KD by the UCCSA was... clearly, in essence, a positive and progressive one. Noteworthy, in this regard, is that the kairos process within the church was set in motion almost as an immediate response, whereas the church could have chosen the route of waiting until its Executive Committee or Assembly convened before any official kairos engagement."

Thus, when confronted by the kairos challenge, the UCCSA was immediately prepared to acknowledge its own inadequacies in ministry and its structural weaknesses as an institution. Furthermore, this denomination was prepared to implement changes that would effect a more relevant response to what it perceived its calling to be in South

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164 This was a document produced by a number of South African theologians during the 1980's in which a critical look was taken at the Church and its prophetic engagement in the political crisis which existed in the country. Several UCCSA ministers signed the document.
African society. Out of the kairos challenge there developed a Pastoral Plan to change church and society and much time, money and resources were made available to make this Plan as effective as possible.

"This church's reception of the KD challenge was ... predicated on the clear recognition that, (i) in its 'external' mission it had to respond more effectively to the 'cry of the oppressed', and (ii) the church's 'internal' mission was to transform itself in order to be a more effective agent of transformation in society."366

It is thus clear that the UCCSA was prepared to subject itself to serious and far-reaching internal ecclesiastical and theological critique in order to become a more relevant and effective transforming agent.

Yet, as with the Church's commitment to ecumenism, the UCCSA's involvement in social justice issues and its endeavours to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world would not have been so significant if it had not been for the dynamic leadership of, especially its General Secretary, the Rev. Mr. Joseph Wing. This is acknowledged by Van der Water:

"It is worth noting... that the UCCSA's voice of opposition to apartheid was, in large measure, due to the direction given by the denomination's ecclesiastical, political and theological leadership, especially since 1967 when the different strands of Congregationalism in South Africa became united under the

leadership of the Revd Joseph Wing. It was in no small measure due to the Revd Wing's decisive leadership, both in the initial and subsequent stages of the kairos process, that the UCCSA responded in such a positive way to the challenge of the Document.\(^{367}\)

In similar vein the Church pays tribute to the efforts of Joseph Wing and others in its submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa:

"We want to celebrate our fathers and mothers in the faith who stood firm against the most incredible injustice, who laboured under a heavy burden of oppression, who shed tears at innumerable funerals of their sons and daughters, and who paid the price for their love. In doing so, we must state that our record would be incomplete without mention of the most amazing legacy bequeathed to us by our first General Secretary, the late Rev Joseph Wing, whom the record will show to have been one of the most principled and dignified church leaders in South Africa in the apartheid era, and whose letters, reports and statements about justice, peace and unity rank with the highest testimony of the church universal."\(^{368}\)

Under this kind of leadership the UCCSA was able to continue to try and be the Church of Jesus Christ in Southern Africa. It is to its credit that the Church was open to critique and

\(^{366}\) Ibid., p42  
\(^{367}\) Ibid., p41  
\(^{368}\) Submission, Op. cit., p10
prepared to view itself and its actions in the light of what the Gospel demanded. Needless to say, however, the Church's failure to effectively deal with ambiguities within its own structures, despite numerous efforts, was a serious setback for its prophetic task and detrimental to its ethos. However, just like any other human institution the UCCSA also is an imperfect one. But at least there is a culture of working at problems and being willing and open to change. This augurs well for the Church and its witness in the future and maybe we can echo the words of Joseph Wing:

"We have reached a point where we realise that the future relationship of the peoples of Southern Africa and the credibility of the Church will not be determined by our fine words but by our willingness to demonstrate in the life of the Church and the community that 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself and has committed to us the ministry of reconciliation.' 369

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