

**THE ROLE OF COLOURED CHURCH LEADERS IN THE ANTI-
APARTHEID STRUGGLE: 16 JUNE 1976 - 16 JUNE 1986**

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DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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Signature

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Date: November 2000

DEDICATION

To Birgitte and our children Justin and Nicole for your love, assistance and support through the writing of this thesis.

To my parents Joyce and James who through great sacrifice strove to give me the best they could under very difficult circumstances.

The oppressed people of South Africa whom I believe are the unsung heroes and heroines of our beautiful nation, in particular the late Mrs. Lettie Viljoen of Bonteheuwel Congregational Church whose undaunted Christian faith and commitment to the struggle was an inspiration to me and many other young activists during the dark days of the struggle.

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TERMINOLOGY

In South Africa, there are different terms used to describe so-called different population groups. The official terms used by the apartheid government were Coloured, Indian, White and Natives or Bantu. Coloureds were subdivided into no less than 5 subgroups. Coloureds were also known pejoratively as Hottentots as opposed to the more acceptable, Khoi-Khoi, and Bushmen as opposed to the Khoi San. The term Coloured was not accepted by the majority who fell into this group. Coloureds in their more positive sense can be seen as Africans of mixed ancestry.

The term, Indians, referred to South Africans of Indian descent and the term, Whites, collectively described all Africans of European descent. The terms, Natives or Bantu, referred to indigenous Africans, pejoratively called, 'Kaffirs'. With the advent of the Black Consciousness Movement, there was an attempt to challenge this negative classification of all people who were not white. Black Consciousness redefined all oppressed people who were not white as Black. Coloureds Indians and Natives were thus defined as Black. This use of the word Black was meant to be positive to affirm the oppressed masses in South Africa. It was used as a rejection of the term non-white, which defined oppressed people in terms of whiteness. In response to the events of 1976, the apartheid government moved swiftly to counter this attempt to unify the oppressed community under one umbrella, namely Blackness. In order to sow confusion, as well as to once again gain hegemony over oppressed South Africans, they replaced the term Native or Bantu with Black, and continued to use the terms Coloured, Indian and White to describe the other so-called racial groups.

In this thesis I will use the terms coloured, Indian, african, white and apartheid in lower case out of protest against the apartheid classification system. When they appear in quotations in upper case, they will be written within quotation marks. E.g. 'Coloured' The term coloured will refer to Africans of mixed ancestry. The term indian will refer to Africans of Indian descent The terms 'Black' 'Native' 'Bantu' when referring to indigenous africans will be replaced by the term african in lower case, except in quotations when they will be written in quotation marks. The term black will refer to coloureds, indians and africans.

The term Ecumenical Church will refer to the member churches of the South African Council of Churches. This includes what is known as the major English Speaking Churches, such as the Methodist, Congregational, Presbyterian, Lutheran and Anglican Churches. The Ecumenical Church will often be referred to as the Church for short.

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PREFACE

In this thesis I seek to understand the role of the Ecumenical Church in the anti-apartheid Struggle, with particular focus on coloured Church leaders, in the period, June 16 1976 to June 16 1986. By coloured I mean people in South Africa who have mixed ancestry and who were classified 'coloured' under the apartheid regime.

The issue of coloured identity has become an issue of contention in South Africa post 1994. The legitimacy of coloureds as part of the oppressed black group in South Africa and their role in the anti-apartheid struggle has been called into question in certain quarters of the oppressed community. This has thrown many coloured activists, including myself into an identity crisis. For the first time coloureds are being forced to look at themselves as coloureds and define who and what they are and their relationship to the anti-apartheid struggle.

I am a coloured person who was involved in the anti-apartheid struggle post June 16 1976, primarily out of my Christian convictions. In this thesis I therefore seek to reflect on my experiences in this struggle, as a coloured and as a Christian. I wish to do so in relation to coloured Church leaders such as John Thorne and Allan Boesak. Both of these leaders came to the fore in the post-1976, socio-political context and influenced the lives of many coloured Christians, including my own in their Christian stance against apartheid. I eventually candidated for the Christian ministry under the directorship of John Thorne.

In this thesis I will therefore reflect theologically on the role of these coloured Church leaders in the anti-apartheid struggle from my personal

experience as a coloured Christian activist and my present position as a practicing minister. I believe that this research is important to:

1. understand that coloured identity in all its complexity and ambivalence was itself a major source of suffering for coloured people in South Africa.
2. to affirm coloureds as an oppressed black grouping under apartheid, who suffered greatly
3. to appreciate the role that some coloureds, in particular, coloured Church leaders, played in the anti-apartheid struggle towards ending that oppression and establishing a new democracy.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

June 16, 1976: a personal experience

"Mommy mommy, we were almost killed!" These were the words of my brother, as he ran into the flat. It was June 16, 1976 and my brother had been on his way to school by bus. He used to travel to school from Eldorado Park, a coloured suburb, bordering on Soweto. He was still schooling in Coronationville where my mother lived at the time and hence had to travel to school each day. The quickest route for the bus to take was through Soweto. This they had been doing for years without incident. This particular morning was to be different from all others. For coloured schoolchildren travelling from Eldorado Park to Coronationville, it was to mark the change of bus routes henceforth. For african schoolchildren in Soweto and elsewhere, it marked the change in the course of South African history.

The bus had been on its way as usual through Soweto, not suspecting anything of what had been brewing in Soweto for the past few months. The children and the bus driver were oblivious of the march that had been planned by the Soweto school children for that day. When the bus reached Orlando West, they were confronted by Soweto school children demanding that the bus driver stop. The driver panicked and refused to stop. The african school children then stoned the bus. The older students, including my brother, lay on top of the younger ones to protect them from the glass shards and stones while the driver continued driving. The bus managed to make it through the barrage of stones and drove straight to the high school, which my brother attended.

My brother, having had the shock of his life, instead of going in to school, ran up home, hoping to still find my mother at home before she left for

work. Physically he had a few scratches on his forehead and hands. But he was deeply shocked. For him it was a near-death experience, which he was fortunate enough to have survived. For me it was a confusing experience. I did not know what to make of it. Suffice it to say I came face-to-face with the reality of being coloured in South Africa. I asked the question why? Why did the african schoolchildren stone the coloured schoolchildren? Did they not see that coloureds were also oppressed and suffering under apartheid?

This incident raised for me for the first time in such a forceful and dramatic way the politics of difference in South Africa. For the first time I was confronted with the negative perceptions, which some african people had of coloureds in South Africa. I was confronted with coloured ignorance of african experience and aspirations. I was confronted with the pain of being coloured in South Africa, a second class citizen, discriminated against, distrusted by africans and despised by whites. I felt that the attack of those african 'schoolchildren on the coloured school children was unfair. I decided that I did not wish to be coloured any longer. I just wanted to be a human being, a person.

On a macro level, the incident raises the issue of the nature and uniqueness of the coloured experience within the matrix of the black struggle against apartheid. As a coloured it raises for me the issue of the role of coloureds in the struggle. As a Christian, it raises the issue of the role of coloured Christians and church leaders in particular in the struggle against apartheid.

These are important questions because they seek to uncover a dimension of the South African experience which is all too easily glossed over. It uncovers the uniqueness of the coloured experience in the struggle and the particular ambivalence which is its trademark. They recognise that

the coloured experience cannot simply be subsumed under the general heading of the black struggle against apartheid under the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), or the non-racial struggle against apartheid, under the United Democratic Front (UDF). The coloured experience has many similarities with the african experience, but also many differences which are unique. These differences must be uncovered. Incidents such as the stoning of the coloured bus, impinge on my consciousness and prevent me from ignoring this issue.

The issue of coloured identity has become a burning political and cultural issue in South Africa today. By uncovering the role of coloured Church leaders in the struggle *as coloureds* may assist us in understanding the complexities of the coloured experience under apartheid as well as the particular contributions that coloureds have made to the struggle. This will hopefully assist all South Africans, not only coloureds to appreciate the particular experience, sacrifices, hardships and contributions of coloured people to the anti-apartheid struggle and the making of South African history in general. This in turn will hopefully assist towards the process of Truth, Reconciliation and justice in the creation of a new South Africa. In order to do this I need to make clear how I see myself, i.e. my identity, as a coloured person.

My Identity

I am a coloured person from a working class background. Both my parents were Workers, my father being a *farrier* and my mother a shopworker. My mother was for many years a member and at one stage chairperson, of a national trade union for shop workers, affiliated to the old Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUCSA), which was divided along racial lines. A marked feature of this union was its apolitical approach to trade unionism, choosing to focus exclusively on shop floor

issues as it affected workers. Despite her political conservatism my mother's concern for her workers and their conditions instilled a strong sense of justice in me, as well as a special concern for the plight of workers in general. Coupled to this was a strong conservative Christian upbringing.

With the outbreak of June 16 and the increased awareness of political oppression in the country amongst blacks, coupled with my sense of justice, I began to question the apolitical evangelical Christian theology which I had grown up with. In this process of questioning certain people and factors played a crucial role: people such as John Thorne and Allan Boesak and movements such as the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) in general. June 16 marked the beginning of thinking along these political lines in a conscious way and of my identity as a coloured person.

The first major force though to influence my concept of myself came not from black consciousness but from the non-racial sporting body, the South African Council on Sport (SACOS). They in turn were influenced by the ultra left Non- European Unity Movement and were conducting their struggle against apartheid through sport. They were against the idea of using any racial labels to classify anybody, dismissing race as irrelevant to the struggle. There was only one race, the human race, they maintained. The struggle was therefore one of class. I found solace as a young coloured person in this political philosophy and was prepared to allow my identity to be subsumed under this umbrella concept of the human race. It answered my need for a place to belong at that stage.

In conflict to this philosophy however, there was the Black Consciousness philosophy which was gaining in prominence during the seventies. This philosophy emphasised the centrality of race in

understanding the South African situation, whilst not denying the class factor. Class and race it said had become synonymous, with blacks being predominantly working class and poor and whites middle class and rich. Race was therefore a class determinant. However, it subsumed all oppressed people under one umbrella as blacks, stating that black referred to a social condition of oppression rather than to the colour of one's skin. All those classified as coloured, indian and african in South Africa were therefore, according to Black Consciousness, black. What was needed therefore was for all oppressed people to recognise and affirm their blackness and unite to overthrow the white regime and white oppression, which included economic oppression. I found myself as a young person vacillating between these two political philosophies, sometimes seeing myself as black and other times as non-racial.

It is into this fray that my Christian convictions and theology entered, as I grappled to relate what I was experiencing as an oppressed, black South African to my conservative evangelical upbringing and theology. A major influence in resolving this conflict came in the form of the school I attended which was private, Christian and non-racial. The kind of Christianity dished out was liberal and opposed to apartheid. The then Dean of Johannesburg and subsequent general secretary of the SACC, Desmond Tutu was a personal friend of the headmaster and a patron of the school. We were thus exposed to the ecumenical struggle to end apartheid. For instance, we were one of the few schools in Johannesburg which commemorated June 16 every year from 1977 as part of our school day. Political awareness of the South African situation was integrated into our school life and all the subjects we were taught.

However, it was only during the 1980 school boycotts (my matric year) that my inner Christian struggle came to a head. This marked a definite paradigm shift in my thinking on Christianity, from a conservative

evangelical paradigm to one of Black and Liberation theology. One of the events which spurred this shift on was listening to a speech by one of my own Denomination's local coloured ministers, the Reverend John Thorne, address one of our student mass rallies in which he employed Black Theology to justify the struggle against apartheid and our role as students therein. He was subsequently detained for this act, which resulted in the first high profile public march by clerics to demand his release. The clerics were promptly locked up and spent the night in jail. Among the clerics were Desmond Tutu, SACC general secretary at the time. John Thorne affirmed the correctness of my own struggle against my conservative Evangelical theology. This set me on a road of deeper reflection and research about the meaning of what it meant to be black and Christian in South Africa.

This search continued when I entered university the following year and came across Allan Boesak's seminal thesis on Black Theology in South Africa and the struggle for liberation, A Farewell to Innocence, which was banned at the time. These two gentlemen, from two different eras, were two coloured Christian leaders who were participating in the struggle against apartheid on the basis of their faith. Both were people who were prepared to face the consequences for their beliefs and actions and each had a tremendous impact on the thinking and direction of their own denominations as well as at a broader ecumenical level in South Africa. Both had also had exposure to the international ecumenical movement and had made their impact there as well, John Thorne as General Secretary of the Council for World Mission, (CWM) and Allan Boesak as the President of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC).

It is significant to me that both of these gentlemen are coloured. I believe that it is their particular experience as coloureds in South Africa which shaped their theology and their politics. It is for these reasons that I wish

to focus on both of these two gentlemen, and their role in the Ecumenical Church's struggle against apartheid.

In order to achieve this however, we have to start by locating these coloured Church leaders in the ecumenical and socio-political context in which they came to prominence. I have chosen as a starting point of this context, June 16 1976 and its aftermath. I will examine the Ecumenical Church's challenge to society arising out of this event as well as the challenge to the Ecumenical Church that this event engendered.

A. June 16 – October 1977: Resistance

The Church responded in two ways to the events of June 16 and its aftermath:

1. It challenged society by protesting and resisting what was happening. In theological terms this would be described as its prophetic ministry. I will refer to it as the Church's challenge to society.
2. The Church itself was challenged by the events to look at its own practices, structures, institutions and theology insofar as these reflected racism and conformed to apartheid norms, and to change them. In theological terms this could be described as repentance and conversion. I will refer to it as the challenge of the June 16 uprising to the Church.

The latter challenge was probably more difficult for some churches than the former, especially the English speaking churches in South Africa, (i.e. Anglican, Methodist, Congregational, Presbyterian, Lutheran) who prided themselves in their multiracial structures at national and regional levels but were still divided at local level. Dealing with the reality of racism in

their midst, however subtle, proved to be very painful for most.¹ Although for other more conservative churches, David Bosch shows that even the former challenge was too much. This applies to elements within the rank and file membership of English speaking churches as well.² It is always easier to criticise and condemn others for injustices, even deservedly so, as in the case of the apartheid state. It is always more difficult to see that injustice within yourself and to address it.

In this chapter I will examine both the Church's challenge to society as well as the challenge of the June 16 uprising to the Church. I will do this in relation to ecumenical bodies such as the South African Council of Churches (SACC) and the Christian Institute (CI) as well as individual denominations such as the Methodist, Anglican, Congregational, Dutch Reformed and African Independent Churches (A.I.C.'s). The context in which this took place was one of general resistance by blacks to the apartheid State.

It is my contention that after the events of October 1977 up to 1984, the african section of the oppressed community lapsed into a period of political quiescence, i.e. a relative lack of open confrontation with the state. On the other hand the English speaking churches went into a state of mobilisation, particularly the black section of these churches, sharpening their theological tools for a more sustained onslaught on the moral, theological and political legitimacy of the state. This process climaxed in 1990 with the unbanning of the ANC, PAC, SACP and other political organisations and the release of Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners.

¹ D. Bosch, "Racism and Revolution: Response of the Churches in South Africa" in Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research, Vol. 3 No. 1, Jan 1979, p.13

² ibid. p.15

This however did not mean that there was no resistance by the community to the state during this time, only that this resistance was sporadic, by smaller groups of people and not openly confrontational. From 1980 onwards, the coloured section of the oppressed community rose up against apartheid through the coloured schools' boycott. It was inevitable that the political awakening of the coloured people as part of the oppressed would provide a platform for coloured church leaders, some established, such as John Thorne and Abel Hendricks, others emerging, such as Alan Boesak.

1.1 The Church's Challenge to Society : 1976 -1977

1.1.1 The SACC

The SACC was one of the first Church organisations to respond to the events of June 16 in Soweto. It had a reputation then already for its opposition to apartheid as evidenced in its statement issued in 1968, " A Message To the People of South Africa." The SACC at this stage represented mainly the English-speaking churches in South Africa. The Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) withdrew in 1961 in the wake of the Sharpeville massacre and resulting World Council of Churches'(WCC) Cottesloe Consultation, which came out against apartheid. These churches, as I have noted before, had a tradition of non-racialism and fairplay even though their leadership was still predominantly white.

This situation, however, was slowly changing. The SACC, as an organisation, was able to move ahead faster with regard to empowering black leadership, than its member churches. From 1971 to 1974 it had its first black President in the person of Bishop Habelgaarn of the Moravian Church, a coloured. He was followed as President by John Thorne from 1974 to 1977, who also became general secretary in 1977, the first person in the history of the organisation to hold both positions

consecutively. Thereafter, there were only two white Presidents of the SACC namely, Bishop Peter Storey of the Methodist Church from 1980 to 1983 and Beyers Naude in 1985.

The situation in individual denominations, showed similar changes. In the Methodist Church, Abel Hendricks, a coloured, became the first coloured and second black President in 1976. He was re-elected in 1978, a first for a black person in that Church to be re-elected after just one term out of office. John Thorne was also General Secretary of the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA), when he was asked to be president of the SACC.³

It is not surprising therefore that the SACC reacted swiftly to the June 16 uprisings. Its first statement noted with sadness that the legitimate protest of the students had erupted into a 'black'-white confrontation. On the initial issue of the language of instruction in 'black' schools it affirmed its solidarity with the Soweto children and appealed to the authorities and the people of South Africa to heed the deep hurt, anger and frustration that apartheid had caused among 'black' South Africans.

They therefore urged the authorities to immediately repeal the offending regulations; expressed their support for the protest of the students against these regulations, and deplored the totally unwarranted actions taken against them. They also questioned whether the same action would have been taken had the protest come from white students. They recognised the increasing dilemma of responsible 'black' leadership when legitimate and non-violent means of effecting change was being totally

³ It is significant that just prior to, during and immediately following the Soweto uprising, the ecumenical Church was led by coloured males, who were also playing leading roles within their respective denominations simultaneously. These men however, were already under the influence of black theology and would have seen themselves as black in its black consciousness definition and not as coloured, which was regarded as derogatory at this time.

disregarded.

Acknowledging the Church's past failure to join in the struggle for justice, they therefore undertook:

1. To call an immediate meeting of Church leaders, including the leaders of the Churches not belonging to the SACC to deal with the urgent implications of what was happening in Soweto and the responsibility of the Church, on Friday 18th June, 1976 in Johannesburg
2. To seek a meeting with the Prime Minister, the Minister of the Bantu Administration Department and the Minister of the Bantu Education Department.
3. To invite the student leaders to avail themselves of the services of the SACC for the purposes of mediation.
4. To appeal to all Churches to give guidance and support to a shocked and bereaved society and to those who by virtue of the vote, bore the responsibility for fuelling the oppressive structure.
5. To call on the Churches to observe Sunday 20th June as a day of prayer, bringing to their attention II Chronicles 7:14.

'If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.' ⁴

They further called on the authorities and the people of South Africa to heed the voice of God and not to be like pharaoh who hardened his heart despite the ten plagues.

It is clear from this statement that the SACC saw its role at this stage as non-confrontationist and pastoral towards the bereaved, mediatory

⁴ Ecunews 19/1976, p.5

between the oppressed and the oppressor, showing solidarity with the children in some of their demands and providing guidance, support, prayer and appeal to the consciences of the authorities. The latter stance was later identified by the Kairos Document in 1985 as 'Church Theology', and ineffective in bringing about fundamental change.

The Church Leaders did meet on Friday 18th, and they in turn issued their own statement much in the same vein as that of the SACC. Knowing that the churches shared responsibility for the critical situation then facing the country, they sought earnestly to contribute to peaceful change in South Africa, and to this end, offered their co-operation to all who sought it. In addition they called on the SABC to cease to interpret the situation by questioning the depths of the peoples' grievances, as this constituted evidence to the protestors that they had not been heard. To correct this imbalance they asked that radio time be made available to acknowledged leaders in the community,⁵ who at that time did not hold positions within government-recognised structures, to make a direct appeal to the 'Black' Community.

They also called for a decision to be made as soon as possible to suspend the Afrikaans-language medium regulation, which was the initial cause of offence, and that this decision be announced regularly on the SABC. They felt that the judicial commission to investigate the causes of the uprising should be made more acceptable to the community by broadening it to include acknowledged 'black' community leaders. They demanded that Mr M. C. Botha, the minister of Bantu Education, agree to receive a deputation consisting of black and white Church leaders from that meeting as soon as possible, in order to discuss the motivation for these pleas. They conveyed a plea on behalf of the acknowledged

⁵ In this way the Church leaders recognised the legitimate leaders of the people, as opposed to the dummy leaders.

leaders from Soweto that police and armed units wherever possible, avoid direct contact with the 'black' population, and that acknowledged 'black' leaders be allowed an opportunity to defuse the situation, as the presence, rather than the absence, of the police had in many situations provoked violence.

At the SACC conference in July of that year, Bishop Tutu set liberation firmly on the agenda for the SACC in an address entitled, "God-given Dignity And The Quest For Liberation in the Light of the South African Dilemma." In his speech, Tutu concluded with the following words:

The struggle for liberation, a truly biblical struggle, is crucial for the survival of South Africa. It must succeed. Yes, liberation is coming because our God is the God of the Exodus, the liberator God. 'If God is on our side, who is against us?'⁶
(Romans 8:31)

Tutu's view that freedom was indivisible, echoed that of Martin Luther King jnr. a decade before in the civil rights struggle in the United States of America (USA). This meant that in South Africa whites could never really be free until blacks were fully free. To be concerned for black liberation was to be concerned for white liberation. This was an unusual way of looking at things at the time especially in the light of the increasing polarisation between black and white and the distrust by the BCM of white liberals. However, this kind of reasoning must have struck a responsive chord in white liberal circles, because it held out the promise of a new lease of life/role for white liberals in the struggle, which at that time had been dealt a severe blow by Black Consciousness (BC).

For many blacks it would have been stretching it a bit to suggest that blacks should participate in the struggle not only for their own liberation

⁶ Ecunews, 24/1976, p.15

but also for that of their oppressor. This kind of reasoning was to become the hallmark of Desmond Tutu over the next two decades as he took the forefront in the churches' struggle for liberation in South Africa. It can also perhaps be seen as the precursor to later differences of opinion between Tutu and other church leaders and theologians in the struggle, such as Boesak, with regards to the best possible form of Christian action to take. In fact, in this speech there are signs of Tutu's reconciliatory theology when he says that in contrast to white intransigence and black hatred in the present situation (of June 16) there is a third possibility, which he says is the object of the exercise of the SACC conference. This possibility was for black and white to desperately and urgently get down to the business of discussing and talking together about the best possible and most just way of ordering society.⁷ Tutu still held out the hope of a negotiated settlement to resolve South Africa's problems. It was however not going to be as easy or as soon as he may have thought at the time.

John Thorne, SACC President at the time, echoed Tutu's liberationist theology, when he declared that "The day of the white man is over...the black man will take command and control of his own destiny." This sentiment was also expressed by Mr. John Rees, a white man himself and general secretary of the SACC, when he said: " the day of his (Black man's) liberation, emancipation from humiliation and oppression is open to him. He is thrilling to the possibility of becoming whole." ⁸

At the same conference, Archbishop Dennis Hurley, of the Roman Catholic Church presented what could be seen as a different solution to the South African dilemma, in his paper entitled "Mobilisation For Peace". In it he outlined the essential elements of what he called a

⁷ *ibid.*, p.12

⁸ *Ecunews*, 2/1977, p.9

"mobilisation for peace" to be undertaken by the churches of South Africa. The most positive aspect of such a call, was his attempt to get the churches to move away from making statements, to taking action. Hurley aptly described the practice of churches, vis-à-vis the struggle, at the time as follows:

"The Americans have a saying about putting your money where your mouth is. We have used our mouths a lot-so much that the press expects us to issue statements and to make pronouncements whenever there is a riot or a banning. Many of us will dutifully comply and the press hopes against hope that one of us will lose his cool and say something really worth recording. But most of us work through committees and committees are pretty good at keeping down the temperature. I doubt if we have the right to go on making statements if we don't do something really big by way of a mobilisation for peace." ⁹

For Hurley the cause of the conflict lay in the attitudes of the white community. Hence, the solution to the conflict lay in effecting large-scale attitudinal change in the white community by any means at the disposal of the churches. This then would be the focus of a mobilisation for peace in South Africa. Hurley called for a massive commitment from the SACC and its member churches in terms of time, money, personnel and expertise in order to get this mobilisation for peace off the ground. In this regard he saw the Christian Institute as being a valuable resource and the work of the Study project on Christianity in apartheid society (SPROCAS) as another.

There were three steps in Hurley's project: (1) a description of the problem in South Africa and this is where he saw the work of the SPROCAS reports coming in handy; (2) a formulation of the kind of

⁹ op. cit., p.21

change that was needed in South Africa; and (3) Communicating (1) and (2) to the white community through every possible means at the churches' disposal.

I think that Hurley's analysis of the primary cause of the conflict in South Africa, although well intentioned, was simplistic and hence his suggested actions would therefore in the long run, prove ineffective. It cannot be denied that white attitudes were part of the cause of South Africa's woes and that a change in them could contribute to the process of change. However, it did not go to the root of the matter, namely, the structural oppression of the black person, which no amount of attitudinal change in whites could affect unless there was an attendant change in oppressive structures. The liberation of the black man lay not only in psychological but also in structural emancipation.

It is possible that Hurley's analysis and solution to the conflict in South Africa was possibly in response to Biko's and the BCM's advice to white liberals to concentrate on conscientising their own community against racism and apartheid rather than working in the black community where they tended to do more harm than good. Biko put it thus:

"...No true liberal should feel any resentment at the growth of black consciousness. True liberals should realise that the place for their fight for justice is within their white society. The liberals must realise that they themselves are oppressed if they are true liberals and therefore they must fight for their own freedom and not that of the nebulous 'they' with whom they can hardly claim identification. The liberal must apply himself with absolute dedication to the idea of educating his white brothers that the history of the country may have to be rewritten at some stage and that we may have to live in a 'country where colour will not serve to put a man in a box'.¹⁰

¹⁰ 'Black souls in White Skins?' in I Write What I Like, Stubbs, p.25

In contrast to Hurley, Tutu in his address at the conference contended that the solution to the country's problems lay in the liberation of the black man, because the liberation of the white man was inextricably bound up with the liberation of the black man and that this liberation was on all levels.

The differing emphases of Tutu and Hurley at this juncture are instructive as it points broadly to the ideological and theological differences of perspective between black and white in the Church in South Africa at this time. Tutu adopts a liberationist approach and his focus is on the black man. Hurley adopts a reformist approach and his focus is on the white man. Hurley's approach can be characterised as liberal in that it focused only on the individualistic behavioural aspects of change namely, change in white attitudes, which although important, were certainly not enough. Tutu also recognised the importance of individual behavioural change in blacks, namely the need to believe once more in their God-given dignity, but goes further by acknowledging that there were structural issues on the political, social and economic levels to be addressed as well, even though these were not primary to him.

The divide was therefore not so much between conservative and radical but one between white liberal and black liberal, if radical is to be understood in the classical Marxist sense of a class analysis of society. It was a divide, which was to become increasingly pronounced in the years that lay ahead as the struggle intensified. It was a divide, which increasingly took the shape of white versus black in the church with some notable exceptions such as the Christian Institute, as well as certain individuals both white and black, such as Beyers Naudé. This divide later intensified to include white and black liberals versus white and black radicals. The radicals wished to see not only a change in the

racist nature of the state but also the capitalist nature of the economy, citing both as contrary to the Gospel.

Also at this conference, the SACC amongst other things took a resolution to undertake an urgent and careful study on investment and disinvestment in South Africa with the aim of determining which of the two options would secure better opportunities for the 'development of the underprivileged sector of our population'.¹¹ At the conference in 1977 the committee presented its findings. There were six major conclusions:

1. that the single-most important factor stopping investment in South Africa had been internal unrest.
2. that blacks needed to be granted labour bargaining rights and the right to organise in trade unions as a matter of urgency.
3. that the Sullivan principles needed to be revised if they were to be acceptable to the people whom they were supposed to benefit.¹²
4. that labour intensive opportunities be created throughout the country as a matter of urgency to absorb the massive ranks of the unemployed.
5. that a revised code of ethics as set out in the recommendations should be adopted and monitors from commerce, industry and the Church be used to monitor the actions of investing companies against the code.
6. that all future loans to South Africa be stopped unless investors were prepared to commit themselves fully to the revised code.

¹¹ *op. cit.*, p.25

¹² The Sullivan Principles were named after an African American economist promoting fair and non-discriminatory labour practices in the workplace for American companies doing business in South Africa.

The following resolution was therefore submitted (a) to the Conference for consideration and report back for adoption or rejection in 1978 by the member churches of the SACC and (b) to the overseas Church bodies and agencies who had asked for guidance from South African Churches as to what their attitude in these matters should be:

1. that Churches in South Africa and Churches overseas consider ceasing all further loans to South Africa unless, and until all the revised code of ethics for South Africa was accepted and obligatory. This code included provisions such as non-segregation in all eating, comfort and work facilities; equal pay for equal work; equal and fair employment practices for all employees; programmes to train blacks for supervisory, administrative, clerical and technical jobs; immediate recognition of black trade unions; locating black initiated and controlled projects for support and encouragement; refusal to use migrant labour unless accommodation was provided for married couples; active reduction of foreign skilled workers by replacing them with adequately trained blacks; etc.¹³
2. that a committee be appointed to monitor the adherence to the code by investors to be drawn from commerce, industry and the Church.
3. that an Educational Assistance Trust be established to award bursaries for training in technological skills.
4. that member churches of the SACC investigate their own investment portfolios as to whether they were investing in companies which (a) supported the liquor trade (b) manufactured arms (c) practised discrimination.
5. that member churches disclose publicly and voluntarily how far they were with regard to the equalisation of stipends.

¹³ Ecunews, 29/1977, pp.15-16

6. that overseas donor bodies in conjunction with the SACC, identified black-initiated projects for support and development.
7. support for schemes to reduce unemployment but not at the cost of human dignity, be shown
8. that the committee set up and investigate critical guidelines for investment in South Africa by churches, bodies and investors.

It is clear that through this resolution the SACC was calling for the de-racialisation of the capitalist South African economy and society as opposed to the replacement of it by an alternative economic system such as socialism. It is significant that the Christian Institute (CI) goes one step further than the SACC by issuing its own statement calling unequivocally for sanctions against South Africa. This did not necessarily mean that the CI was against capitalism, but rather that it was more prepared to call for drastic steps to bring down apartheid, than the SACC was at this stage.

In its statement on the State of the Nation after its Pietermaritzburg conference on September 18, 1976, among other things, the CI reaffirmed "its support for all peaceful efforts to bring change, including work stay-aways, economic sanctions, and the discouragement of immigration."¹⁴ It is significant that it is only in 1985, nine years after the idea was first mooted that the Ecumenical Church, under the leadership of the former CI's Beyers Naude, unequivocally calls for "disinvestment and similar economic pressures...as a peaceful means of putting pressure on the South African Government to bring about those fundamental changes this country needs".¹⁵

¹⁴ Ecunews, 31/1976, p.12

¹⁵ Religion 2, ISSUES, Info '89 HAP, p. C27; Beyers Naude's banning order was unexpectedly lifted in 1984, the first time since his banning in 1977. He immediately took over, as General Secretary of the SACC after Desmond Tutu stood down to become Bishop of Johannesburg.

During August and September 1976, there were renewed outbreaks of unrest in black townships and stay-at-homes in Soweto and african and coloured townships of the Western Cape. The SACC and its member churches responded to these in the usual way by issuing statements of protest and condemnation. In September of that year the US secretary of state, Henry Kissinger was on a visit to the Southern African region ostensibly to promote the US policy of peace in the region.¹⁶ Part of the US strategy was to support the Vorster government's policy of Détente with its neighbours. The SACC seized on this opportunity to present a letter to Kissinger outlining the true nature of the situation in South Africa.

In the letter, they explained the situation of oppression of the black majority prevailing in South Africa, and implored him to persuade prime minister Vorster to accede to the demands of the majority of South Africans for full democratic rights on the basis of the American Declaration of independence and the UN Charter on Human Rights of 1948 and the two Covenants of Human Rights formulated by the UN in 1966.¹⁷ They urged him that his efforts for peace in the region would be better served were he to impress on the Prime Minister the need for fundamental change at home.

This action of the SACC, although well intentioned, once again revealed its elitist top-down approach to change in South Africa, i.e. that changing its leaders can bring about change in society. Even though there were prophetic individuals within the SACC, such as Tutu, who were pointing them to more 'radical' approaches beyond protest, this approach

¹⁶ It is clear from the evidence of the time that the real reasons for the US peace policy for the Southern African region was more to safeguard their own strategic economic interests.

¹⁷ Ecunews, 31/1976, pp. 6-10

continued until well into the eighties. However, it did not go unchallenged.

It was challenged by the Hammanskraal 'Consultation on Racism's' call for a Black Confessing Church in March 1980; by Boesak's call for civil disobedience at the June 1980, SACC National Conference and most scathingly and decisively in 1985 by the Call to Prayer for the End to Unjust Rule and the Kairos Document. Para-church organisations, such as the CI, because of their smaller constituency and policy of individual membership, were however able to take up more 'radical' positions and actions more easily than the SACC.

Another factor could have been the nature of the SACC leadership itself at this stage. It consisted largely of white males with John Thorne, a coloured, as chairperson. The theological paradigm they operated out of was a liberal one, although Thorne showed some of the tenets and terminology of Black Theology. The general thrust of SACC theology at this stage however, essentially respected the legitimacy of government, while objecting to its unjust racial laws and the worst excesses of its repressive security apparatus. What was needed to remedy this situation therefore was to change the hearts and minds of the political leaders by means of delegations and statements of protest and condemnation. There was seemingly a great reluctance to move into the realm of non-collaboration and non-violent action, as some of the political movements, such as the BCM and CI had already done. Armed resistance, such as that in which the banned African National Congress, (ANC) South African Communist Party, (SACP) and Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) were engaged in, was out of the question.

At the end of that year the Church leaders of the SACC churches came out in a statement calling for a Christmas of mourning in the light of all

those killed, injured and maimed in the events of that year. At a meeting of Church leaders on November 12, leaders of fourteen churches, called on Christians to 'identify with the poor and oppressed in our land' ¹⁸ by cutting down on spending, shopping, cards, parties and drinking that Christmas. They reminded Christians that the majority of Soweto schoolchildren, who had requested all South Africans to join them in commemorating the dead, were baptised members of the Church. Of the students' stand the Church leaders had this to say:

"In their rejection of discrimination many of them are witnessing to what they have learnt in Church about the Gospel of God's acceptance of all men in Christ irrespective of race and the corollary that we should unconditionally accept one another. It is the sinful rejection of this Gospel by our apartheid society which has caused the death of so many innocent children and others. " ¹⁹

On a more positive note, the Church leaders made other practical suggestions to celebrate Advent and Christmas. These included "hunger meals and vigil services as 'acts of penitence', contributing to the SACC Relief Fund, and making special efforts to meet with people and to establish fellowship across the colour line." ²⁰

In a similar vein, the Justice and Reconciliation Division, called on South African Churches in the face of the present crisis, to celebrate Christmas "as a period of discipline, moderation and prayer". ²¹ It also called on Churches to encourage their ministers "to undertake a common action for celebrating Christmas as a period of commemoration of the dead, and

¹⁸ Dimension, December 1976, p.1

¹⁹ Dimension, vol.VII No. 11, December 1976, p.1

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ Ecunews, 37/1976, p.6

hope for the dawning of a new day".²² It recommended that the SACC convene an urgent meeting of Church leaders to do the following:

- share what each Church had done about the situation.
- determine what the churches' stand was in relation to the movement for change.
- critically examine the requests of black people as articulated by churches, the Soweto Students' Representative Council (SSRC), The Black Parents Association (BPA), the Chambers of Commerce and Industry, and other similar organisations.
- respond to these requests and indicate to Church members how they could support these requests.
- recommend specific actions that the churches could undertake either jointly or as separate denominations, about the situation.²³

The question of police conduct at funerals, which had by this time become a burning issue in the community, was also addressed. The police were requested to regard funerals as bona fide religious services and to therefore stay away from them. They also called on all mourners to conduct themselves in a manner befitting such occasions.²⁴

Despite the general cooling off of events towards the end of the year, there was still a note of conflict as the year ended with the jailing of Beyers Naude and the continued banning and detention of people. The SACC protested the jailing of Naude for refusing to testify before the Schlebusch/LeGrange Commission.²⁵ They pointed out that Naude's refusal to pay the fine and willingness to go to prison for thirty days

²² *ibid.*, p.7

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ The Schlebusch-Le Grange Commission was appointed by the government to investigate the funding activities of the CI and the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS). It eventually recommended that the CI be declared an affected organization.

reflected his view that the State's attack on Christian organisations such as the CI was unjustified. They seriously questioned the moral state of a society, which could continue "to condone - by its silence if nothing else - the types of purge carried out in the wake of the Commission's reports and recommendations." ²⁶

More generally the SACC condemned the continued bannings of people in all spheres of life by the government, as counterproductive. They argued that the people being banned were more moderate in political persuasion and that their activities could be characterised as uncomfortable to the government rather than subversive. They therefore pointed out that the State was succumbing to the abuse of the extraordinary powers that they had arrogated to themselves. Of particular concern was the clampdown on the black trade-union movement which in the SACC's view represented a means of securing economic justice by non-violent means. The government's actions only served to lend credence to the views of those who believed that violence was the only way to secure their rights. They warned that the consequences of the government's actions would mean increased overseas pressure and the drying up of investment funds. They issued a challenge to the so-called Christian society of South Africa to seriously question whether they could continue to live with a government, which was "increasingly prepared to secure its ends by unjust means." ²⁷

This statement held great prophetic portent because with the rise to power of P.W. Botha in 1978, we also see the development and implementation of the 'Total Strategy' concept by the South African government against the liberation movements and the oppressed populace in general. This strategy gave rise to the most sophisticated and

²⁶ op.cit., p. 10

²⁷ Ecunews, 39/1976, p. 8

repressive state apparatuses yet devised in South Africa namely the National Security Management System (NSMS) based on the twin pillars of reform and repression. This system came into full operation in the eighties. The implementation of this strategy by government gave rise to an increasing number of people who came to believe that violence was the only option left to get rid of the apartheid state. This in turn led to the intensification of the armed struggle by the ANC in the eighties, as its ranks swelled with young cadres from South Africa seeking military training.

The year 1977 started off quietly enough without any hint of the drama and trauma that lay in wait. Reverend E.E.Mahabane, a life president of the SACC, in his Presidential address to the Institute of Race Relations on 11 January outlined the bare minimum of prerequisites which had to be agreed upon by all South Africans in order to bring about fundamental change in South Africa. These things he said were a source of irritation and suffering to the lives of the people concerned. These were:

- "the abolition of the pass Laws
- the abolition of Influx Control
- the abolition of Job Reservation
- the abolition of Migratory Labour
- the repeal of the Land Act of 1913.
- the repeal of the Group Areas Act
- the repeal of the Bantu Education Act
- the repeal of the Coloured Education Act
- the repeal of the Separate Universities Act
- the cessation of the forced removals of the African" ²⁸

During the first half of the year, the repression of the state, which started in 1976, continued on a more subtle and low key level. Some of the

²⁸ E. E. Mahabane, (Rev.) "The Urgent Need for Fundamental Change in South Africa". SAIRR. 1977. p.

measures which the government took in this regard were: proposed legislation aimed at restricting press freedom; the banning of Dr. Mamphela Ramphele and Mr M. Mvovo, workers at the Zanempilo clinic near King Williamstown, a project of the Black Community Programmes (BCP); the rejection of the major recommendations of the report of the Erica Theron Commission of the Government on the "Coloured" people; the detention of Dean Farasani of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa in the Venda homeland; the banning for five years of Fr. Smangaliso Mkhathshwa general secretary of the Catholic Bishops Conference; the continued detention of the President of the Union of Black Journalists Joe Thloloe and another member, Mike Mzileni as well as the general gagging of the press; the killing of people by police on Monday June 13, three days before the first anniversary of the June 16 uprising; the harassment of churchmen such as, Rev. Theo Kotze of the Methodist Church and CI and Dr. Alex Boraine, MP and former president of the Methodist Conference. Kotze was refused a passport to travel abroad to Germany at the invitation of the German government in Bonn. Dr. Boraine was a target of a political campaign by the Minister of Justice Mr. Kruger, when the latter quoted from what were apparently security files on Dr. Boraine available to the executive.

The SACC protested in response to these events, as it by now had grown accustomed to do. At its national conference in June, it issued a statement outlining ten infringements of religious freedom, which the State was guilty of. Then the bombshell broke in September. Steve Biko was killed in detention and barely a month later, 16 BC organisations, two newspapers and the CI was banned. Beyers Naudé, Theo Kotze and Brian Brown of the CI were banned while hundreds of Christian and non-Christian activists were detained.

The SACC and Church leaders of all the major denominations once again vehemently protested at these actions of the state but were still slow in moving towards challenging the state in a fundamental way. These events no doubt marked another turning point in the struggle for liberation in general in South Africa. According to Jeremy Seekings they marked the beginning of a period of political quiescence within the african community in South Africa. He put it thus:

"...In the intervening period, 1978-84, there were few confrontational protests in the regions townships. (Witwatersrand region) Whilst there was certainly a resurgence of national, civic, and trade union organisation, and of guerrilla insurgency, the region was largely unaffected by the otherwise widespread (coloured) school boycotts of 1980, and few township residents were ever involved in mass public protest. Studies covering 1978-1984 are certainly right to view protests more widespread than in the pre-1976 period and as precursors of the 1984-86 rebellions, but by focussing only on confrontational protest and national organisation they neglect important continuities and discontinuities in township politics." ²⁹
(bracketed comments are mine)

This state of 'quiescence' lasted until 1984 when the black community in the Vaal Triangle came out in rejection of the 'dummy' community councils and instituted rent boycotts in the wake of the formation of the UDF in 1983 and its successful campaign against the Tricameral Parliament elections in 1984.

1.1.2 The Christian Institute

The Christian Institute was always one step ahead of the SACC and the churches in their resistance to apartheid. It was often the case that what

²⁹ Seekings, J., Quiescence and the Transition to Confrontation: South African Townships, 1978-1984, 1990, p. 17

the Institute did today, the SACC, followed by its member churches, did the next. It is thus important to examine what the Institute did in response to the uprising in order to get an idea of the direction that the SACC and the churches would take in the future.

The Institute even at this stage tried to move beyond protest to challenge. They tried to implement concrete programmes such as the reconciliation programme, the SPROCAS II programme,³⁰ which resulted in the formation of the Black Community Programmes (BCP) and the call for disinvestment and solidarity with the liberation movements. In their response to the uprising, the CI therefore appropriately reminded the government that they had been warning them for a long time of the dangers of racial policies generating frustration and tension among blacks. Their prophecy had now been realised in the Soweto uprisings which had assumed national proportions and significance way beyond the Sharpeville Massacre of 1961.

The CI was founded largely because of the Sharpeville massacre. Ironically it could perhaps be said that it was banned in 1977 as a result of the Soweto massacre. The Institute confessed to their complicity, together with the government and the parents of the children, for not having acted timeously enough to prevent the dispute from escalating into violence. In addition the Institute called upon the government to:

- recognise that the country had been brought to the brink of violent racial conflagration;
- remove forced instruction through the medium of Afrikaans, and

³⁰ SPROCAS II sought to move on from the theoretical phase of SPROCAS I by initiating practical programmes and projects within the black community aimed at conscientising and mobilising the community towards self-reliance. The programme was not confined to the black community. A conscientising programme was implemented within the white community as well. It is widely believed that

- convene a national conference of black and white leaders in order to prevent an irrevocable break in relationships.

They called upon the Church:

- to support the call of the SACC;
- to confirm that their rejection of separate development over the years always recognised that apartheid could only be enforced by violence;
- to call upon their white ministers and members to publicly remove their support from the policies of the Government without equivocation, and to make personal and collective representations to their members of parliament to press for a conference of black and white leaders, recognising that there could be no peace until all people were totally liberated.³¹

They called upon their members:

- to bring these matters to the attention of their local churches, members of parliament and friends;³²
- to become involved in their own crucial local issues, and
- to contribute to the needs and maintenance of those suffering and bereaved.³³

Towards the end of the 1976, the SACC still saw the government as having the responsibility of taking the initiative to bring about a solution to the conflict. The intensified disturbances in Soweto and other black areas led it to believe that the government could avert the continuation of

it was the successes of this programme in 1975, which, amongst other things, led to the banning of the CI by the government in 1977.

³¹ Abel Hendricks echoes this call later in the year to Methodist circuits throughout the country.

³² It is significant to note that even the CI supported the utilisation of members of parliament for the furtherance of the aims of opposition to apartheid. This could be interpreted by some as having given credence to racially defined politics while trying at the same time to undermine such politics. This perhaps not surprisingly illustrates their liberal roots.

³³ EcuNews, op. cit., p.7

the renewed disturbances by courageous, bold and swift action. This action would entail the government taking the initiative to make immediate contact with the recognised black leaders to find ways of preventing the indefinite continuation of the disturbances. This meeting could then "lay the foundation for an immediate roundtable convention, representative of all races, which would have as its aim the removal of apartheid and the implementation of an acceptable system of government for all." ³⁴

In contrast, the CI saw that the initiative for change in South Africa lay firmly in the hands of the black people. This in itself represented a fundamental shift in an earlier position they had held, enunciated in a statement immediately following the uprising. They now said:

" the Government is no longer in a position to determine the course of political events not only in Soweto but also in South Africa as a whole; nor is it capable of guiding in any way the nature, direction or pace of change." ³⁵

As a solution they proposed that black people be given the freedom to elect truly recognised leaders from their midst, including those who have to be released from prison and those who were in exile. These leaders would then "participate in a national convention with a view to dismantling in the shortest possible period the unjust political and social structures of our land and to present to our country a political policy of liberation based on freedom and justice for all." ³⁶ They saw any action, which fell short of this demand as "a dangerous stumbling block to the achievement of fundamental peaceful change." ³⁷ The SACC it must be noted, only came to a similar position in 1985 after the publication of the

³⁴ Ecunews, 25/1976, p.10

³⁵ *ibid.*, p.11

³⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷ *ibid.*

Kairos Document.

At their Pietermaritzburg conference on 18 September 1976, the CI showed an increasing political maturity in the far-reaching resolutions they took, contained in their State of the Nation statement. Amongst these were the demand for a National Convention; identification with and support for the oppressed in their struggle for liberation; unequivocal support for the goals of the Black Liberation Movements (ANC, PAC, SASO, BPC, and SASM) which were consonant with the biblical values of justice, freedom and human responsibility; support for all peaceful means to bring about change such as: work stayaways and economic sanctions;³⁸ the discouragement of immigration and recognition of the right of the oppressed to seek freedom for themselves and their oppressors.³⁹ Most of these resolutions were in line with those of the Black Caucus, taken at the SACC conference two months earlier. This was significant for a predominantly white organisation such as the CI, in that it illustrated the extent to which at least its leadership, not only understood the black struggle for liberation in South Africa, but also was committed to it.

But the relatively 'radical' stance of the CI did not escape the apartheid regime's attention unnoticed when in October 1977, it, together with its top leadership its newspaper, *Pro Veritate* as well as 18 other BC organisations and newspapers, were banned. These actions of the State we noted above marked the beginning of a period of quiescence in the african community while the coloured community were beginning to rise

³⁸ The SACC only took an unequivocal position for economic sanctions in 1986 under the leadership, not surprisingly, of Beyers Naude, former leader and founder of the CI.

³⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 11-12; The SACC was only able to support these demands, with the publication of the Harare Declaration in 1985 and the Lusaka Statement in 1987. In the former, it for the first time pledged explicit and unequivocal public support for the liberation movements and in the latter, recognised that while the armed struggle was not an option for the Church, that in the light of the violence of the state, it could not condemn the counter-violence of the liberation movements

in resistance as indicated by the coloured schools' boycott of 1980. This was to be the dominant trend until the UDF was formed in 1983. The stage was set for the emergence of a new style of politics and a new style of theology. The black political leadership were forced to take stock of themselves and devise new forms of political organisation. The Church leaders realised that they too had to take stock of themselves in the face of a state, which they began to realise, would stop at nothing to maintain the status quo.

1.1.3 Diakonia

Diakonia was a regional ecumenical organisation operating in the province of Natal (now Kwazulu-Natal). Although regionally based, they did some important work and made significant contributions to the Church struggle, not only in Natal, but also nationally. It was the brainchild of Catholic Church leader, Archbishop Dennis Hurley.

Towards the end of the month of June, Durban Church Leaders issued a statement expressing their sympathy to all bereaved and those who suffered injury or other loss. They stated that a true interpretation of the riots would lead one to the conclusion that although violence was deplorable in effecting or preventing change, the violence from young blacks was understandable because of the 'deep groundswell of bitterness and resentment that exists among Black people throughout our country,...'⁴⁰ because of the policies of racial discrimination, which robbed black people of their human dignity.

⁴⁰ Ecunews, 20/1976, p.8

" if attention is not paid to the well-known causes of that discontent, no amount of security legislation, repression, deportations, detentions or bannings will give this country genuine and lasting peace." ⁴¹

The looting and burning of buildings was not comparable to the dignity of black people who had been made in the image of God, which for so long had been assailed in their country. This is what had led the young people to rise up with such fierce anger.

The Church leaders welcomed a commission of enquiry but questioned its effectiveness if it was not composed of all races and not just one man. They appealed for urgent action to be taken for a just solution to be found in the form of a National Convention of all races called by the President long before such a commission reported back. In this demand, the Durban Church leaders were of one mind with the SACC, CI and almost all major denominations and political organisations in the country, including the African Independent Churches (AIC's). The latter, however, differed in one crucial respect namely, that they wanted black organisations and leaders to take the initiative in organising such a convention, not the apartheid government. ⁴²

In a situation where 'the Black community sees the police as agents of white power', ⁴³ and 'in a country acquainted with vigorous protest and rioting,' ⁴⁴ the Durban Church leaders questioned why it was necessary for the police to use firearms to deal with the students' protest. They saw the police as having to shoulder some of the blame for the riots, and called on the commission to 'go fully into this matter.' ⁴⁵

⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴² *Ecunews*, 21/1976, p.10

⁴³ *ibid.*, p.8

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

1.1.4 International Ecumenical Bodies

On the international front the World Council of Churches (WCC) gave a very comprehensive statement on the June 16 Soweto riots, correctly calling it a massacre. They compared it to Sharpeville 1960, and observed that whereas previously such repression would have cowed blacks into submission, 'Now the protests spread in proportion to armed police efforts to contain them.'⁴⁶

The WCC displayed a deep understanding of the issues at stake in the South African conflict when it recognised that besides the immediate issue of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in certain subjects, it was the whole Bantu system of Education imposed on africans in 1953 by the white South African Government, which was at stake. This in turn was part of a wider system of separate development, which had created 'black' townships like Soweto and whose ultimate expression was the Bantustans themselves.⁴⁷ They therefore argued that the South African Government should not treat the Soweto incidents as though they were isolated incidents that could be controlled by force. The only way to address it was to immediately meet black demands.

They criticised the *Detente* policy which was being pursued by the Vorster Government at the time, as trying to give the apartheid system a human image abroad, while in fact it was nothing less than 'subterfuge',

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p.7; This observation leads us to conclude that June 16 was another turning point in the struggle against apartheid, such as Sharpeville 1960 was, where the ordinary black people were no longer afraid to stand up to the repressive state apparatus of the apartheid regime, even if this meant losing their lives. This phenomenon, when contextualised was probably more true of the 'african' community than the 'coloured' community although there was revolt in the 'coloured' areas of Cape Town. It was only from 1980 onwards that it can be said that the 'coloured' community had reached the same level of consciousness the 'african' community had reached in 1976. This is certainly true of the coloured community in Johannesburg, who were largely indifferent to the uprising in Soweto. Thus it is that the coloured community as a whole resisted more vigorously in 1980 than in 1976, whereas the 'african' community were quiescent during this period as they watched the 'coloured' students' protest with interest.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

which the Soweto riots had exposed. It must be remembered that the *Detente* policy of Vorster was also an attempt to win over South Africa's remaining non-independent neighbouring states such as Zimbabwe, (then Rhodesia) as potential allies. South Africa was becoming increasingly isolated from its neighbours Mozambique and Angola which had become independent Marxist states. Thus, their motives for *Detente* were not genuine. ⁴⁸

The WCC therefore concluded that the events in Soweto showed that apartheid could not have a human face and that as long as it continued, there would be no peace for South Africa at home or abroad. They therefore expressed their grief at this wanton loss of life; their solidarity with those in protest and urgently called on the South African Government to:

1. immediately cease the use of armed police repression and multiple arrests as a response to legitimate african protests
2. take immediate steps to meet african demands for full human rights
3. release those imprisoned for political reasons as a first step towards assuring the rights of South African blacks to full participation in political decision-making. ⁴⁹

They commended the SACC for 'supporting the protest of the students and asking the authorities to repeal the offending regulations' ⁵⁰ as well as the CI for calling on the churches 'to confirm that their (the CI's) rejection of separate development over the years always recognised that apartheid could only be enforced by violence.' ⁵¹ They urged the South African churches 'to respond courageously to the present crisis and in

⁴⁸ Readers' Digest History of Southern Africa.

⁴⁹ op.cit., p.8

⁵⁰ Ecunews, 19/1976, p.8

⁵¹ ibid.

solidarity with the African people'⁵² and they called upon WCC member churches elsewhere 'to continue to initiate actions to bring pressure on the South African Government to meet the legitimate demands of the African people.'⁵³

The British Council of Churches sent a short telegram message to the SACC written in a pastorally concerned tone. They described the Soweto events as a tragedy and expressed their deep shock at the events and sympathy to all the bereaved. The action they had taken thus far in response to the uprising was to release the SACC statement to the British press and to organise a day of prayer for race relations to improve in South Africa and Britain, presumably on the Sunday following June 16. The latter action by the BCC was significant in that it indicates that the BCC recognised firstly, that one of the fundamental causes of the events of June 16 in Soweto was race-related and secondly that Britain was not immune to these self-same problems. This kind of honesty and insight was refreshing coming from an overseas country.

The Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) produced a limp statement in which they expressed shock and concern for the 'suffering and despair' into which both black and white families had been thrown. This must rank as a gross oversimplification of the real situation in which whites were largely untouched by the situation except for those few white officials who were killed in Soweto. The majority of black people suffered.

The statement did however recognise that the events of Soweto could lead to a 'violent racial war', and that Christian action in such times was faced with 'difficult and heavy decisions.' They fully backed the

⁵² *ibid.*

⁵³ *ibid.*

statements of the SACC and the CI on the current crisis. As a solution they saw discussions between the South African Church leaders and the Prime Minister as a matter of urgency in the situation. They reaffirmed their continued relationship with black and white Christians and their leaders in South Africa. It is clear from their statement that the EKD saw the Church as playing a major role in resolving the conflict in South Africa.

The National Council of Churches, USA, expressed their concern about the 'depth of frustration felt by the majority people of South Africa in their struggle for human dignity in their motherland.'⁵⁴ They committed themselves to prayer and humanitarian assistance through the SACC, to meet the needs of the Soweto community. They sought to be informed about the status of the situation and the programmes of assistance the SACC was going to embark upon and the desired role, if any, that the International Ecumenical Community could play. The churches in the USA clearly saw their primary role as providing practical humanitarian assistance to the struggling people of South Africa through the SACC.

The Dutch Council of Churches, expressed their condolences and sympathy with 'those concerned.' They wished the SACC 'courage and strength' in their 'struggle and decisions', and promised to publish the SACC's declaration in the Netherlands. However, the statement does not seem to show much understanding on the part of the Dutch Council of Churches on the gravity of the situation in South Africa. In the same vein the Australian Council of Churches issued a one line statement, expressing concern. They had up to that point informed their media in Australia about the situation and sent 'prayerful greetings.'

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p.9

The All Africa Conference of Churches was much more militant and radical (and understandably so) ⁵⁵ in their condemnation of South Africa's apartheid policies after their executive committee meeting in October '76. Among other things they:

1. called on all nations especially Western, to exert "maximum pressure on white terrorism and brutality against the 'Black' and 'Coloured' people of South Africa."
2. condemned the 'bogus independence of the Transkei 'homeland' '
3. reaffirmed its support for the liberation movements and black consciousness groupings who were struggling 'to achieve full independence, human rights, justice and peace in South Africa.' ⁵⁶
4. repudiated the obscene attitude of the South African Authorities to the indiscriminate slaughter of the 'black' and coloured people of South Africa.
5. maintained that the only lasting solution to the South African problem was the eradication of apartheid.
6. called on all churches in Western countries that were involved in nuclear collaboration with South Africa, to urge their governments, industrial enterprises and banking institutions to stop such collaboration. ⁵⁷

This stand by the AACC was followed by a vociferous one in December by its Deputy General Secretary, Mrs Jael Mbogo who described the situation in South Africa as that of a Holy War. Mrs Mbogo, Deputy General secretary of the All Africa Conference of Churches, was addressing the graduation ceremony of the second Pan-African Women's

⁵⁵ African countries especially those on the borders were directly affected by the South African conflict. They bore the brunt of South African refugees and were economically also dependent on South Africa. Some of them, such as Zambia and Botswana, risked being targets of the SADF as they housed the exiled armies of the liberation movements, the ANC and PAC. They therefore had a great stake in the speedy resolution of the South African conflict.

⁵⁶ Ecunews, 37/1976, p.3

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

Leadership Training Course at Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation, Kitwe, Zambia. She characterised the armed struggle being waged in Southern Africa as a Holy War because its aim was 'to free both the oppressed and the oppressor in order to bring justice, freedom, progress and stability to the people irrespective of their race or colour of skin.'⁵⁸

She called on Independent African States to redouble their efforts in helping the freedom fighters. The AACC was committed to the principles of human justice, freedom, equality and dignity and would continue to support all the liberation movements in Southern Africa. Victory was on the side of the oppressed for it is 'God who has granted the victory through His Son Jesus Christ who died on the Cross in order that all may be redeemed from bondage.'⁵⁹ She called for the 'rightful recognition' of the contributions being made by women in all spheres of life including the liberation of Africa.

The overwhelming concern of the International Ecumenical Church with the struggle in South Africa, and the Church's Role in it, was unmistakable. This concern was to be repeated and intensified in the years that lay ahead. The next time in which the international Church rallied to the aid of the SACC was in 1982-1984 with the Government's appointment of the Eloff Commission to investigate the affairs of the SACC. There can therefore be no doubt about the important role that the international Church played in the anti-apartheid struggle.

1.1.5 The Methodist Church

The first responses of the Methodist Church came from some of its Districts. The Natal Coastal District supported the statement of the

⁵⁸ Ecunews, 39/1976, p.5

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

Church leaders of the greater Durban area and urged all circuits and societies to give urgent attention to their Christian responsibility as contained in the above-mentioned statement and to take the necessary action. They supported the call for a National Convention of all races and appointed its President to call on all Methodists to observe a day of prayer, repentance and confession for the internal situation in the country.

The Synod of the South-Western Transvaal District issued a statement in which it expressed its sympathy for all bereaved and injured in the uprising in Soweto and elsewhere. It was outraged that the government could suggest that the horrible events of the time were solely or even primarily the work of 'agitators'. This was incitement at its worst. Christians as never before were therefore called upon to understand the pain and hurt that was felt in the community. It resolved to form its own committee to consider the reasons for the unrest and to suggest appropriate changes in the structure of society to prevent growing racial estrangement and hostility. This committee would make its findings available to the one-man commission which the government had appointed to undertake an investigation. In this regard it identified with the concern of the National Church Leaders by asking that the commission be broadened to include acknowledged black community leaders, in order to ensure the co-operation of the black community.

It also asked the relevant authorities not to apply the offending Afrikaans-language regulations when schools reopened. It pleaded with its church members to make a redemptive response to the tragic events; to find victory in love and pardon; to strive for a just peace; to listen to what God was saying rather than to the voices of fear, hate and violence. In a further statement it expressed support and appreciation for the roles that John Rees of the SACC and Dr Beyers Naude of the CI were playing

in trying to defuse the unrest and condemned the warnings that restricted them from being thus involved. It requested the withdrawal of these orders forthwith.

At the synod, the Chairman, Reverend Stanley Pitts, noted that the 'cavalier' way in which the government was treating the complaints of the Soweto youth on the Afrikaans language issue, was not dissimilar to the unfeeling and discourteous manner in which petty officials of the local offices of the Regional Bantu Affairs Board treated african people in general. He slated the remarks that the Deputy Minister of Bantu Education, Andries Treurnicht had made that the government had the right to determine language policy for 'black' schools because it paid the teachers and supplied the buildings, as showing a 'callous disregard of the facts of the situation and of human feelings'.⁶⁰ It was inflammatory, ill-advised and had been resented by the african people.

Significantly, at the time of the Soweto uprising the Methodist Church was led by a coloured man, the Reverend Abel Hendricks. His first public response as recorded in the *Dimension* newspaper, was to express his sympathy 'on behalf of the Methodist people',⁶¹ and to mourn the loss of life of both blacks and whites. He reiterated his aversion to violence as an effective means of achieving change, and warned of the dangers of polarisation in the light of these events. The need for communication between those in authority and the black community was never more urgent than now. Like the Western Transvaal synod, he called it 'unwise' to see the violence as the work of a few 'agitators'.

Stanley Mogoba, in an article in the *Dimension* in October, suggested a few minimum demands that the Church could rightly make in the

⁶⁰ *Dimension*, Vol VII No.7, August 1976, p.1

⁶¹ *Dimension*, Vol. VII No.6, July 1976, p.1

situation:

1. that religious leaders of all faiths should get together and define their role in the present state of the nation.
2. All churches should call a day of prayer in which the nation should be led in prayers of penitence and ask for God's guidance.
3. The churches should help to raise funds for the reconstruction programme.
4. The churches should be actively involved in restoring communication at a local level.

He argued that blacks had the right to run their own affairs and should exercise that right immediately, and also that the Church was the only institution which could save society. The Church should therefore call for a National Convention as soon as possible, since papering over the political cracks was going to be an expensive and useless exercise. In contrast to Mogoba, the September editorial of *Dimension* chose to see the problem and its solution in an individualistic and simplistic way. It called on the government to confess that they were wrong before it was too late. It held out the hope that the road to change was through the transformation of individuals in government and that this would only come about through confession. This naïve, yet sincere approach, epitomised the stance of many white liberal Christians in contrast to the more 'radical' stance of black Christians who were calling for fundamental changes in the socio-political and economic structures in society.

In a very revealing letter, a reader wrote to complain that *Dimension* was biased in favour of the Progressive Federal Party, a liberal-democratic political party. The editor of course denied such a link, but the point had been made that the Methodist Church through its mouthpiece *Dimension* sounded to some of its members like a liberal democratic voice. She

warned that she would discontinue her subscription in the new year were this not to change in the future. On the whole however, if the space devoted to the uprising in the *Dimension* are anything to go by, then the Methodist Church certainly showed more concern for the situation in the country than the Congregationalists and Presbyterians. From the first issue of *Dimension* in July after the uprising, it was reported that Methodist theological students had responded to the uprisings by protesting at the Federal Theological Seminary (Fedsem) and Rhodes University. Letters to the editor from conservative and liberal, black and white members of the Church and Church statements of protest on the uprising on circuit level were in abundance.

On the other hand, *The Christian Leader*, the joint newspaper of the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA), and the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa (PCSA), only published the Congregationalists' response to the uprising in October of that year. Prior to that the paper carried only one editorial in the August issue which addressed the matter of the uprising and even then the content was reformist and the tone patronising. Very few letters to the editor made any mention of the situation in the country, prior to October. However, this should not be construed as implying that the Congregational and Presbyterian churches as such were not interested in the struggle of black people. At most it meant that the paper was run by and obviously represented the interests of a small section of people in the Church, most of whom were white.

In *Dimension* however, there were responses from every shade of opinion of the Church community. The conservative white response blamed the riots on communists and agitators, whereas on the other end of the ideological spectrum, the Rev. Brian Brown of the CI challenged the moral legitimacy of Methodist chaplains in the SADF. He succeeded in

initiating dialogue with them. Most white correspondents were surprisingly sympathetic to the cause of the Soweto schoolchildren. However, this could also be a reflection of the editor's bias in that more letters reflecting his views were published than those were, which did not.

The real test for the Methodist church came at their National Conference in October of 1976 when the Black Methodist Consultation tabled a document in which they threatened to walk out of the representative session if their request that the conference 'adjust its agenda that it accommodates immediate action as a priority to all other conference business'⁶², was not heeded to. At the beginning of the session, the Rev. Ernest Baartman, outgoing secretary of the Christian Education and Youth Department, leading Black Theologian and leader of the Black Methodist Consultation (BMC), proposed a motion requesting that Conference suspend its agenda and address itself to the situation in the country. To his credit, the Rev. Abel Hendricks, outgoing President of the Methodist Church, courageously supported this motion and almost certainly averted what was potentially a divisive situation in the Church.

In his stance, Abel was supported by the new President, the Rev. Charles Stephenson, a white man, who responded to the request in the correct pastoral and theological manner with the following words:

"Time is important, but first of all I am a Pastor and if there are those in need, wherever there is pain and suffering, these take priority."⁶³

The Conference went on to reach great heights both in terms of its prophetic witness to the situation in the country as well as its response

⁶² Dimension, Vol VII, No.10, Nov. 1976, p.3

⁶³ Op. Cit., p.3

to the challenges posed to its own structures and practices by the uprising. In a resolution adopted unopposed by the conference, the Church unequivocally expressed its 'solidarity with the hopes and aspirations of the black people'⁶⁴ even though it could not approve of some of the methods adopted. It called for an immediate end to police harassment of school children and community leaders. It sought to impress upon the Government the urgency of bringing about rapid and radical change in living and educational conditions under which urban black people were living.

The Conference further recommended that the Methodist Church take the initiative through its Christian Citizenship Department (CCD) to approach SACC member churches, as well as Afrikaans churches of the Reformed tradition, with a view towards seeking ways and means of bringing peaceful change in South Africa, while there was still time. The Methodist Church at this stage, not unlike most other member churches of the SACC, while expressing solidarity with the struggling black people on the one hand, nevertheless still implicitly accepted the apartheid regime as legitimate and capable of bringing about fundamental change, on the other.

1.1.6 The Congregational Church

A statement of the Church and Society Department of the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa, (UCCSA) on the June 16 uprising started off with the following affirmations which were later endorsed by the Assembly:

⁶⁴ Op. Cit., p.1

"Black people have a right to a voice in determining their own destiny;
Black people have a right to choose the language in which they will be taught;
Black people have a right to live with their own families;
Black people have a right to full citizenship in the country of their birth." ⁶⁵

They went on to ascribe the escalation of the violence to 'unruly elements', but urged that South Africa should look beyond the 'mob violence' to the underlying call for justice and freedom which lay behind it. Without justice and freedom there could be no lasting law and order in South Africa. They quote a question which a leading Afrikaans newspaper had posed: had the Government changed at all in the sixteen years since Sharpeville or had it in fact reverted to the inflexibility, pre-Sharpeville? They lauded the courage and restraint shown by both black and white amidst the 'horror and destruction' of the previous week, as the country's saving grace. They suggested that the deaths of the schoolchildren and Dr. Melville Edelstein could be redemptive, in line with Christian belief, in that they could inspire all South Africans to work towards more just conditions, which were the prerequisite for reconciliation between black and white.

The statement contained all the right sentiments: justice, reconciliation, and full political rights for blacks. They did this by attacking the pillars of apartheid such as migrant labour, Bantu Education as well as the immediate cause of the June 16 uprising, namely, the issue of being taught in Afrikaans. In content, the statement by the Congregationalists was by far the most incisive, direct and radical, reflecting a theology of Liberation.

As could be expected, the Assembly of the Congregationalists in September 1976, like that of the Methodists was dominated by discussion of the uprising and the Church's response to it. As in the case of the Methodists, however, this discussion did not come about without a fight. The whole of the first day was devoted to listening to stories, debating and making resolutions around the uprising only after the majority of black delegates had called for the original agenda to be suspended in favour of such a discussion. In the heated debate and discussion that ensued, there was a general outcry from mainly the black delegates that the Church was irrelevant to the situation. They also challenged the State with radical statements. The social responsibility of the Church in the situation in the country was emphasised.

1.1.7 The Anglican Church

At this point in time the Anglican Church did not have much to say about the uprising, if its newspaper *Seek* is anything to go by. However, there were individuals who stood out. One such person was Desmond Tutu. Tutu could be said to have represented the Anglican Church since its theology and spirituality so clearly came through in Tutu's social stance in society. Thus, to look at the Anglican Church would necessitate looking at Tutu.

Writing from a clergy retreat in Johannesburg a month before June 16 1976, Tutu demonstrated the initiative and prophetic vision, which was to distinguish him in the years to come as a deeply spiritual man of God and a prophet on the South African political scene. He predicted a nightmarish scenario of violence and bloodshed in South Africa if the basic demands of black South Africans for a non-racial, open and just

⁶⁵ Ecunews, 39/1976, p.12

democracy were not acceded to by Vorster and his government. He appealed to the humanity, parental concern and Christianity of Vorster in a highly personal and impassioned appeal, which was to become characteristic of Tutu in the years to come. The injustice, oppression, exploitation and inhumanity of apartheid was becoming increasingly intolerable for blacks to bear. Racial discrimination was also not biblically defensible.

Tutu incisively dissected Vorster's reformist moves of doing away with petty-apartheid, as superficial and hence not bringing about fundamental change in black lives vis-à-vis the migrant labour system, inadequate housing, transport and overcrowded classrooms. It is significant that Tutu mentions educational conditions as only one of many others as being the cause of black frustration and does not even make mention of the language issue, which is widely accepted as the immediate spark which ignited the Soweto revolt a month later. Tutu's analysis confirms the view that the Soweto revolt was ultimately about black oppression under apartheid as a whole, with education merely being the spark, which set it alight. Tutu cited three demands, which in his opinion were the basic demands of blacks at the time:

1. residence and property rights for urban blacks
2. repeal of the pass laws
4. a National Convention of all recognised leaders of each section of the community to try and work out an orderly evolution of South Africa into a non-racial, open and just society.

He ended his letter by wishing God's blessings on Vorster and his government then and always, an indication of the respect with which he still regarded worldly authority, in particular, the South African government.

The trend of Tutu's letter clearly appealed to the moral conscience of the state to change and undergo conversion. This kind of theology would later come under increasing pressure as the struggle for liberation and the repression of the State intensified. Later on the Kairos document identified such theology as Church Theology. It is also significant that in the letter Tutu employed the Black Consciousness definition of what it means to be black in South Africa, namely, all those who are not white, i.e. africans, indians and 'coloureds'. This is evidence of the influence that BC and Black Theology already had on his thinking at that time.

" Freedom, Sir, is indivisible. The whites in this land will not be free until all sections of our community are genuinely free." ⁶⁶

This is one of those famous statements of Tutu's, albeit borrowed from Martin Luther King Junior, which were to become characteristic of him. In it he demonstrates his unique and remarkable theological insight and courage. He proceeds thus:

" I am writing to you, Sir, because I have a growing nightmarish fear that unless something drastic is done very soon then bloodshed and violence is going to happen in South Africa almost inevitably. A people can take only so much and no more. The history of your own people which I referred to earlier demonstrated this, Vietnam has shown this, the struggle against Portugal has shown this. I wish to God that I am wrong and that I have misread history and the situation in my beloved homeland, my mother country South Africa. A people made desperate by despair, injustice and oppression will use desperate means. I am frightened, dreadfully frightened, that we may soon reach a point of no return, when events will generate a momentum of their own, when nothing will stop their reaching a bloody denouement which is 'too ghastly to contemplate', to quote your words, Sir." ⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Allen, John ed., Archbishop Desmond Tutu: The Rainbow People of God, 1994, p.10

⁶⁷ *ibid.* p.11

These words are now famous for their prophetic portent, for on 17 May the first students went on strike and on a month later, on 16 June, Soweto erupted and the face of South African politics was never to be the same again. Tutu went on to reveal on the one hand, his acute political savvy, quick wit and sense of humour, and on the other, his deep Christian faith which always called people and systems to conversion when they were out of step with God's will.

" But we blacks are exceedingly patient and peace-loving. We are aware that politics is the art of the possible. We cannot expect you to move so far in advance of your voters that you alienate their support. We are ready to accept some meaningful signs which would demonstrate that you and your government and all whites really mean business when you say you want peaceful change. First, accept the urban black as a permanent inhabitant of what is wrongly called white South Africa, with consequent freehold property rights. He will have a stake in the land and will not easily join those who wish to destroy his country. Indeed, he will be willing to die to defend his mother country and his birthright. Secondly, and also as a matter of urgency, repeal the pass laws which demonstrate to blacks more clearly than anything else that they are third-rate citizens in their beloved country. Thirdly, it is imperative, Sir, that you call a National Convention made up of the genuine leaders (i.e. leaders recognised as such by their section of the community) to try to work out an orderly evolution of South Africa into a non-racial, open and just society. I believe firmly that your leadership is quite unassailable, that you have been given virtually a blank cheque by the white electorate and that you have little to fear from a so-called right-wing backlash. For if the things I suggest are not done soon and a rapidly deteriorating situation arrested, then there will be no right-wing to fear - there will be nothing." ⁶⁸

1.1.8 The Dutch Reformed Church (DRC)

The response of the DRC to the uprising came at the beginning of July in a statement entitled, 'With Reference to the Riots'. This is a most

⁶⁸ *ibid.* p.12

interesting statement by the DRC on the June 16 disturbances in Soweto and elsewhere, taken from the Kerkbode. It was issued by the Moderature of the General Synod of the Church and was apparently issued immediately after the riots. It is noteworthy for its arrogance and paternalistic tone. For example, it notes that besides damage to property, human and race relations and loss of human lives, there was *also* 'damage suffered by the kingdom of God.'⁶⁹ By this they probably meant that the witness of the Church had been found wanting. They speak as though they were the appointed custodians of that kingdom.

They called for a plan of action in which one could practice love of God in one's neighbour, but in the very same breath, speak of the 'younger churches', a clear paternalistic reference to their 'daughter' churches, the coloured, indian and african DRC churches. What is most interesting and revealing is their admission, albeit in an arrogant vein, that their Commission for Liaison with the government, and their Moderature had met with the government to discuss the situation and on the other hand had made contact with institutions of their church in the affected areas. This is an indication of the close relationship which they enjoyed with the apartheid government.

On June 29 1976, the above-mentioned bodies had talks with the minister of Bantu Administration and the secretary for Bantu Education in Pretoria. The following items were on the agenda:

- " * The occurrences in Soweto and elsewhere in recent times;
- * Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in schools;
- * The application of the policy in this connection;
- * The participation of parents and school boards;
- * Communication between the authorities and 'Black' people;
- * The position of Urban 'Blacks'. "

⁶⁹ Ecunews, 21/1976, p.8

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

They made certain recommendations to the minister, which he was now studying. From the above it would appear that the white DRC played a role in the government's decision to make concessions on the Afrikaans issue. But just what that contribution was is difficult to say from the above statement alone. What is clear though, and not surprisingly, is that they had a direct line to the government and were in a position to influence its policies. History shows that they did not make much constructive use of this power.

1.1.9 The African Independent Churches

The African Independent Churches (AIC's) issued a statement displaying a depth of insight into the South African situation and the root causes of the events of June 16. They saw the problem as being a political one, with whites, formulating and implementing principles and policies 'for Black people without practical co-operation and contact with them.'⁷¹ They condemned the 'mass killings of innocent and unarmed school children by members of the South African Police',⁷² who were peacefully demonstrating against the use of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction. The AIC's statement is significant in that they claimed to represent approximately 3 million black Christians in South Africa.

They observed that the repetition of the same acts of wanton violence by the police in places such as Cato Manor, Langa and Sharpeville, bore witness to an attitude prevailing in the police and South African Government which was not only a threat to the internal security of South Africa, but also to international security and peace. They also warned that whilst whites continued to wield political power over blacks,

⁷¹ Ecunews, 19/1976, p.10

⁷² *ibid.*, p.9

dissatisfaction would continue and race relations in the country would continue to deteriorate. They called on the government to "remove all the root causes of misunderstanding and friction between White and Black." ⁷³

They displayed what could be regarded as a 'balanced' approach when they rejected the acts of vandalism of the students, but immediately came to their defence by blaming these acts on 'hoodlums and work-shy frustrated youths' ⁷⁴, who seized upon the opportunity of using the students' protest to air their own grievances. On closer inspection, even the latter statement reveals a subtle bias towards even the so-called hoodlums and work-shy youths in that it recognises that they too had grievances.

Finally and most significantly, the AIC's called upon 'all Black leaders of Associations and Organisations to convene a National Convention.' ⁷⁵ What is significant about this statement is not that they were calling for a national convention, since that was nothing new, but rather that they were calling on *Black leaders and Organisations* to organise such a convention as opposed to the government doing so. The previous calls that were made by Bishop Tutu, the SACC, CI, Diakonia, and individual denominations had called upon the *government* to convene such a convention. This move by the AIC's could be interpreted as an indication of the fierceness and consistency with which they guarded their independence and african initiative.

⁷³ *ibid.*, p.10

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

⁷⁵ *ibid.*

1.2 Soweto's Challenge to the Church:

The events of Soweto '76, challenged the Ecumenical Church to introspect on at least three issues and to take action on them. These were: Racism and Racial Discrimination in the Church, Church Unity and the Pastoral Ministry of the Church. I will examine each of these in turn as they played themselves out in the life of the SACC and some of its member churches.

1.1.1 Racism and Racial Discrimination

After the SACC conference in July, Revelation Ntoula, a SACC journalist, described the previous three conferences of the SACC held at Hammanskraal as, Hammanskraal I, II and III, each of them noteworthy for one or other controversial issue. At Hammanskraal I, the controversial 'conscientious objection' resolution had been made. Hammanskraal II the following year, produced its own controversy when the President, John Thorne, made the dramatic declaration that the day of the white man was over and that the time had come for the black man to take command and control of his own destiny. John Rees echoed this sentiment of Thorne's when he declared that the day of the black man's liberation, emancipation from humiliation and oppression was open to him. He was thrilling to the possibility of becoming whole ⁷⁶

These statements were interpreted particularly by hysterical white right wingers as suggesting an imminent black take-over. Thorne and Rees were however referring to the black man within the broader political context of South Africa. They were taken somewhat by surprise when

⁷⁶ It is clear from both of these gentleman's usage of sexist terminology that the gender struggle had not yet impinged on the mindset of male Church leaders. However this was to change rapidly in the years to come

some black men and women, did indeed attempt to take command of their own destiny by staging a walkout after Thorne refused to accede to their request to suspend the prepared agenda in favour of a general discussion on the uprising. They were led in this by Smangaliso Mkhathshwa and Victor Mayethula, and were supported by some Quakers.

Hitherto, SACC conferences had been dominated by whites in terms of input, initiative in discussions, and presentation of motions. From this point onwards that was going to change because the majority of black delegates at Hammanskraal demanded and got a Black Caucus. The rationale they gave for such a caucus was that their existential experience was unique, a fact, which whites would not be able to appreciate. By this action the black, church people gave notice that they were going to take charge of their destiny in South Africa by starting where they were - in the Church. This was a challenge to racism prevalent within the SACC and the member churches in general.

(i) Black Methodist Consultation

By the latter part of 1976 there was a growing awareness and solidarity amongst black ministers as blacks, following the creation of a Black Caucus at the national level of the SACC. Black Methodist ministers were particularly tenacious in pursuing this strategy within the Methodist Church. A group of 80 black Methodist ministers met separately in Bloemfontein at the end of September 1976, for talks based on the future of South Africa. The discussions included the equalisation of stipends and other benefits, which at that time were determined along racial lines. The Reverend Earnest Baartman, chairman of the caucus pointed out that in no way should that meeting be construed as splitting the

with women such as Mrs. Sally Motlana, Virginia Gqabashe and Evelyn Mahlatse, making their voices heard at the conference. Sally Motlana later became SACC vice President.

Methodist Church in two. Instead the meeting was necessary because blacks felt that their existential experience was different to whites and that they therefore needed to meet on their own in order to shape their own destiny in the South African situation. Similar meetings had already taken place in the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches.⁷⁷ One of the first successes of this caucus, as mentioned above, was to persuade its Assembly in October of that year to suspend its agenda in favour of discussing urgent proposals for action in the light of June 16.

The efforts of the Methodist Black Caucus started paying dividends when for the first time in Methodist history in South Africa, a black minister was appointed to serve a white congregation as from January 1977. The minister concerned was the Rev. Creswell G.S. Mkhize and the church the Metropolitan Methodist Church in Pietermaritzburg. Prior to this the only trans-racial appointments of ministers involved white ministers in black congregations. Another significant development was the appointment of an Indian minister, the Rev. David Thomas to a coloured congregation in the Cape Peninsula. It was also hoped that Methodist ministers would in future be trained at the Federal Seminary (FEDSEM), then being built at Edendale, in a fully integrated theological school.⁷⁸

At the Methodist Conference of that year, a resolution adopted during the Missionary Affairs debate, made the integration of Methodist circuits a real possibility by 1980. In another groundbreaking resolution, the last racial references were abolished from the finances of the Methodist Church with the adoption of a new Stipend scale. The scale was far from an adequate equalisation, but nevertheless laid the foundation for possible equalisation by 1983 and finally enabled a number of other funds to be integrated.

⁷⁷ Ecunews, 32/1976, p.9

⁷⁸ Dimension, Vol. VII No.11, December 1976, p.3

The President of the Methodist Church, Abel Hendricks, in his response to the events of Soweto, pointed out that what was of importance was to heed the message that these events were bringing about our whole life together. Christians in particular had to ask themselves what it was that these events were saying to the body of Christ, and how in their prayer and preaching, proclamation and attitudes the Methodist Church could contribute towards healing the great [racial] divide.

"Surely we must as never before, work at every level for the kind of love and justice which will ensure that this never happens again. ⁷⁹

(ii) Congregational Assembly

A similar thing happened at the Congregational Assembly in September that year when black delegates demanded a discussion of the Soweto uprising. Although a black caucus was not formed out of this ferment, it did mark a significant change in the racial politics of the Church. Like most other denominations, the UCCSA faced serious weaknesses in getting its anti-apartheid stance down to the grassroots. The denomination could not even succeed in getting its stance on the uprising published in its own newspaper, the *Christian Leader*, before October 1976. This distance between the paper and the denomination, itself became a matter for confrontation at the Assembly in 1976 between the majority of members (who were black) and the newspaper. Delegates slated the newspaper as being irrelevant to the situation.

Soon after the Assembly, the secretary of the denomination and also President of the SACC at the time, Rev. John Thorne, publicly declared that he would not attend any more Board meetings of the *Christian Leader*, until they began to address black issues. In the light of this

⁷⁹ Dimension, Vol. VII No.6, July 1976, p.1

increasing criticism from especially black members of the Church, the board almost immediately began to put plans in motion to start a black supplement of the *Leader*. Events were however to overtake them and this supplement was never to get off the ground, as the SACC announced that it too intended to launch its own Black Ecumenical Newspaper to be called *The Voice*, thereby saving the Board of the *Leader* some work and embarrassment. The Board duly shelved its plans in favour of *The Voice*, pledging its support both materially and in terms of expertise to the new newspaper.

The resolutions made at the UCCSA Assembly of 1976 were also made to effect greater inter-racial contact within the Church. These included the concept of 'twinning' black and white congregations where contact is made with one another and as much as possible is shared. A concrete example of this took place in George between a coloured and a white congregation who swapped ministers for a week. Furthermore, the Assembly requested that in future Church and Society items appear on all Regional Council agendas and the secretariat were instructed to send out a list of prison chaplains. A commission was also appointed 'to initiate and promote a programme that would help local churches look at the Church's ministry and the role of the Church 'with regard to the whole man'.⁸⁰

(iii) SACC Black Caucus

Out of the SACC Black Caucus of 1976 came some of the most forthright motions of the Conference. Any attempts to 'water-down' these motions from the plenary were firmly resisted from the members of the black caucus. Some of the motions, which became resolutions were:

⁸⁰ The Christian Leader, Vol 8, No. 10, October 1976, p.1

- (1) the recognition of such black organisations as the South African Student's' Organisation (SASO), Black Peoples' Convention (BPC) and the South African Students' Movement (SASM), as the legitimate voices of black aspirations.
- (2) support for the liberation struggle in Namibia, a motion proposed by Dr. Lukas De Vries of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Namibia.
- (3) unqualified support for liberation movements in their struggle.⁸¹

Attempts by some delegates to qualify the word 'struggle' with the word 'peaceful' were roundly defeated with the argument that it would be false to speak of 'a peaceful struggle' in Namibia when the people were in fact engaged in a bloody struggle.⁸² Debates in plenary vividly demonstrated the new mood now prevailing in black circles. The recent Soweto disturbances and the political situation in Namibia, seemed to have added to black fears that the time for a peaceful solution to the country's problems had almost become a thing of the past. In fact, the Black Caucus stated that South Africa was in a state of war.

The conference also witnessed the rise of the voice of black women. They were represented by people such as Mrs Sally Motlana, one of the presidents of the all Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), Miss Evelyn Mahlatse, member of the World Council of Churches (WCC) Central Committee, and Mrs Virginia Gqabashe, general secretary of the Federation of Black Women of SA.

⁸¹ Ecunews, 2/1977, p.9

⁸² *ibid.*

(iv) Natal Church Leaders

In Durban, Church leaders as part of their Christian responsibility in response to the challenge of Soweto and with particular reference to the question of racism within the Church, confessed to the following:

- (i) that the life in their churches had not sufficiently shown the possibility of an alternative to racial domination and group selfishness;⁸³
- (ii) that as leaders of their churches, they had failed to give justice and reconciliation high priority.

They further called upon their members to continue in prayer, undergo a meaningful change of heart, to act for justice and to give their wholehearted support to the various initiatives that would be taken by the churches to deal with the crisis situation that had arisen. They thanked God for those demonstrations of Christian love and heroism that did occur in the midst of the turbulence. Among the signatories to the statement were the Most Reverend Dennis Hurley, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Durban and Chairman of Diakonia, as well as the Right Reverend Phillip Russell, Anglican Bishop of Natal.

(v) Conclusion

It is clear that June 16 had begun a process of ferment within the English speaking churches in South Africa and within the SACC, which made it more sensitive to racism and racial discrimination within its own laws and practices. This process ultimately found expression in the formation of black caucuses. These caucuses were destined to become the conscience of the Ecumenical Church, the prophetic voice of Black and Liberation Theology. They challenged the SACC and its member churches to radical changes within and without its own structures

⁸³ *ibid.*, p.9

particularly with regard to racism and exploitation. From their ranks were to emerge many young prophets and Church Leaders, Black and Liberation theologians such as Allan Boesak, Frank Chikane, Shun Govender and many others, who were to lead the Church into and through the next phase of its struggle against itself and apartheid. From their ranks came those who eventually contributed to and penned the watershed Kairos Document of 1985.

1.2.2 The Pastoral Ministry of the Church

The pastoral ministry of the Church is one of its better known and natural functions. But in the context of an apartheid system which systematically denied blacks the basic necessities of life, it was an ongoing challenge. However, in times of political crisis, such as the June 16 uprising, it took on mammoth proportions. The Church was suddenly faced with deaths, detentions and injury on a large scale. This often resulted in more hardship with the loss of breadwinners to injury, death or detention in families which were already cash-strapped. As one response to this situation the Church Leaders, at their meeting on Friday, 18 June 1976, agreed to immediately establish a fund to offer aid to those who had suffered through bereavement and injury in the violence.

John Thorne, as President of the SACC, later announced the establishment of the Asingeni Relief Fund. Besides the bereaved, funds would also be made available to families where the bread-winner and/or family member had been arrested. The President was going to make this fund known to all the churches in fellowship with the SACC. In addition to this, the Church leaders also asked the SACC to endeavour to organise a Legal Aid Service. Many individual denominations, also made their own appeals for donations and established their own relief funds.

The Pastoral Ministry of the SACC eventually grew into one of its biggest ministries, yet most ignored by its detractors, eventually taking shape in the Dependants Conference. This was a project whereby material, financial and other assistance was provided to dependants of those detained, killed, maimed or imprisoned in the course of the struggle. One of its better known services was the accommodation and meals provided to the families of Robben Island prisoners, who had come to Cape Town from other parts of the country to visit their loved ones. It also accommodated and re-oriented political prisoners released from the island, before their homeward journeys to other parts of the country.

1.2.3 Church Unity

Another important way in which the Church was challenged by the political uprisings in the country was around the question of Church unity. The criticism that was levelled at the Church from within and without, notably from Prime Minister Vorster himself, albeit opportunistically, was that the churches had no right to criticise the apartheid system because of its divisiveness, since it itself was deeply divided along denominational, racial and economic lines. This debate came to the fore within the SACC early in 1977. John Thorne, SACC president at the time, fired the first salvo in a wide-ranging interview at the beginning of that year. His views echoed Vorster's when he said that the Church in South Africa 'lacked integrity because it often attacked social and political apartheid while practising ecclesiastical apartheid.'⁸⁴ He believed that the Church was the only institution in society where people with different opinions could find one another in unity.

⁸⁴ Ecunews, 2/1977, p.1

The theme of Church unity had thus far been explored by the Church Unity Commission(CUC), which had been set up specifically for that purpose in 1967. However, the type of unity it was exploring was denominational and not racial. From the discussion post-'76, two distinct views on Church unity emerged within the SACC. It could be argued that these views reflected the ideological divide within the SACC along racial lines. The black view was articulated by Fr. David Nkwe, an Anglican Minister and one of the co-secretaries of the CUC.

In a statement in the Kairos newspaper of the SACC, Fr. Nkwe argued that to blacks it was senseless to speak of Church unity, when churches themselves still failed to practice human unity. Blacks appreciated what the Church had done for them, but they had also been hurt by the apartheid practices in the `mainline' churches "long before the Nationalist Government came to power."⁸⁵ In other words, the churches should first work at achieving non-racial unity within the Church before they could think of achieving denominational unity. To blacks the two were inextricably linked.

Rev. Peter Storey of the Central Methodist Church in Johannesburg, espoused the opposing view. Storey questioned whether the need for structural unity in the Church had not been `prematurely abandoned'. To support his argument Storey related the story of the beginning of the formation of the "Uniting Church" in Australia, which he had witnessed on a recent trip to that country. This church would consist of Methodists, Presbyterians and Congregationalists. Admittedly, the process had been made easier by the absence of the Anglicans, but the process had not been without its casualties as 30 to 40 percent of the Presbyterians had opted for `going it alone'.

⁸⁵ Ecunews, 18/1977, p.11

Storey nevertheless optimistically believed that even the problem of race, which pervaded every aspect of South African life including the Church, could be surmounted. Structural unity of the Church in South Africa could have the effect of starting off with a new history and not a segregated one, which the 'traditional' churches had. No doubt there would be breakaways from such a church as well, but such breakaways would more than likely be by politically conservative Christians, rather than those who were theologically conservative. Storey was clearly more concerned with denominational unity above racial unity. Race was just another obstacle to be surmounted on the road to this unity.

Fr. Nkwe pointed out, however, that the reality for black churches was such that they were moving away from white churches rather than coming together. They wanted to 'go it alone' because of the feelings of hurt and resentment which they had suffered at the hands of white churches. Despite Nkwe being a positive man with a strong vision of a united South African Church which could set the pattern for South African society, the pain and frustration of racial discrimination were still present in the Church despite attempts by some "mainline churches" to remove all racial discrimination. This, according to Nkwe, was just not good enough. Nkwe was clearly sceptical of Storey's view that a United Church in South Africa (along denominational lines) would necessarily mean the end to racial discrimination in the Church. This is why for him, racism needed to be tackled before denominational unity. He outlined four areas in which Christians should move if unity was to be achieved:

- the removal of racial discrimination and inequality in churches in order to give blacks a greater feeling of participation in all that churches did.

- Church hierarchies should take the lead on unity. The present practice seemed to be that different denominations co-operated in establishing new churches in white residential areas, whereas this did not appear to apply in black areas.
- Church unity should not be something handed down from above to local congregations hence decision-making should be decentralised.
- the first priority should be that of working with the local ministry on the question of unity.

Kairos agreed with Fr. Nkwe's sentiments and went as far as to say that blacks in South Africa, by insisting on their human dignity being acknowledged before participating in Church unity schemes, were in fact showing some of the most advanced thinking on Christian unity in our country, 'rather than being behind in their quest for union...' ⁸⁶

However, the CUC, SACC and Catholic Bishops Conference, summed up the debate by reminding all the stakeholders that ultimately it was not the denominational or the race issue which was fundamental to Church unity, but rather the fact that:

"however different our traditions and beliefs, however diverse our past experiences and present trials and expectations, we share the conviction that by the Holy Spirit we have been made members of the Kingdom of Grace". ⁸⁷

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p.13

⁸⁷ *ibid.*

1.2.4 Conclusion

June 16 1976 had a profound effect on the Ecumenical Church, which was to change its course irrevocably. By the end of 1976, the role of the Church in the present crisis had come increasingly under the spotlight and more and more voices were calling on the Church to stand up and be counted. There was even talk that the students and a large constituency of the black population would accept Church leaders as representing black aspirations. This was probably the beginning of the leadership role of the Church in the struggle in a time of repression.

However, the Church's stance was still very much one of protest in terms of statements, delegations and petitions. In this they were eclipsed by the Christian Institute, who were more able, and did take a more 'radical' stance in terms of calling for non-violent resistance actions such as conscientious objection and economic sanctions, against the apartheid State. It is not surprising therefore that they were banned along with 18 other BC organisations and two newspapers, including their own, *Pro-Veritate*. This repressive action, was akin to Sharpeville 1960, and ushered in what Jeremy Seekings calls a period of political quiescence in South Africa's african townships.⁸⁸ It was a time for the Church and black political groupings to regroup.

June 16 also confronted the Church with internal challenges of racism, sexism, pastoral care, and Church unity. These challenges added to the complexity of the Church's struggle to be faithful to the Gospel in South Africa. They remain challenges to this day.

⁸⁸ Seekings, Op. Cit., p.17

In Chapter two we will examine the role and contribution to the Ecumenical Church struggle of John Thorne and Allan Boesak, as coloured Church leaders who rose to prominence prior to and during this period of political quiescence.

CHAPTER TWO: COLOURED CHURCH LEADERS

B. October 1977-1984: Political Quiescence in African townships:

Seekings argues that Religion, in particular Christianity, played a multi-faceted role in the townships:

" It was a spiritual refuge, but also a source of social and economic support. For different people it underlay a retreat from politics altogether, conservative political action, or involvement in radical national and civic politics. ...we can see that even forms of inaction often involved resistance as well as accommodation. As we shall see, forms of organisation and action also involved accommodation as well as the more obvious resistance." ¹

It is with these qualifications in mind that we have to view the state of political quiescence in african townships during the period under consideration, particularly with regard to the ambivalent role which religion, in particular Christianity played, in this regard.

P.W. Botha took over from the disgraced B. J Vorster on a hard line ticket opposed to the constitutional reforms Vorster had first mooted in 1977. A few years later, however, P.W. began to implement reforms of his own. We have seen that Soweto '76 had thrown apartheid into crisis and there was no way that any National Party leader could ignore this. P.W. started his reforms with the granting of trade union rights to black workers resulting from the recommendations of the Wiehann commission in 1979. This set the stage for a new terrain of struggle in the oppressed community, the shopfloor. Union federations such as the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) and Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA), with Charterist and BC leanings respectively, sprang up and were soon flexing their muscles in the workplace, much to the chagrin of the government. The

¹ Seekings, Op. Cit., p.31

government found itself in a dilemma because it couldn't withdraw the new rights it had just granted to workers. This opened up a new arena of struggle between workers and the State and the bosses, which was to prove crucial in the years that lay ahead.

On the other hand the ANC, at a groundbreaking conference in 1979, decided to review its strategy and tactics emphasising the primacy of mass mobilisation over the armed struggle, based on the Vietnamese experience. Despite this change however, armed activity actually increased during this period, Umkhonto's ranks having been swelled by the new recruits of the '76 generation who had fled the country in the wake of the uprising.

Before the liberation movements within and outside the country could regroup after the 1977 clampdown however, the government pushed through the independence of a number of homelands, the Transkei being the first in 1976. Not much resistance to these moves was forthcoming from political organisations or the churches. In 1978 however, a new political organisation in the Black Consciousness tradition was formed, namely, the Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO). Seeking to carry on where their predecessors had left off, this organisation was however, unable to recapture the spirit of a demoralised people. They were soon eclipsed by the UDF in 1983, a rival grouping in the non-racial, Charterist tradition of the African National Congress (ANC)

In 1981 Botha introduced the President's Council, an idea which he had expediently rejected when first suggested by Vorster. In 1982 he tested the waters of the white electorate with the idea of the Tricameral Parliament. This set the stage for a new era in anti-apartheid politics with the formation of the UDF. However, the other side of Botha's reform measures, namely, repression, was soon acutely felt by the liberation movements and anti-apartheid

organisations, which opposed his moves. But, until then, the period 1978 to 1984, according to Jeremy Seekings, was predominantly a period of political quiescence in african townships, with a few sporadic incidents of protest and resistance such as the 1980 coloured schools boycotts.

For the Church it was a period of introspection as new theological perspectives on the situation in the country were formulated and old ones fine-tuned. The key figures to emerge at this time in the Church as well as national leadership were Boesak and Tutu. At the time, Boesak was a rising star within the 'coloured' Dutch Reformed Mission Church as President of the 'Belydende Kring' (BK) as well as Chaplain to the students at the militant University of the Western Cape (UWC). Tutu, by then had returned from Lesotho to take over the reins as SACC General Secretary from John Thorne. Almost single-handedly these two priests took the church forward into the next decade of struggle. Both in their own unique way, were exponents of Black Theology.

The SACC and its member churches, having witnessed the ruthlessness of the state in dealing with its political opponents, including Christians such as Beyers Naude in the October 1977 crackdown, now had no option but to continue on the path from 'Protest to Challenge', while not questioning the legitimacy of the apartheid state itself. It decided to take the route of challenging the more reprehensible aspects of apartheid society and law, calling for their abolition. In this respect we witnessed the controversial Conscientious Objection Resolution of 1978, calling for alternative military service for conscientious objectors on religious or moral grounds. There were also studies undertaken on possible economic pressure on South Africa such as disinvestment by the international community.

The 1980 Consultation on Racism held at Hammanskraal under the auspices of the WCC to evaluate ten years of the work of the Program to Combat Racism (PCR) of the WCC in South Africa, proved to be an ideal opportunity for the SACC to prepare the groundwork for a renewed challenge on the State in the decade of the eighties. Of the goals that were set for the new decade, one was the achievement of democracy by the end of the decade. In this, history was to prove them to be correct. But before this could be achieved, there was still a difficult struggle ahead about which the participants had no illusions either.

The decade of the eighties was to prove decisive as well arguably the most intense in the struggle for liberation in South Africa. The apartheid State, in response to the people's struggle for liberation such as in 1976, responded with piecemeal reforms. When the people and their leaders rejected these reforms, the regime responded with repression. By 1984 the black townships of the Vaal Triangle were up in flames, the coloured and indian townships were incensed by the implementation of the Tricameral system and a state of insurrection existed. In this context the ANC called for a campaign to make the country ungovernable. This campaign was so successful that a state of emergency was declared in June 1985. It was briefly lifted September of that year but re-implemented in 1986 up to 1990 when the Then State President of South Africa, F.W. De Klerk, lifted it. In this historic announcement he also unbanned all political organisations and released Nelson Mandela. This was a new watershed in the history of South Africa.

From 1980, the Church as represented by the SACC, continued its attack on apartheid's reprehensible laws and its effects on South African society, in particular blacks. Represented by an increasing number of black leaders, not least of whom was Tutu, the SACC was taken to a new level of challenging the State especially in its

Constitutional Reforms. The State's response was to threaten, detain and harass, although it was seemingly more reluctant to act against the Church and its leaders at this stage. This only served to strengthen the resolve of the Church to fight on, thus deepening the rift between Church and State. Eventually the State responded by implementing the Eloff Commission into the affairs of the SACC, with the aim of discrediting the organisation in the eyes of the South African public as well as limiting its access to overseas funding. This attempt at muzzling the Church before it could do any more damage turned out to be counterproductive. The support that the SACC received from the International Church was overwhelming.

At the end of it, and indirectly as a result of his witness against it, Tutu was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in November 1984, just a few months after the Eloff Commission had completed its report and made its findings. In March of the following year Tutu was installed as the new Bishop of Johannesburg, and a year later as the Archbishop of Cape Town, the highest office of the Anglican Church in South Africa. Tutu was a thorn in their side, even though he was regarded by many blacks as a moderate. Tutu was still prepared to talk to them. He still recognised their legitimacy to rule.

There were, however, other individuals in the Church who were trying to push the Church into non-violent direct action during this period. Through new black Church organisations such as the Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT), 'Die Belydende Kring'(BK), the Alliance of Black Reformed Christians of South Africa (ABRECSA) and others, individuals such as Allan Boesak were constantly pushing, cajoling and prompting the Church to an ever more radical stance. Almost single-handedly he masterminded the movement which witnessed the declaration of apartheid as a sin and its theological justification a heresy by all the major denominations in the country as well as by the World Alliance of Reformed Christians (WARC). This indirectly led to

the formation of the UDF, since his logic was that if apartheid was a sin then it had to be fought against and be removed. In an address to the SACC as early as 1979, he called for the Church to move from protest to action through Civil Disobedience.

A year later, at the 1980 SACC Conference in Hammanskraal, Tutu attempted to implement this resolution by calling for an act of protest by all Conference delegates after the Conference on Pretoria's Church Square. He was defeated by one vote. Ironically, it took the detention of another Church leader, former SACC President and General Secretary, John Thorne, in the little known township of Bosmont in Johannesburg for supporting the nation-wide coloured school boycotts of 1980, to afford the Church the opportunity, as Tutu remarked on the occasion, to implement the resolution.

Both these men, Thorne and Boesak are two examples of coloured Church leaders among others, who saw themselves as blacks fighting for their own and their country's liberation from racism and exploitation. They did so first and foremost out of Christian conviction. Each of them was a product of his time and context and thus contributed to the struggle in their own unique way. Their roles in that struggle ought to be evaluated within those contexts as well. It is to this task that I will now turn my attention.

The Witwatersrand Church Leaders March to John Vorster Square - 26 May, 1980

I attended a relatively privileged private school catering mainly for blacks from disadvantaged communities. However, we were highly politicised through the more liberal education we were receiving. So when the news reached us that the coloured schools in the Transvaal and the rest of the country had come out on boycott in solidarity with coloured schools in the Cape, we had no doubt in our minds that we should join them, despite the fact that we were receiving a relatively better education than they were. We embarked on the boycott although not without some opposition from some parents, students and teachers, who could not understand why we would want to jeopardise what was generally regarded as better education than our fellow coloured, indian and black counterparts were receiving.

The first mass rally that was called was at Chris Jan Botha (CJB) High school in Bosmont on a Friday morning. The school happened to be opposite the home of the Rev John Thorne, former general secretary of the SACC and UCCSA and past chairman of the UCCSA. He had been invited by the student leaders at the time to be the main speaker at this rally. He was small in stature but big in heart. John was also an ex-parent of the school I attended, as two of his children had matriculated there.

He spoke forcefully about the inferiority of the coloured education system and called for equal education for all. He pledged his support to the students in their stand against this evil education system and apartheid in general. He urged us to cast off the shackles of a slave mentality. However, we were to do this non-violently.

At school the following Monday morning, we received the news that John Thorne had been detained on Saturday, 24th May 1980 at 12:30

p.m. We were immediately incensed that this 'Man of God' who was sickly and who had so courageously addressed us on the truth of our situation in South Africa, could have been detained. Calls for his release became the new focus of our protest campaign. This campaign was to enjoy almost immediate results. At 4:30 p.m. on Monday afternoon of the 26th May, John Thorne was unconditionally released from detention.

What we did not know was that on Saturday evening after his arrest, a group of ministers held a meeting in Coronationville. At this meeting they had decided that they would hold a service of intercession for John Thorne at the Congregational Centre in Braamfontein on Monday 26th May 1980 at 9:00a.m., after which the ministers present would walk to John Vorster Square in their clerical robes to present a petition to the police expressing solidarity with Mr Thorne and to call for his release. A process of contacting Church Leaders and Church Unity Commission (CUC) ministers had been set in motion whereby they were asked to be present at the service and to join the walk to John Vorster Square thereafter.

On Monday, 26th May 1980, the service went ahead as planned with approximately 80 people present. Afterwards, fifty three ministers and lay people joined the walk to John Vorster Square, led by Bishop Desmond Tutu, General Secretary of the SACC and Rev. Joe Wing, General Secretary of the UCCSA and Chairman of the CUC. The march passed the offices of the Johannesburg evening newspaper, The Star, and was stopped not far from these offices on the corner of Sauer and Pritchard Streets. All the clergy, and others with them were arrested. The then editor of The Star, Harvey Tyson, described the march as remarkably peaceful and wondered as to the wisdom of the police in arresting the marchers. They carried no weapons and no banners and the most menacing thing about them was one of the hymns they sang....."Onward Christian Soldiers..." Another hymn, sung to the tune of Aurelia was:

*"O God of earth and altar, bow down and hear our cry,
Our earthly rulers falter, our people drift and die;
The walls of gold entomb us; the sword of scorn divides
Take not thy thunder from us, but take away our pride.*

*From all that terror teaches, from lies of tongue and pen,
From all the easy speeches that comfort cruel men,
From sale and profanation of honour and the sword,
From sleep and from damnation, deliver us, good Lord!*

*Tie in a living tether the prince and priest and thrall
Bind all our lives together smite us and save us all;
In ire and exultation aflame with faith, and free
Lift up a living nation, a single sword to thee." ²*

Police gratuitously used batons to disperse onlookers who had gathered at the scene. They had succeeded in bringing to what was essentially a low-key event, 'a taste of needless drama and conflict.' ³ At the police station the marchers handed the petition demanding the release of Thorne, a copy of the order of service used at Braamfontein and a brief statement outlining the reason for the protest, over to the head of security. The Rev. Thorne was released on Monday 26th May 1980 at 4:30p.m. The group of clergy and others were taken into custody for the night and appeared in court the next day after which they were released on their own recognisance's.

The Reaction

A pastoral letter was written to the churches by the following Church Leaders: IC Aitken - General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa, Timothy Bavin - Anglican Bishop of Johannesburg, Frederick Bell - General Secretary, Federation Evangelical Lutheran Churches of Southern Africa, Stanley Pitts - Chairman of the South-West Transvaal District of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, Desmond Tutu - General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches and the Revd Joseph Wing - General Secretary of the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa. In the letter they described the course of

² The Christian Leader, 1980, p.5

³ *ibid.*, p.4

events, which led up to the Church Leaders March. They explained that the purpose of the march had not been to seek confrontation with the Government, but first of all:

"to express solidarity with a brother minister who had identified himself fully with the needs of the community and his people in the exercise of his pastoral duties;"

and

"to protest against detention without charges being preferred, and the suspension of the rule of law on which detention is based." ⁴

Their experience in the cells had been an enriching one of worship and fellowship in which they discovered their unity in their faithfulness to God and to one another, rather than in Plans of Union.

The incident received worldwide press coverage and messages of support for both Thorne and the arrested Church Leaders came in from far and wide, both local and international. There was a statement from local ministers of the Church of Jesus Christ and religious leaders, protesting the detention of Thorne and calling for his immediate release. They also expressed solidarity with Thorne and believed that his action was based on the following biblical principles on which they too took their stand as the only basis for their total pastoral and social responsibility:

" Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself St. Luke 10: 27

'What is it that the Lord requires asks of you? Only to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly before God.'
Micah 6: 8

⁴ *ibid.*, p.4

*'Is not this what I require of you: to loose the fetters of injustice and to set free those who have been crushed?'
Isaiah 58: 6*

'We must obey God rather than men.' Acts 5: 29"⁵

A message of support for the Church Leaders was received from the general secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, assuring them of their solidarity and concern and prayers for peaceful and just solutions, respect for human rights and the dignity of the vast majority of South Africans and for the redress of the great racial inequalities in education. Another message was received from the President of the Methodist Conference for the Church Leaders and Thorne lamenting the fact that relationships between the Church and State were now at an all-time low because of the actions of the police. He called on the State to start talking to the recognised leaders of the country and cease imposing its will by force, as this would not stem the triumph of the biblical principles of justice and reconciliation to which Christians the world over were committed.

The Outeniqua region, one of the regions of the UCCSA of which Thorne was a minister, sent its own message of support to him and the 53 ministers arrested. They called on the government to: scrap the law of detention without trial; release all those who were detained or prefer charges against them; absolve the 53 church leaders who were arrested from any further prosecution and call for a national convention of all race groups in the country.

After his release, John Thorne wrote the following letter of thanks to his colleagues and friends:

⁵ *ibid.*, p.5

"What a beautiful show of solidarity our world has had as fifty two ministers supported by two other friends chose imprisonment in order to successfully demand the release of a colleague. I truly value and appreciate your participation in the march. Pentecost 1980 has certainly enabled so many of us to share the experience even in a small measure of the first disciples. Let us Give thanks that what Paul said to his Philippian congregation in 1:13, we too can say:

'My imprisonment in Christ's cause has become common knowledge and it has given confidence to most of our fellow Christians to speak the Word of God fearlessly and with extraordinary Courage.'

Let us rejoice that by this obedience to the heavenly voice our world has seen a part of the family of God in action and understand now what the family of God is there for. It very effectively expresses the truth: '...that God has combined the various parts of the body...so that there might be no sense of division in the body, but that all its organs may feel the same kind of concern for one another. If one organ suffers, they all suffer together. If one flourishes, they all flourish together.' 1Cor. 12: 33

Let us pray that Jesus Christ, whose we are and whom we serve, may use this very beautiful demonstration of care and concern. May it become characteristic of our life as a whole and may the world once again be able to say of Christ's followers, 'SEE HOW THEY LOVE ONE ANOTHER.'

*With renewed thanks and warm Christian greetings,
Yours sincerely,*

John Thorne " 6

⁶ *ibid.*, p.5

2.1 The Rise of John Thorne

It is interesting to note that during the time of the June 16 uprising that the SACC was led by coloureds. In 1975, Bishop Habelgaarn, a coloured man of the Moravian Church was the SACC President. At its July conference in 1975, he was replaced by John Thorne as President of the Council. Thorne, like Tutu, had just returned from England where he had worked as President of the Council for World Mission (CWM). Two years later, Thorne took over from John Rees, a white man, as General Secretary of the Council, the first black man to hold the post and only the second man in the history of the council to assume the top executive position of the council while still the sitting president. The only other person to have done so was the Rev. Basil Brown, also a Congregationalist, in 1962. Thorne was issued the invitation after Desmond Tutu declined a similar invitation at the end of 1976 as his Church was opposed to him taking on the job.

During the first half of 1976, Desmond Tutu was still Dean of Johannesburg and was put under tremendous pressure especially from the black constituency of the churches to remain in South Africa at this crisis time, since as a South African his services were needed as never before in the country. A delegation from the Black Parents Association of Soweto even sent a delegation to try and persuade Dean Tutu not to leave the country "at a time when millions of Blacks are pinning their hopes on you." ⁷ Unfortunately, Tutu was unable to accede to the request of the Black Parents to remain in the country. He argued that as much as his country needed him, so too did the people of Lesotho, as they would be without a bishop for many years to come if he did not take up the call. He also maintained that he was not indispensable. The SACC was therefore denied its first black general secretary for another year. Mr John Rees was to continue as

⁷ Ecunews, 21/1976, p.1

general secretary for yet another year, a position he had held since 1969.

However, the black voice within ecumenical circles was not to be denied. Thorne, of the UCCSA having been elected as the SACC president in 1975, brought to the council a broad international and local experience of the Church as well as a particular coloured perspective to the South African struggle within the broader black perspective. In his presidential address to the July '76 conference, Thorne emphasised the need for a change in direction in South Africa. Liberation, he said, implied a new direction. We could not go back the way we had come. Where there was human life a new beginning could always be made.

" There is a dead past, there is yet an available present and, please God, there is some possible future." ⁸

In words, which were to be echoed almost exactly by the Kairos Document of 1985, he told conference delegates,

" The moment which God waits for has arrived for us as a country - as a church - the moment of extremity is God's opportunity." ⁹

He went on to compare the birth of the new era, new man, new deal, new direction of the country as very much like that of the birth of a baby, traumatic, painful, a time of labour, fear for the insecurity of the unknown world. In what could only have been a reference to the South African government, he said that it was even more painful for her from whose womb it had to be liberated.

⁸ Ecunews, 24/1976, p.2

⁹ *ibid.*, p.2

He warned that the Church should not expect good sense to prevail and expect that people would be rational enough to accept that it would be as impossible to withhold liberation, as it would be to thrust the new-born baby back into the womb. The darkest hour the world experienced had occurred when the authorities had attempted to prevent the arrival of the Kingdom of God. However, out of the darkness the Easter morning appeared. The changed and liberated Peter and John then continued with the unfinished business of Christ. The theological imagery was a clear reference to the dangers of what was to be expected from the South African authorities in the struggle for liberation, which lay ahead, not unlike Boesak's warning at the SACC Conference in 1979. But there was also a message of the hope of victory as represented by the Easter morn.

For all the prophetic clarity of this speech, Thorne revealed an ambivalence in his understanding of the black struggle in his actions at that very conference. Two black delegates, Smangaliso Mkhathshwa and Victor Mayethula had issued a call to suspend the agenda in favour of a discussion on the Soweto disturbances. They argued that they meant no disrespect to the guest speakers, but that they (the guest speakers) ¹⁰ were unlikely to say anything new and that there were more urgent priorities. Black feelings were running very deep at that time when their children were being killed. Thorne ruled the two men out of order, thus precipitating a walkout and the subsequent formation of the Black Caucus within the SACC.

The end result was that after heavy debate a compromise was reached whereby it was agreed that three caucuses would be formed, a black, white and "mixed" caucus. Conference participants could choose which group they wished to join. In the end only two caucuses were

¹⁰ One of the guest speakers who was particularly objectionable to the men was O' Brien Geldenhuys, Ecumenical Relations Director of the NG Kerk and the first leading figure of that church to address an SACC conference in almost four decades.

formed, a black and a "mixed" one. There was no white caucus. The majority of blacks joined the Black Caucus while a fair number stayed in the mixed group. The discussions were held in the groups, but their conclusions were summed up in the resolutions on the Soweto uprising. Significant about this conference was the fact that the two caucuses, the black and the "mixed" produced two separate sets of resolutions on the Soweto uprising reflecting their differing standpoints on the issue.

The resolutions of the Black Caucus focused more on the practical day to day issues of how to show concern and to assist the black victims of the violence with their immediate needs and showing more direct solidarity with black liberation movements and the black struggle. In contrast, the "Mixed " Caucus focused on more symbolic action and long term issues, couched in more general terms. e.g. From the Black Caucus we have a resolution which states:

"We call on all those who have relatives missing as a result of those disturbances to contact their local ministers and similarly we ask the constituent churches to request their ministers to list missing parishioners in order to assist in tracing them. If difficulties are encountered an appeal can be made to the SACC for legal advice." ¹¹

From the "Mixed Caucus", however, there was following:

"The National Conference refers to the Executive Committee the question of devising an act of public witness and penitence which will have an impact on the constituency as well as society such as the dramatic actions of the prophets of old." ¹²

They also spoke about the churches' examining their own structures, addressing white fears, seeking a united stand with the Dutch Reformed Church and the Church becoming an "alternative" society to

¹¹ op. cit., p.23

¹² op. cit., p.38

apartheid on national, regional and local levels. The latter resolution was a clear example of reformist 'third way' theology as an answer to the problems of South Africa. There was also an appeal to individual Christians to make a difference, characteristic of the rugged individualism of liberal thought.

These two sets of resolutions brought to the surface the ideological and theological differences between what was broadly speaking a radical black group and a liberal white group within the SACC, thus also reflecting the ideological division between white and black in the country as a whole. The remarkable thing was that the resolutions gained general support and the black speakers gave the assurance that their move to form a separate caucus had not been intended to disrupt the conference. It seemed on the surface at least, that the caucusing had not had any lasting divisive results on the SACC. Unity had won the day for the time being. But this unity was to be severely tested in the future as the struggle intensified and ideological positions calcified in the years that lay ahead. This uneasy truce was eventually shattered, with the issuing of the Call to Prayer for the End to Unjust Rule by Allan Boesak and the publication of the Kairos Document in 1985.

Thorne seemed to have misunderstood the actions of the two black priests and his heavy-handed action almost put the conference in jeopardy. The way in which he handled the request of these priests was in contradiction to what he had proclaimed in his own speech to the SACC Conference in Hammanskraal the previous year when he had announced that the day of the 'Whiteman' was over and that the 'Blackman' would 'take command and control of his own destiny.'¹³

¹³ op.cit., p.9

When black men did try to do just that at the level of the SACC a year later, he ruled them out of order. This is perhaps an indication of the gap, which still existed in the theory of black Church leaders and their practice. Their theory or theology often appeared to be radical but their practice, liberal, bordering on the conservative.

Thorne nevertheless continued to be a prophetic voice during these troubled times. In September of 1976, in a strongly worded statement on behalf of the SACC, he condemned all detentions and bannings of the regime as a 'violation of human rights' as 'immoral' and 'unjust' and something which was 'alien to most non Communist Christian countries.'¹⁴ At this time, several hundred people were in detention and 70 were being held under the Internal Security Act that allowed for "preventative detention". Despite these detentions, Thorne noted, the tense situation in the country still remained. What was more alarming was that there was no protest by Christians concerned with the need for Christian justice. Thorne called on all Christians who were so concerned, to 'take urgent note of the situation, and to take action to reverse it'.¹⁵

In November of '76 Thorne responded to press reports of a so-called white backlash in response to the riots in black areas and a current "stay-at-home" by black workers. He condemned such a supposed backlash as unchristian and dangerous. He called on whites to commit themselves to working for a just and stable society in which the human dignity that God gives to all people would be realised.

In January 1977 Thorne was invited by the executive of the SACC to take up the position of General Secretary once his term as President had expired. In a wide-ranging interview, he expressed his fervent belief in the prophetic role that the Church had to play in society. He

¹⁴ Ecunews, 28/1976, p.14

¹⁵ *ibid.*

went on to identify what this prophetic role was in South African society 'marked by polarisation.' In particular, the SACC was faced with a unique challenge in the present situation, that of being torn between two forces. On the one hand there were forces which were trying to intimidate the Church, while on the other there were forces which were trying to co-opt the Church to be used for their own ends. The Church had to resist both these types of forces if it was to play its real role. He would be wrestling with how best he could contribute to this role, denominationally or ecumenically, pastorally or at an administrative-cum-executive level.¹⁶ Thorne eventually accepted the invitation and so became General Secretary at the July conference of the SACC that year.

He was, however to serve for only three months, stating as reason that that was not the place for him to be. He was replaced by Desmond Tutu who had finally agreed to take up that pivotal position - a position he held until 1985 and in which he was to lead the Ecumenical Church in South Africa deeper into the liberation struggle.

2.1.1 The 1980 Coloured School Boycotts

The year 1980 started with a bang literally and figuratively, with the 'coloured schools boycotts. These boycotts started in Cape Town over basic amenities and provisions of textbooks in 'coloured' schools and soon developed into a full-scale political onslaught against apartheid. By April of that year the boycotts had spread to Johannesburg 'coloured' schools of which I was a part. This was my initiation into the 'struggle', as it had become known in the oppressed community. I was a very fervent evangelical Christian at the time and my faith was challenged by the realities of my oppression under the apartheid

¹⁶ Mr Thorne was also one of two general secretaries of the UCCSA at the time and would be meeting with its executive in April of that year to share the problem with them.

regime. Prior to this I had been aware of the politics of difference in this country and had participated in resistance to it, however in a low-key way, namely, through sport politics, under the leadership of the South African Council of Sport (SACOS). SACOS was a predominantly coloured and indian anti-apartheid, non-racial sports body which was at the forefront of fighting racism in sport and in isolating the apartheid sports machine internationally together with its sister body the South African Non Racial Olympic Committee (SANROC).

The boycotts were for me the first real confrontation with the repressive arm of the state, through the riot police, and security police. In this sense it was an eye-opener with regard to the brutality with which the apartheid State was prepared to defend as well as implement its policies. The same was probably true for many other coloured children of my generation. The 1980 school-boycotts was a turning point in the political mobilisation and consciousness of the coloured community in South Africa since it forced the whole community to become involved in the struggle of their children. The coloured people could no longer claim innocence, as the white people were prone to do, concerning the harsh realities of South African apartheid. Inevitably, clergy were also going to be involved in this conflict and as a result some coloured clergy emerged both in Johannesburg, Cape Town and other places as spokespersons for the community. By this time Thorne had left the SACC and was serving a coloured congregation in Bosmont, a suburb in his native Johannesburg, as well as serving on denominational structures. It is in this context that John Thorne along with other clergy such as Cecil Begbie in Johannesburg and Allan Boesak in Cape Town arose as spokespersons for the community.

John Thorne was not the first clergyman nor the first coloured clergyman to be detained for opposing governmental policies and siding with the oppressed in South Africa, neither would he be the

last. But what was unique about this small, low- key protest march and subsequent arrest of 53 clergy, was that it was undoubtedly the first time that so many prominent clergy had participated in such a march and had been put in jail.

In July that year, at the SACC National Conference Bishop Tutu had posed the question in his secretarial report as to how the Church could practically put into effect a resolution taken the previous year to resist the government through civil disobedience. The planned program of the conference had then been suspended to discuss this matter as an indication of how seriously the delegates felt about the Church playing its role in the liberation struggle. At the end of the conference a motion to hold a protest rally on Pretoria's Church Square after the conference was defeated by one vote. Tutu later observed that the march for John Thorne's release had ironically provided the Church with that opportunity to engage in the act of civil disobedience denied it by the Conference in July. In general the march was seen by many as an opportunity for the Ecumenical Church to give early notice to the government of its intentions of actively and non-violently resisting its policies as opposed to mere statements. This movement was however, only to gain popular support in the Church after the Kairos Document was published in 1985.

The fact that the police had responded in the way they did was an indication of the repressive mood the Botha government was in. The battle lines between Church and State had been drawn some time back already, but were now becoming increasingly sharper and intense. The government with its reform and repression strategy was not going to brook any opposition, regardless from which quarter it came.

A second significant factor about this event is that it was a coloured minister at the centre of the furore. The boycotts and the detention of

John Thorne, a well-known and respected Church leader in the Johannesburg coloured community as well as nationally and internationally, raised the consciousness of the coloured people in Johannesburg to new heights. His involvement demonstrated that he had not lost any of his prophetic fervour in the struggle for freedom in South Africa. It must be remembered that the coloured people in Johannesburg were not so actively involved in the 1976 uprisings as their Western Cape counterparts. The coloured people in Johannesburg had been politically mobilised against apartheid through the school boycotts, the detention of John Thorne and the subsequent march and arrest of 53 ministers. The community was now ready for any further mobilisation against apartheid that would eventually come its way in the form of the UDF and the National Forum.

After his detention Thorne kept a low profile in terms of his involvement in the Church struggle, preferring to devote himself to pastoral activities and the training and spiritual formation of candidates for the ministry in the UCCSA until a few years before his death in 1998. I eventually became one of those candidates under John Thorne in 1988. The stand he took in Bosmont in 1980 in solidarity with the coloured school children and his subsequent detention, could be seen as the culmination of the prophetic witness of a simple, obstinate, but courageous coloured Church leader. It was time for younger men to take over the reins. This came readily enough in the form of Allan Boesak, already a rising star in Ecumenical circles at this time. It is to him that we will now turn our attention.

The Pollsmoor March - 28 August, 1985

We woke early that morning, about 6:00 a.m. Charles needed to be at the Lutheran Centre by 8:00 a.m. The March would start at 9:00 a.m. and we still needed to get from the Lutheran Centre to Athlone stadium. We knew Boesak had been detained the night before already. There was an air of uncertainty about what was going to happen. The troops had already rolled into Athlone and were taking up positions outside the Athlone stadium. Police were everywhere as we made our way to the Lutheran Centre just a few blocks up the road from first avenue Belgravia where we stayed. Johannes and I were boarding with Charles an ordained minister in our Church (the UCCSA, Bonteheuwel). We were staying with him in the manse of Gleemor Congregational Church because Bonteheuwel didn't have a manse as yet. Johannes and I were both students from Johannesburg, myself at the University of Cape Town (UCT) reading for a postgraduate teacher's diploma and Johannes an undergraduate degree at the University of the Western Cape (UWC).

Charles and I drove up to the Lutheran Centre (the agreed meeting place for the clergy who were to lead the march. (Johannes decided to stay home.) At the Centre, in a small meeting room, the clergy led by pastor Gottfried Kraatz, a German National who was later deported, and some lay people huddled together, debating about what to do next. Were they going to go ahead with the march given that Allan Boesak had been detained, and that the police and army were out in force and had sealed off all entrances to Athlone stadium the agreed starting point of the march? And what of the fact that the police and army had already sealed off the exits to the african townships, preventing people from making their way to Athlone stadium?

It was a difficult decision to make and one could feel the tension in the air and in one's body. At the same time I had a sense that history was

being made there that day and that I would rather not be anywhere else. Then the reports came in that the people were already gathering at the shops opposite the Athlone stadium and that the police were beginning to wade into them with batons and sjamboks. A decision had to be reached quickly. The meeting agreed that the people assembled there would march down to the stadium and intervene to stop the police brutality. It would also ask the police for an opportunity to address the crowds and to ask them to disperse to the Hewat College of education, there to decide what to do next.

We marched down, led by the Reverend Abel Hendricks, Gottfried Kraatz, Richard Stevens and other clergy. Charles was also in the front. I decided to stick to the back rows.

When we got to Athlone stadium, which didn't take us ten minutes to do, Reverend Hendricks and Richard Stevens, tried talking to the police captain. However, it was clear that they (the police) had already decided what they were going to do. They were probably only too happy that the 'ringleaders' of the march had identified themselves and they decide to arrest all of them on the spot. Several scuffles ensued as some of the lay people tried to prevent the police from arresting the clergy. They were unsuccessful and all the clergy and some lay people were ignominiously bundled into 'Mello Yello's'¹⁷ and taken off to jail. Charles was one of them.

Before he was taken though he had the presence of mind to give me his car keys which was parked at the Lutheran Centre. As I could not drive at the time, he had asked Ashley Kriel a high school student activist from Bonteheuwel to drive his vehicle back home from the Centre.¹⁸

¹⁷ 'Mello Yello's' were the nickname given to the yellow police vans, which transported prisoners to jail. They were named after a popular cooldrink of the same name

¹⁸ Ashley, later clandestinely fled the country for military training in the ANC's armed wing only to be killed in sinister circumstances by a security policeman, Jeff Benzien, in Hazendal. Athlone, after Ashley had returned to the country.

Ashley and I together with another comrade from Bonteheuwel then drove the car back home from where we proceeded to the Hewitt Teacher's Training College sports' ground where the crowds had regrouped and another group of clergy, led by the Rev. David Russell were now leading proceedings. It was decided that the march would continue from the Hewitt sportsgrounds down Thornton Road and led by the clergy and some nuns from the Catholic Church. Johannes and I decide to go home as we felt we needed to inform the Bonteheuwel Congregational Church's Church Council, Charles' relatives and friends of his arrest and to find out where they were being held.

We later learnt and saw on television news how the march had been brutally stopped by the South African police, by baton charging, sjambokking, and teargassing peaceful demonstrators, including nuns and clergy, after they had knelt down to pray in the road. The scenes were nauseating and infuriating at the same time. The Reverend Jan De Waal, a close friend and confidante of the Reverend Allan Boesak had his spectacles broken in his face, with the result that he later lost the sight in his one eye.¹⁹ So ended the peaceful march to Pollsmoor prison before it could even get started.

What followed the arrests can only be described as insurrection in what the media later dubbed, 'the battle of Belgravia', after one of main roads and housing estates in which the street battles took place. School pupils and students from the area put up burning barricades, stoned cars including police vehicles and looted and burnt delivery vans. The unrest continued for some months and simmered down after the infamous Trojan Horse killings and once the troops pulled into Athlone.

¹⁹ At the same time another drama was playing itself out outside the gates of Pollsmoor prison. A smaller group of activists, who had expected the Athlone march to be stopped, had gathered near Pollsmoor prison and marched to its gates. They too were arrested and imprisoned at Pollsmoor.

Cape Town's coloured townships had joined the african townships in the country as centres of violent resistance to the state. It felt as if one was literally in the middle of a war at the best at times. With the State of Emergency and the restrictions that were placed on meetings and protest actions, creative ways were found by the now underground UDF structures through which protest could be registered. From this situation of extreme repression, the 9:00- 10:00 o'clock lights out, candlelight vigils were born. As a sign of protest people were to put out all their lights in their homes every night and light candles in their windowsills. Even cars on the road would have candles in them. A spontaneous and exciting spin off of this action was that cars would drive around the perimeter of Belgravia and Thornton roads each night and physically hinder the progress of police and army armoured vehicles in the road and hoot in unison whenever they were near. This action was a great morale booster to the activists and kept the spirits of the community up.

The Pollsmoor March and subsequent resistance actions in the Athlone community and Cape flats in general and the unflagging spirit of the community as a whole, despite a state of emergency in the country, were symptomatic of the kinds of creative struggles that were taking place in similar communities of the oppressed throughout the country involving hundreds of thousands of ordinary people, Christian and non-Christian alike. It is symptomatic of the new levels to which the struggles had been taken in the post UDF era. It was characterised by a myriad of small, low intensity, resistance actions that were not so easy for the State to crush as before. Little wonder that the State's methods of repression showed a concomitant desperation. In addition to the usual bannings, detentions and mass arrests, now troops came into the townships. What were later exposed as death-squads were also active, responsible for disappearances, assassinations, terrorist bomb blasts made to look like that of the liberation movements, vigilantism and even drugs flooding the oppressed communities.

The Church found itself increasingly in the forefront of such struggles as the political movements were restricted or banned. The question of violence and non-violence in the oppressed response to the violence of the state thus became a moot point of strategic and tactical importance only. For the Church it was a major point of disagreement. The Church and Christians were faced with a choice between good and evil, God and the devil as the Kairos document pointed out in 1985. It was a time for decision and action.

One man who had contributed a great deal to making all this possible was Allan Boesak, Dutch Reformed Mission Church Minister, Black Theologian, Academic and Activist. It is to his contribution that we now turn.

2.2 The Rise of Allan Boesak

The Soweto uprising in 1976 challenged the Church not only in terms of what its role was in the struggle for liberation against racism, but also in terms of the racism within its own structures. One of the denominations in which this latter challenge was particularly acutely felt and waged was in the Dutch Reformed group of churches, particularly the so-called non-white branches of this church. This was one of only two denominations in South Africa, which was racially divided into its constituent parts, the white Dutch Reformed Church, the coloured, Dutch Reformed Mission Church, the african Dutch Reformed Church in Africa, and the indian Reformed Church in Africa. The other one was the Lutheran Church.

It was therefore not surprising when some of the ministers of the three black churches of this apartheid family, coloured, indian and african, decided to get together in an organisation called the Broederkring, as

far back as 1974.²⁰ The organisation had three aims according to its first chairman, Reverend, Dr. Allan Boesak, speaking in an interview with Contours of the Kingdom in 1979.²¹ First and foremost it was a desire for unity in the Dutch Reformed Churches because they wanted to get to know one another better and remove prejudices they harboured against one another. The second reason was for the black churches within the Reformed family to give a clear and united witness on the political, economic and social situation in South Africa. Thirdly, it was an attempt at ecumenical co-operation both within South Africa and outside the country. What was clear however, was that the primary aim was unity within the Reformed Churches in South Africa. In other words, the breakdown of apartheid divisions within the church.

The 'Kring', as it became known, also later joined the SACC as an independent organisation with its own voice within ecumenical circles and could make its presence felt there through its exposition of Black Theology and the Theology of Liberation. It saw these theologies as the only theologies, which could equip Christians for participation in the struggle as well as contributing towards the building up of the body of Christ. This ecumenical contact also had profound implications for Dutch Reformed ministers in the various churches because they could now be exposed to the broader ecumenical family.

²⁰ Membership, as Boesak pointed out was also open to white Dutch Reformed ministers who were committed to the same ideals of unity, witness and ecumenicity. Most of the white members who had joined up to that point however, were drawn from the 'Sendingkerk', the other black churches and the University of South Africa (Unisa). Very few were from the NGK. Interestingly, Boesak admitted that membership at that point was only open to members of the Dutch Reformed family of churches as they did not want to become something like the Christian Institute (CI) had been. They wanted to remain within the reformed family of churches as their hands were already full in stimulating the work of reformation to be done within those churches, than to take on broader ecumenical responsibilities as the CI had done. This was a wise decision of the Broederkring in terms of effecting unity within the black Dutch Reformed Churches and effectively challenging apartheid in the long run, than the Christian Institute was able to do. The recent establishment of the 'Uniting Reformed Church' out of two of the black churches, as well as the prominent role that the 'Kring', which later became the 'Belydende Kring', and its off-shoot the Alliance of Black Reformed Christians of South Africa (ABRECSA) in the anti-apartheid struggle is testimony to this. However, it is clear that the Broederkring saw themselves, at least certainly in the eyes of Dr. Boesak, as following in the rich prophetic tradition left by the Christian Institute, of which he had also been a member.

²¹ 'Focus on the Broederkring' in Contours of the Kingdom, Aug-Sept. 1979, pp. 16-17

Alan Boesak as Chairman of the Broederkring began to make his individual impact in ecumenical circles of the SACC from the middle to late seventies as a fiery orator and incisive exponent of Black Theology within the South African context. He shot to prominence at the Annual National Conference of the SACC at Hammanskraal from July 23 -27, 1979. The address he delivered, entitled the "The Black Church and the Future", was seminal in terms of charting the course of the ecumenical struggle against apartheid in the eighties. It is to this address that we shall now turn our attention.

2.2.1 SACC National Conference - 1979

In his address to the conference, Boesak outlined the condition of the Black Church, the alternatives facing the country and the Church at the time, and what the Black Church needed to do in order to equip itself for the challenges it would face in the future. We shall examine each of these in turn.

(i) The Condition of the Black church

According to Boesak, the condition of the Black Church was characterised by three elements. Firstly, the Black Church was a Church, which was uncertain of its identity. Secondly it was a Church, which faced a tremendous challenge, and thirdly it was a Church, which was dependent on an alien theology.

It was uncertain of its identity because it was predominantly still under white control and projected a white image in style, witness and commitment, thus making it difficult for blacks to identify with. What it needed to do to attain its authentic identity was to be able to identify with the community it served. Among other things, this meant not being afraid to identify with the struggle of the people, for the struggle in South Africa was not merely political, but also moral. The

struggle was not merely *against* an oppressive political and exploitative economic system but it was a struggle for the authenticity of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The struggle was not as much against a political philosophy and practice as it was against a pseudo-religious ideology.²²

Furthermore, Boesak pointed out that:

"To identify with the struggle is to realise that the struggle for liberation and the attainment of black humanity are commensurate with the Gospel of Jesus Christ."²³

Secondly, the great challenge the Black Church faced was from a newly and highly politicised black community, especially the youth, which had reached its apex in 1976. The Black Church did not yet know how to deal with this new, politically conscious generation. The traditional respect which the Church and Churchmen had enjoyed in the past was no longer to be taken for granted. The black community now judged the Church by the willingness of its office-bearers to actively participate in the liberation struggle. In other words, the liberation struggle had become the criterion by which the authenticity of the Church and the Gospel would be judged in the black community.

Thirdly, the alien theology in which the black Church was trapped was a Western Christian theology of accommodation and acquiescence, 'an individualistic, other-worldly spirituality, which had no interest in the realities of this world except to proclaim the existing order as God-ordained.'²⁴ This theology wanted blacks to accept their slavery of the past and in modern times their lowly positions as

²² The Church and The Alternative Society, edited by M. Nash. Papers and Resolutions of the Eleventh National Conference of the South African Council of Churches, Hammanskraal, July 23 - 27, 1979,

p.41
²³ *ibid.*,

²⁴ *ibid.*, p.43

second and third class citizens. This theology Boesak argued had to be exchanged for a new theology which in fact, was not so new but was in actual fact the age-old Gospel, the message of the Torah and the prophets.

This theology spoke about the sinfulness of man in personal life as well as in the social, political and economic structures he had built. It was a theology, which spoke of hope, conversion and redemption. It was a theology, which understood God as the liberator/redeemer of the oppressed. It was a theology for the whole of life.

(ii) The Alternatives facing Church and Country

Both the Church and country according to Boesak, faced two alternatives at that time. The country faced the choice of modifying and modernising the system of white '*baaskap*' and eventually ending up with civil war, or bringing about radical and fundamental change which would open the way towards a search for a truly new society. The choice the black Church faced on the other hand, was between the easy policy of *Real Politik* and accommodation whereby people would be urged to accept piece-meal concessions, or the more difficult option of challenging the status quo and accepting the risks that go with it.

There was a sense in which the Black Church had very little choice in the matter because it had become one of the few vehicles left for the expression of the legitimate aspirations of the black people, given the outlawing of black political organisations in 1977. As such it could therefore expect increasing unfavourable attention from the government if it was to be true to the Gospel and its calling. The prospect of increasing Church-State confrontation was therefore unavoidable. The Church had to be watchful as there would come a time when Government spokespersons would increasingly employ a Christian language of peace, love and reconciliation, while accusing

the Church of subversion, in order to undermine the Church. Boesak's prophecy did of course come to pass later on in the eighties, as the Church came increasingly under attack from the government. The Kairos Document identified this kind of theology as State Theology.

Included among these voices of opposition towards the Black Church, Boesak warned of some Christians who may 'shout charges of lovelessness and intransigence.'²⁵ Nevertheless the Church would have preserved its dignity in the end. The black Church, however, needed to be adequately equipped in order to carry out this momentous and historical task which had been laid upon its shoulders. To this end, Boesak suggested three things that needed to be done, to which we now turn our attention.

(iii) What the Black Church Needed to do to Equip itself for the Future

Firstly, the Black Church needed to reaffirm its commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord. The implication and importance of this commitment was to be found in the fact that it placed the Black Church's allegiance to God above allegiance to anything else including the laws of the State, or the laws of self-preservation. This was crucial if the black Church was going to be obedient to the Gospel in the South African context. However, this commitment was not an automatic process, but needed to be learned. Boesak put it thus:

"We shall have to learn not to be dictated to by the demands of the status quo, however intimidating, not by the demands of ideology, however tempting. Our faith in Jesus Christ and the liberating power of His Gospel must form the basis upon which we offer ourselves as a humble servant in the world."²⁶

²⁵ *ibid.*, p.45

²⁶ *ibid.*, p.45

Secondly the Black Church had to resist the temptation of what the great theologian of the German Resistance, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, had called *cheap grace*. By this he meant the inability of the Church sometimes, in its desperation to bring hope, love, justice, peace and reconciliation in a hopeless situation, to distinguish between the authentic and the inauthentic. The Church had to realise that:

" Reconciliation is not feeling good, it is coming to grips with evil. In order to reconcile, Christ had to die. We must not deceive ourselves. Reconciliation does not mean holding hands and singing Black and White together : It means death and suffering, giving up one's life for the sake of the other. If white and black Christians fail to understand this, we shall not be truly reconciled." ²⁷

furthermore,

"Peace is not the absence of war or the uneasy quiet in the townships. Peace is the active presence of justice, it is the *shalom*, the well-being of all." ²⁸

and finally,

"...Christian love is not a sentimental feeling but an act of justice, doing what is right,...We must not be afraid to say that in the South African situation Christian love between white and black must be translated into terms of political, social and economic justice if it is to be love." ²⁹

Boesak's definitions of reconciliation, peace and love are later echoed by the Kairos Document in its criticism of the English Speaking churches' response to apartheid. By 1985 the Church had still failed to heed the warnings of Boesak and had continued practising cheap grace, peace and love, which the Document called 'Church Theology'. The document called them to repentance and change.

Thirdly, the Black Church had to preach a relevant Gospel to the black community and to follow up that preaching with meaningful

²⁷ *ibid.*, p.46

²⁸ *ibid.*, p.46

²⁹ *ibid.*, p.46

ways of participation in the liberation struggle. In the light of the fact that violence was becoming an increasingly attractive option as peaceful protest was becoming less and less possible in South Africa, the Black Church had a particular responsibility not to be idle. Boesak put it succinctly and eloquently:

" The church must initiate and support meaningful pressure on the system as a non-violent way of bringing about change. The church must initiate and support programs of civil disobedience on a massive scale, and challenge especially white Christians on this issue. It no longer suffices to make statements condemning unjust laws and tomorrow obey those same laws as if nothing happened. The time has come for the black church to tell the Government and its own people: We cannot in good conscience obey your unjust laws, because non-co-operation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is co-operation with good. So we will teach our people what it means to obey God rather than man in South Africa." ³⁰

The Church, however, if it was going to follow this path, would have to prepare itself for greater suffering as the repressive and intolerant nature of the then government, would not allow this.

Boesak's address was to say the least, incisive, radical and prophetic. As the Botha regime perfected its Total Strategy through the National Security Management System and through Low Intensity Conflict, the Church as a body and individuals within it, increasingly became an object of repression and harassment on a personal and organisational level throughout the eighties. Church leaders and activists such as Tutu, Beyers Naude, Boesak, Thorne and many others, became targets for harassment and detention. The Eloff Commission into the affairs of the SACC, which started its work in 1982, was an attempt to attack the Church on an organisational level. Individuals in the Church as well as entire churches were targets for co-option, such as

³⁰ *ibid.*, p.47

Bishop Mokoena and the Transkei Methodist Church.³¹ Many Pentecostal Churches and the Dutch Reformed Church supported the government and apartheid as God-ordained. They were supported by individual local Churches in almost every major denomination who had broken away from their mother bodies to form new denominations.

The suffering and repression continued throughout the eighties in various and often lethal ways. This culminated in the bombing of Khotso house, the Johannesburg headquarters of the SACC in 1985 and the attempted murder of the then General Secretary, Frank Chikane through poisoning, in 1989 and the bombing of Khanya House, headquarters of the Catholics Bishops Conference in Pretoria..

What was most remarkable of Boesak's prophecy was his call for the Church to support and initiate programs of civil disobedience on a mass scale. This was again repeated by the Kairos Document in its call to action. It is clear that for the English-speaking churches, Boesak's call for the Black Church to involve itself in the liberation struggle and mass civil disobedience, was six years too early. However, it was in line with the strategic shifts, which were taking place within the liberation movements internally and externally at the time. Both the exiled ANC as well as the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), represented by the Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO) internally, had at that historical juncture, identified the primacy of political mobilisation of the masses of South Africans on the bases of bread and butter issues linked to National demands. The ANC was the first to review its strategy and tactics in 1978-1979

³¹ Bishop Mokoena was a former director of the Theological College for Independent Churches started by the SACC. The government through its security police recruited Bishop Mokoena as an informant

2.2.2 The ANC's Review of Strategy and Tactics: 1978-1979

In 1978 the ANC in exile set in motion a process of review of its strategy and tactics in the light of the changed circumstances post-1976, particularly the influx of young students into its camps for guerrilla training, which resulted in logistical, diplomatic, ideological and pedagogical problems for the ANC. An ANC delegation visited Vietnam in 1978 to study the Vietnamese revolutionary experience to see whether there were any lessons to be learnt from this. The National Executive Committee (NEC) and Revolutionary Council, after considering the delegation's report at a special meeting lasting from December 27, 1978, to January 1 1979, came to the following conclusion:

"the Vietnamese experience reveals certain shortcomings on our part and draws attention to areas of crucial importance which we tended to neglect." ³²

They found a golden thread of the strategic thinking of the Vietnamese Workers Party (VWP), consisting of many strands. A six-member Politico-Military Strategy Commission was selected to examine strategic options and make recommendations in the light of the Vietnamese experience. In its statement the meeting identified 12 significant conclusions or proposals. The first five were the most important:

- "(1) the elaboration of an overall strategy based on mass mobilisation.
- (2) the creation of the broadest national front for liberation.
- (3) the strengthening of the underground machinery by drawing into it activists thrown up in mass struggle.
- (4) the development of operations out of political activity, guided by the needs of political mobilisation and organisation.

and used him as a tool in an attempt to discredit the SACC locally and internationally.

³² In Karis, T.G. and Gehart G. M. (eds.), *From Protest to Challenge*, A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa: Volume 5. Nadir and Resurgence, 1964 - 1979, Unisa Press, Pretoria, 1997, p. 302

(5) the creation of a central organ to plan, co-ordinate and direct all activities inside the country." ³³

The first two conclusions coincided remarkably with what Boesak was suggesting the Black Church should be involved in. The final report produced by the six-member commission eventually became known as 'the Green Book' because of its green cover. In it Joe Slovo confirmed that the main task of the ANC at that point in time was "to concentrate on political mobilisation and organisation so as to build up political revolutionary bases throughout the country. The armed struggle was 'secondary'." ³⁴

Thus the ANC's review of strategy and tactics was seminal as it entered the 1980's with "a revitalised sense of the importance of the importance of above-ground mass mobilisation as a prerequisite for a 'people's war'." ³⁵ In this regard ANC sympathisers, some working independently and some in conjunction with Underground ANC networks, played a major role. Starting with local and decentralised organisations, they drew on the energy of the highly politicised post-Soweto youth generation and the organisational skills and experience of the young adults schooled by the Black Consciousness Movement of the early seventies. It was only in the eighties that these local efforts were to result in a myriad of national mass organisations such as the Congress of South African Students (COSAS) and others. These would eventually cohere to form the mass coalition, as envisioned by the Green Book, called the United Democratic Front in August 1983. ³⁶

Given the convergence of the thinking of Boesak and the ANC concerning the need for mass civil disobedience or political mobilisation at that historical juncture, it was not surprising therefore

³³ *ibid.*, p.303

³⁴ *ibid.*, p.304

³⁵ *ibid.*, p.305

³⁶ *ibid.*, p.305

that Boesak eventually played such a central role in the formation of the UDF, and its continuing struggle against apartheid, as patron.³⁷ In that single act of the formation of the UDF, the false dichotomy between the political and the religious, the sacred and the secular, which had so successfully been used by the South African government over the years to keep the Church out of the anti-apartheid struggle was dealt a fatal blow. The struggle had entered a new and exciting, but also more dangerous phase.

It is important however, not to present Boesak's role in the formation of the UDF as being a pawn of the ANC. As we shall see, this is far from the truth. Dr. Boesak's course towards the formation of the UDF was firmly rooted in his understanding of his Christian faith as expressed in Black Theology. The formation of the UDF can therefore also be seen as a logical outcome of the struggle of the Broederkring, which started way back in 1974 in bringing about unity within the Dutch Reformed Church family. This struggle naturally broadened out with Boesak at its helm, to include a struggle for the unity of the whole of South Africa. The statements and developments within the self-understanding of the Broederkring, the Alliance of Black Reformed Christians of South Africa (ABRECSA), other denominations in South Africa, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and Boesak's own denomination, the coloured Dutch Reformed Mission Church in rejecting apartheid as a sin and its theological justification as a heresy, bear witness to this fact.

There was an important interlude in this movement when in March 1980 the WCC organised a Consultation on Racism at Hammanskraal, to evaluate ten years of the work of the PCR in South Africa and to discuss how the churches could continue to be involved in combating racism in South African society in the eighties. The

³⁷ It is more than likely that Boesak must have been aware of ANC strategy at the time and its involvement in the setting up of the UDF.

consultation was attended by delegates from all the member churches of the SACC. Allan Boesak was also present. We will now look at the significance of this consultation for the Church struggle in South Africa, and Boesak's role therein.

2.2.3 World Council of Churches Consultation on Racism in South Africa

One of the major issues to emerge from the conference was the call for a Black Confessing Church by the black delegates present. The idea of such a Church arose out of the concern that the multiracial churches in South Africa were still practising racism in the following areas:

1. in their power structures
2. financial control
3. doctrinal emphasis ³⁸

Because of this the white Church was called upon to demonstrate their willingness to purge the Church of racism by repentance shown in concrete action within the following twelve months, failing which black Christians would have no alternative but to become a militant Black Confessing Church, i.e. a Church that would reject all structures and manifestations of racism evident in the present denominations. ³⁹ Some of these concrete actions to be taken were spelt out in the following recommendations:

1. All Church structures should demonstrate majority rule.
2. Ministers should not be appointed on the basis of race.

³⁸ Dr. B. Goba noted these points in his lecture on the final evening of the conference, in "Draft - Confidential Background Information " by Wolfram Kistner, 1980 pp. 4-5

³⁹ There was some concern over the use of the term 'militant'. This term, it was explained, was being used in its theological and not radical sense, namely that of a church on earth waging battles against the manifest evils of the world. This implied the preparedness to struggle for and suffer on behalf of the oppressed and to carry the cost of confessing justice.

3. Differences in ministers' stipends based on race should be abolished.
4. Churches should withdraw its ministers as marriage officers as this entrenched racism because the law restricted people of different colours from marrying.
5. Churches should not keep any record of racial classification of members, ministers, or congregations and should not take this into account when appointing ministers, areas of pastoral oversight etc.
6. Churches should consider not participating in broadcasting over the SABC because of its role as a racist propaganda machine. Churches should investigate alternative broadcasting facilities.
7. Churches should teach baptism and/or a confirmation candidate that racism is a sin and that loyalty to Christ takes precedence over any other loyalty, including race.
8. Churches should discipline members who persist in overt racist behaviour.
9. That a deputation should be sent to the Prime Minister over the whole question of education; that church schools be non-racial in their staffing and control and that bursaries be made available to admit deserving pupils from all sections of society.
10. Churches should jointly resist forced removals by taking the necessary non-violent action to express solidarity with the affected communities.

Other important recommendations the conference took were:

1. that the churches should call a National Convention on their own as the government had failed to do this, despite calls from a wide spectrum of South African society.
2. Affirmation of its support for the Programme to Combat Racism (PCR) despite criticism of certain aspects, and called upon the WCC to mediate between, and care for those outside the country who opposed the system in South Africa.

There is no doubt that the above recommendations of the conference were all crucial for the continuation of the Church struggle in South Africa. However, what was probably more significant for the Church struggle as well as the struggle in general in the long run, was the difference of opinion which emerged between black delegates as to what constituted 'blackness', during the debate on the resolution of the Black Confessing Church taken by the black delegates.

Two schools of thought emerged, one of which was represented by Allan Boesak. He argued that "blackness was not related to skin colour, but depended on the individual's attitude towards oppression and suffering that were caused by racism."⁴⁰ Therefore, in his view, blacks who had become part of the apartheid structures and were in turn oppressing other blacks was not truly black. He referred to Paul's reference to Jews who were only outwardly circumcised to illustrate his point theologically. On the other hand there were some whites who had identified with the struggle for liberation, had made sacrifices in its cause, and had suffered ostracism and harassment because of their stand against racism, who could be regarded as blacks.

According to the other view 'blackness' was constituted solely by the colour of one's skin as it was only such people who had experienced racism. White Christians could not share in the suffering of black Christians because they had not experienced it because of their privileged position in society.

Because of this disagreement, Dr. Bonganjalo Goba proposed that the debate be adjourned so that those who were ethnically black could debate the issue among themselves. This was agreed to and by the next morning the black delegates had presented a statement to the

⁴⁰ Christian Leader, March 1980, p. 5

plenary, which was subsequently adopted and endorsed by all present. However, there was nothing in this statement to suggest that the debate had been resolved.

This was the first time that the subtle ideological differences between blacks had emerged within the nascent Black Caucus of the Ecumenical Church in such a public and dramatic way. The Black Caucus could never be the same again as the differences in perspective were to play themselves out in terms of political affiliation outside of the Church, as well as in theological perspective within it. The debate could be seen as marking a split within the Black Consciousness camp between those who would later be called non-racialists versus 'true' BC adherents. Both groups claimed to be the true heirs of Steve Biko's understanding of Black Consciousness.

The non-racialists would eventually follow Boesak into the non-racial UDF and later the ANC and adopt the colour-blind Latin American Liberation Theology. The hard-line BC adherents were either already members or supporters of the existing BC organisation AZAPO, or would eventually join or support it, the NF or the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC). Theologically they sought to further the struggle within the Black Theology Project of the Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT), and/or the Journal of Black Theology or in theological faculties of Universities.

In all of this Allan Boesak had once again played a pivotal role. His understanding of his faith, his particular understanding of 'blackness' and the role of the Black Church in the struggle were however to lead him to on to greater heights such as, the declaration of apartheid as a heresy, and its theological justification a sin, and the formation of the UDF. We shall now examine Boesak's role in both of these events.

2.2.4 The History of a Heresy

The apartheid is a heresy debate was not a new one invented by the Broederkring or Allan Boesak. The first definitive statement condemning apartheid as incommensurate with the Gospel and hence needing to be disobeyed had already been made in 1968 in The Message to the People of South Africa drawn up jointly by the SACC and the Christian Institute. Other statements by individual churches had followed such as the declaration of Faith by the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa (PCSA) in 1973 and the Lutheran World Federation Statement in 1977 in which it declared that the situation in South Africa constituted a *status confessionis*. This meant that, "on the basis of faith and in order to manifest the unity of the Church, churches would publicly and unequivocally reject the existing apartheid system." ⁴¹

The problem of course was not in the theological and political correctness of the statements thus far, but rather in the implementation of the "obligation to live in accordance with the Christian understanding of man and community, even if this be contrary to some of the customs and laws of this country...", ⁴² as stated in The Message to the People of South Africa. In other words, civil disobedience. The institutional churches and the SACC were still by and large white led, and lacked the theological commitment and political will to give substance to the practical implications of their theological commitment.

One exception was the Christian Institute (CI), but it was unfortunately not representative by any means of the Ecumenical Church in South Africa. Its banning may have even spurred the white

⁴¹ Lutheran World Federation, South Africa: Confessional Integrity, statement issued at the sixth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation at Dar-Es Salaam in June 1977", in DeGruchy J.W. and Villa-Vicencio C. (Eds.) Apartheid is a Heresy, David Phillip, Cape Town, 1983, p. 161

⁴² *ibid.*, p.159

leadership and members of the Church further into their cocoons. It is therefore not surprising that since the uprising of 1976 and the massive crackdown of 1977, more and more black caucuses came into existence in the different denominations as well as in the SACC itself. Black leadership itself began to replace whites within the denominations as well as in the SACC. The rise of Allan Boesak and Desmond Tutu as spokespersons for the Ecumenical Church and the black oppressed masses as a whole must be seen in this context. Their message placed an increasing emphasis not just on the heretical and sinful nature of apartheid but also the need to actively disobey and oppose it by non-violent actions.

Thus it was that in 1979 the "Broederkring" at its annual convention issued the following theological declaration as a confessional basis for the struggle, in which the fundamental principles of a theology of liberation was espoused:

1. God is a righteous God who therefore stands on the side of those who are victims of injustice.
2. Through Jesus Christ God breaks the power of injustice and by his Spirit he makes it possible for people to again live in obedience to his Word.
3. This new people that God has liberated from oppressive powers now have the responsibility to live in unity as one body of Christ, to stand where God stands against injustice and with those who are denied justice and to constantly search after the truth of God's Word in order to fulfil this task. This was especially true because the Church owed greater allegiance to Christ than to human governments, power or ideologies.
4. In the South African situation this meant that the Church of Jesus Christ should undauntingly persevere to establish God's justice. This may bring it into conflict with the human authorities, which could result in suffering. In this case the Church had to know that this was the way of God's people through history and that Christ's

Word remained in force: " I will never leave you or forsake you."
(Heb. 13:5) ⁴³

Boesak, almost as if in response to his own prophetic words about the looming State-Church confrontation in his address on The Black Church and the Future, took on the Minister of Justice, The Honourable, A. Schlebusch in an open letter dated 24 August 1979. The issue was the sharp criticism, which the minister had made in the press, on radio and television, of the SACC resolution on civil disobedience made at the conference. This resolution was a direct response to the call that Boesak had made in his address for the Church to 'initiate and support actions of civil disobedience on a massive scale.' ⁴⁴ The SACC resolution read as follows:

" Recognising the great suffering resulting from the policy of separate development, and confessing that this suffering has been greatly increased by the churches' failure to act in the past, this Conference:

- believes that the South African churches are obliged to withdraw as far as that is possible, from co-operation with the State in all those areas in the ordering of our society where the law violates the justice of God;
- calls upon all Christian people to examine their lives and seek to identify the ways in which each one reinforces the policy and props up the system;
- commends the work of the Division of Justice and reconciliation and requests it to continue this work by examining the strategies of resistance." ⁴⁵

The resolution, although less strident in tone than Boesak's address, did nevertheless unequivocally lay the foundations in principle for civil disobedience, which was enough to evoke the ire of the government, particularly the Minister of Justice. Boesak, ostensibly in his personal capacity, in much the same vein as Desmond Tutu did in predicting

⁴³ 'Theological Declaration: "Broederkring" of the Dutch Reformed Churches in South Africa (1979)' in Hans Georg Link (ed.) Confessing our Faith around the World II, Faith and Order Paper No. 120, World Council of Churches, Geneva (ISBN 2-8254-0789), p. 2

⁴⁴ op. cit., 'The Black Church and the Future', p. 47

⁴⁵ "Resolutions of the SACC National Conference, 1979", in The Church and the Alternative Society, op.cit., p.74-75

the June 16 1976 uprising, took it upon himself to engage the minister and give him a lesson in Christian liberation theology and the proper role of the Church in society, particularly an unjust one. Boesak exposed the hypocritical nature of the age-old South African apartheid government's warning, issued by Schlebusch that pastors and churches should keep out of politics.

Given the history of the Afrikaner people and the Dutch Reformed Church's involvement in the creation of apartheid, the only conclusion that Boesak could come to was that what the Government really objected to was not Christians participating in politics as such but rather that they were participating in politics which was opposed to them.

Boesak, drawing on the Biblical figures of Daniel and his three friends; Peter and John before the Sanhedrin; Paul before the Roman judge and Jesus himself before Herod and Pilate, clearly and powerfully demonstrated Reformed theology's belief that blind obedience to civil authorities was alien to the Bible and that for a Christian, 'loyalty and obedience is first and foremost to God.'⁴⁶ This view was supported by Church fathers such St. Augustine who had said that a worldly government without justice was nothing but a bunch of plunderers.

Reformers such as Calvin also stated clearly that Christians should resist 'worldly princes' when they (the princes) rise up against God. The apartheid laws were unjust and as such were rightly condemned by the churches over the years as out of keeping with the Gospel. It was only logical therefore, that the next step for the churches was to disobey these laws. This was not a recipe for violence but precisely an attempt to avoid it. Boesak called on the government to make a choice

⁴⁶ Boesak, A. " A Letter to the South African Minister of Justice" in Boesak, A. Walking on Thorns: The call to Christian Obedience, World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1984, p. 62

between the demon in Revelations 13 and the servant of God in Romans 13 and to stop their disastrous policies before it was too late. Unfortunately this warning, as with Tutu's earlier, was not heeded and the government continued into the eighties on its disastrous course.

Boesak's letter is another classical and prophetic exposition of Black and Liberation Theology. Many of the themes were taken up later and expanded on by the Call to Prayer and the Kairos Document of 1985. e.g. comparing the government to the demon of Revelations 13 or the servant of God of Romans 13; the solid biblical foundations for civil disobedience in the case of an unjust state.⁴⁷ With this letter, Boesak gave notice to the government, the ecumenical movement and the world that he was prepared to take on the mantle as a prophet of the Ecumenical Church, against injustice and the heresy of apartheid alongside other Church leaders such as Thorne and Tutu.

In October 1981, the Alliance of Black Reformed Christians in South Africa (ABRECSA) was founded with Boesak at the helm. This was a new ecumenical body, which went one step further than the Broederkring on the road to Church unity, by opening up membership to all denominations of the Reformed persuasion. The aim of this was to promote the unity of these churches and strengthen their prophetic witness in the context of the struggle for a just society in South Africa.⁴⁸ These churches included the UCCSA and the Presbyterian family of churches.

In their founding Charter, they unequivocally declared that "apartheid is a sin, and that the moral and theological justification of it is a travesty of the Gospel, a betrayal of the Reformed tradition, and a

⁴⁷ St Augustine's famous words about an unjust government, became the slogan of a poster in late 1989, showing South African church leaders as they were confronted by police in a march to parliament, being led by none other than Desmond Tutu and Allan Boesak.

⁴⁸ The Broederkring was only open to members of the Dutch Reformed family of Churches.

heresy." ⁴⁹ One of their aims was therefore to promote the understanding among the Reformed churches that involvement in the struggle for liberation was an act of obedience and a theological necessity. At this conference, ABRECSA also made what was to become an historically pivotal decision to petition the World Alliance of Reformed Christians (WARC) to move from statements and declarations condemning apartheid to " a programme of action based on the rejection of apartheid on theological grounds contained in the previous statements." ⁵⁰ , and "to understand that the initiative for change in South Africa had now passed into black hands." ⁵¹

The declaration of ABRECSA as well as the resolutions taken at its founding conference were to form the basis of the South African black delegation's case in getting the WARC to take a stronger stand on apartheid and to suspend the membership of the two white Dutch Reformed churches of South Africa, at their conference in Ottawa Canada in August, 1982. The ABRECSA declaration, together with the subsequent WARC resolution and election of Allan Boesak as its new President, were to act as a catalyst for a spate of churches and ecumenical bodies in South Africa declaring apartheid "sinful" and its theological justification a heresy in 1982. First in July of 1982 came the SACC resolution.

The UCCSA at its Assembly in September 1982, endorsed the decision of ABRECSA taken in 1981 to suspend dialogue with the Dutch Reformed Churches until they had declared apartheid "sinful" and confessed their complicity in the suffering and oppression of the black people. In so doing the UCCSA aligned itself with ABRECSA's decision to declare apartheid sinful and its theological justification a heresy.

⁴⁹ ABRECSA Charter, in *Apartheid is a Heresy*, p. 162

⁵⁰ ABRECSA Conference Resolutions, *ibid.*, p. 167

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 168

The Methodist Church declared that "Apartheid is not simply a socio-political policy, but a sinful contradiction of the Gospel which cannot be justified on biblical or theological grounds and is, therefore, an ideology which the Methodist Church rejects as heresy." ⁵² The Methodists went further by calling for recommendations for further action to be made by its Justice and Reconciliation and Ecumenical Affairs Committees to the Conference of 1983. In similar vein, the Church of the Province of South Africa (Anglicans) added their voice through the following resolution "...this Synod resolves that Apartheid is totally UN-Christian, evil and a heresy." ⁵³

Last but not least, the Dutch Reformed Mission Church of which Boesak had also become assessor at their synod after Ottawa, took the strongest stand possible of all the denominations in South Africa. At a synod, in which the grip of the conservative faction led by Ds. Sakkie Mentoor was effectively challenged and finally broken by the progressive faction led by Boesak, the DRC Mission Church (coloured branch) declared apartheid a sin, its theological justification a mockery of the Gospel and its consistent disobedience to the Word of God a theological heresy. It went still further by declaring that because the secular Gospel of apartheid threatened the witness of Jesus Christ in the deepest possible way as well as the unity of the Church of Jesus Christ in its very essence, this constituted a *status confessionis* for the Church of Jesus Christ. i.e. the matter was so serious that it was impossible to differ on it without it seriously affecting the integrity of the communal confession of the Reformed Churches.

In all of this Boesak's role is unmistakable. He helped to move the churches to the point of declaring apartheid a heresy and mobilising them for civil disobedience. He started where he was at within the

⁵² *ibid.* p. 183

⁵³ *ibid.* p. 184

DRC family through the Broederkring, to the Reformed family through ABRECSA, to the wider Ecumenical Church through the SACC. Ultimately onto the world stage through the WARC and then back to his own Mission Church as Moderator. As such he helped deal a severe blow to the reformist designs of the Botha regime to woo the coloured people, because of the *coup de gras* which he had helped bring about in the coloured Dutch Reformed Mission Church, thus consolidating the gains made in the coloured community by the 1980 coloured school boycotts. The final blow however, was still to come in the conceptualisation and formation of the United Democratic Front in August 1983, with Boesak as one of its patrons.

2.2.5 The Formation of the United Democratic Front

The formation of the UDF was a logical conclusion to Boesak's Theology of Liberation. If apartheid was a heresy and the situation was one of *a status confessionis* for the Church of Jesus Christ, then it followed that the only thing left for a Christian and the Christian Church to do was to actively engage in the struggle for liberation with all other groups who were similarly engaged. Thus Boesak's call on January 23, 1983 at the Anti- South African Indian Council's (Anti-SAIC) conference in Johannesburg for a United Front of anti-apartheid organisations to oppose the constitutional proposals of P.W. Botha and to fight for a truly non-racial, democratic and undivided South Africa as the only dignified response that blacks could make to the situation, was perfectly consistent with his theology. By taking this logical leap from what might have been perceived by the government, as well as conservative Christians within the churches as mixing politics with religion, Boesak was freeing up churches and Christians and indeed people from other religious communities as well, to join

the struggle for liberation as an imperative of their faith.⁵⁴ He summed it up thus:

"Most of the Christian churches, and all of the democratically-minded organisations in our communities, have rejected unequivocally the proposals of the President's Council and the call to co-operate in their implementation. We are all committed to the struggle for a non-racist, open democratic South Africa, a unitary state, one nation in which all citizens will have the rights accorded them by ordinance of almighty God. There is no reason why churches, civic associations, trade unions, student organisations, and sports bodies should not unite on this issue, pool our resources, and inform the people of the fraud that is about to be perpetrated in its name, and on the day of the election expose these plans for what they are."⁵⁵

The formation of the UDF proceeded remarkably quickly from this point and on August 20, 1983, at the Rocklands Civic Centre, Mitchell's Plain, Boesak delivered an inspired inaugural address and was elected as one of its first patrons. Although the UDF was formed specifically to oppose the Botha regime's Constitutional proposals for a Tricameral Parliament from which blacks would be excluded, it was also opposed to apartheid oppression in general and sought to fight for a united, non-racial, non-sexist and democratic South Africa. For Boesak, the UDF was a logical outcome of the Gospel in South Africa and was something the Church should be involved in without question. In this sense, the UDF could be seen as having been the broadest possible expression of ecumenism that the Ecumenical Church and Christians could have been involved in because of its inclusion of the broadest religious, ethnic, cultural, socio-economic and political groupings imaginable in South Africa at the time.

⁵⁴ Faried Essack in an interview on the Radio Voice of the Cape on his book, "Qu'ran, Liberation and Pluralism: an Islamic perspective on interreligious solidarity against oppression", stated that one thing he is grateful to Christian liberation theologians for, such as Boesak, is that they taught Muslims in the struggle how to develop a 'Muslim' theology of liberation based on the Koran. His book is an attempt to document these experiences.

⁵⁵ "The Present Crisis in Apartheid" in *Black and Reformed*, p. 128

We have also seen that the UDF also happened to be the culmination of the exiled ANC's political vision of a broad, mass-based anti-apartheid front as envisaged in the "Green-Book" in 1979. As to who can claim the greater credit for the formation of the UDF, the Ecumenical Church through its activists such as Allan Boesak or the ANC underground, or both is not clear or even important. What is patently clear and of more importance is that the groundwork had been laid for the Church and religious people of all persuasions to get involved in the struggle as an imperative of their faith from that point onward.

This was to constitute the single-most important challenge to the Church and the State in the years, which lay ahead. It was clear that if the Ecumenical Church could succeed in mobilising ordinary Christians to join the struggle as Christians, *en masse*, that this would toll the death-knells of apartheid, not only as a socio-political and economic system but also as a pseudo-religious ideology. This is exactly what the UDF did in the ensuing years with qualified success.

The SACC never formally joined the UDF and only its two largest and more militant regions, the Western Province Council of Churches (WPCC) and the Witwatersrand Council of Churches (WCC) saw it fit to take out membership. It is not surprising therefore that these two regions were the wombs out of which two of the most far-reaching documents in the Church struggle were born, namely the Call to Prayer for an End to Unjust Rule and the Kairos Document respectively. The first arose out of yet another call made by Boesak at the SACC Conference of 1984; the second out of the crucible of struggle between black and white Christians in the cauldron of the black township of Soweto and other townships on the Witwatersrand.

For Boesak, these struggles reached an apex when he was detained for two weeks after calling for a protest march to Pollsmoor prison in

August 1985, to demand the release of Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners. The march, as stated above, was repressed by the brute force of the police and army. What it did unleash however, was a storm of protest from churches, locally and internationally as well as a state of insurrection in the streets of the coloured township Athlone on the Cape Flats.

The community was incensed by the arrest of Boesak and the other priests who had led the march in his absence, as well as the brutal treatment meted out to those priests and lay people who had attempted to continue the march. The State had touched a raw nerve of the coloured people, namely the Church and its priests, who enjoyed great respect in the community and who had always played a central role in the life of the community. Soon most of the Cape flats townships were up in arms and up in flames. The troops were sent into Belgravia to stem the tide but the die had been cast. There was now no turning back for coloured communities in the Western Cape and elsewhere.

The community came out in support of Boesak and the UDF. Schools were boycotted and some coloured schools did not write examinations at the end of that year, including most black students at the University of Cape Town (UCT) and virtually all students at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), the two main universities catering for black students in Cape Town. The struggle had certainly intensified, the ANC and PAC had stepped up their armed campaign in support of the popular struggles of the people. This was also the time that many coloured underground Umkhonto We Sizwe units were established in the Western Cape. The State responded with a two States of Emergency, the second lasting until 1990, when it was finally lifted by F.W. De Klerk in his historic speech in which the release of Nelson Mandela was also announced.

2.2.6 Conclusion

Boesak had been central and pivotal in all of these events. He had helped to move the Ecumenical Church in the decade since 1976 from a critical acceptance of the legitimacy of the South African State, and a rejection of its policy of apartheid, to an unequivocal rejection of the very legitimacy of that State and all it stood for on political, moral, biblical and theological grounds. This he achieved through the WARC rejection of apartheid as a sin and its theological justification as a heresy as well "The Call to Prayer to End Unjust Rule". This was further consolidated in 1985 by the Kairos Document. Not only had he spoken and written, but also mobilised civil disobedience to the apartheid State, not only of the Church but also of the broadest cross section of South African society through the UDF. In the final Chapter we will take a closer look at the two documents, the Call to Prayer (in which he had a direct hand) and the Kairos Document (in which his role was more indirect) and their implications for the role of the Ecumenical Church in the Struggle.

CHAPTER THREE: FROM PROTEST TO CHALLENGE - THE BEGINNING OF THE END

June 16, 1985: a personal experience

"The residents came from the streets, lanes, highways, and hedges of South Africa to pray on 16 June 1985. Residents across this vast, resource rich, beautiful country continue to be active in the struggle to make an end to unjust rule a reality. The Day of Victory will be the ultimate answer to the 16 June 1985 petitions to our God." ¹

This is how Lionel Louw, a coloured minister of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church and chairperson of the WPCC at the time, described the 9th anniversary commemoration of the Soweto uprising on 16 June 1985. One of those services that Louw was referring to was the one at the AME Church in Hazendal Athlone, where Boesak himself preached, and which Louw himself attended. I attended this service with my friends Charles and Johannes.

The atmosphere in the community was tense. There was an air of expectancy that anything could happen as the government had already expressed its dissatisfaction with the idea of South Africans being called upon to pray for its downfall. We expected the government to clampdown on the services with a show of unprecedented force. We accepted the risk that we might be arrested at the service. But yet we went and yet they came in their numbers, people from all over the Peninsula. There were Church leaders; ordinary Church members; Church-based activists; political, community and trade union organisations; women and youth; young children; priests too numerous to mention; white, african, coloured and indian. The police were there too in plainclothes and uniform, in

¹ Louw, L.R. "From Streets, Lanes, Highways, and Hedges...They Came" in Boesak, A. & Villa-Vicencio, C. (eds.) A Call For An End To Unjust Rule, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Westminster Press, 1986

casspirs and vans and ordinary police vehicles. I wondered what they were planning to do as we approached the church.

The service went off without incident. Boesak was at his eloquent best. The atmosphere was electric and we went out of there feeling rejuvenated and strengthened to continue the struggle "In the Name of Jesus", the theme of Boesak's message. There was no cataclysmic event. The apocalypse did not take place as we had half-expected. There were no arrests or any other action from the police. For some or other reason they had let that service go ahead unhindered and kept a low profile that day. We had lived to see another day. What was clear though is that the Church could not be the same again.

No longer could the Church sit on the sidelines and watch as Christian policemen beat up Christian children men and women fighting for freedom. The challenge laid down by Boesak was not only to the authorities but equally to the Church. Already in the run up to the Day of Prayer serious differences within the Ecumenical Church vis-à-vis support for the Call had come to the fore. These were critical times for the Church and the State. It was the beginning of the end for the apartheid State. It was the end of political naiveté for the Church and the beginning of active engagement in struggle.

C. Resistance: 1984 - 1986

Jeremy Seekings in his book, Quiescence and Resistance, African Resistance to apartheid, described the period from 1984 as the beginning of another period of open resistance to apartheid in African townships, after a relatively quiet period of what he calls quiescence since the clampdown on BC organisations in 1977. This phenomenon can in no small measure be attributed to the arrival on the political scene of the

UDF with its emphasis on grassroots organisation and participation in the struggle, based on bread and butter issues and the co-ordination of these myriad of struggles into a united national assault against apartheid.

The UDF's immediate objectives were however, the opposition to the Tricameral Parliament and the Koornhof Bills. Its first national campaign was the million-signature campaign to unite opposition against the Tricameral Parliament. In the townships, however, one of the immediate problems was the puppet community councils, which were being foisted onto the african community. One of the first things these councils did in the Vaal triangle townships was to increase rents. Given a situation of high unemployment and 32% interest rates, it was a recipe for disaster. The Vaal Triangle townships embarked on widespread rent boycotts and attracted the brutal and unfavourable attention of the police and army.

By the time of the elections for the coloured and indian houses of the Tricameral Parliament in August 1984, over a million students were out on class boycotts. This number exceeded that of 1976 and 1980. There was countrywide opposition to the Tricameral elections within the coloured and indian communities often ending up in violence, beatings, detentions of leaders and mass arrests. The insurrection had begun and there was no sign of it abating, despite State repression. The students and communities were better organised, resourceful and strategic than ever before and made tactical retreats when necessary. There was a new determination in the air to fight until apartheid had been finally overthrown. This was a fight to the finish encapsulated in the slogan of the Congress of South African Students' (COSAS) "Freedom or Death, Victory is Certain"

In September of 1984 the Vaal Triangle communities called for a three-day stayaway from work which was wildly successful and elicited harsh government response with the usual bannings and detentions of leaders, and attributing it to a few agitators. At the end of this the Government arrested and charged almost the entire executive of the Transvaal Region of the UDF for High Treason. This trial was to continue for several years before all the accused were acquitted, but not without seriously hampering the work of the UDF in the old Transvaal province.

In March the UDF, after its first annual conference, announced a new phase in protest action which amounted to a civil disobedience campaign. They were going to implement what Boesak had first called for the Churches to do in 1979. The forthcoming New Zealand Rugby tour of South Africa was to be the first target. Other resolutions passed by the conference were on foreign investment, which just stopped short of calling for disinvestment, as well as a commitment to build a closer relationship with trade unions. They reiterated their commitment to non-violent action. Patrick Lekota, Publicity Secretary for a second term of office nevertheless held out the hope that there was still time for the government to consult with the authentic leaders of the black people with the aim of dismantling apartheid and 'transferring power to the people'.

However, this hand of friendship did not preclude more mass action. Press statements were not enough. They were going to be backed up by action. This action, in particular the protest against the rugby tour was destined to bring the UDF into more conflict with the authorities and hence increased violence, as it inevitably meant the contravention of the Internal Security Act, which prohibited protest gatherings.

With a number of its leaders arrested, the work of the UDF was seriously hampered, but fortunately there was an able second tier leadership, which was as determined as the first and prepared to step into the breach. Despite these setbacks, the insurrection intensified and the concomitant state action against leaders and increasingly just about everyone who could be perceived to be a potential threat to the State and 'Law and Order'. On March 21 1985, a peaceful protest march by members of the Uitenhage black community to protest rent increases as well as commemorate Sharpeville Day, resulted in a similar massacre to Sharpeville 1961, with 19 people being killed by police's live ammunition.

An inquest revealed that most of the people had been shot whilst fleeing as they had wounds in their backs. The incident unleashed a storm of local and international protest, with the SACC taking up the cudgels by means of a march to parliament on 26 March from the Methodist Church in Buitenkant street, Cape Town. The march was led by the new secretary general of the SACC, Dr. Beyers Naude, Dr. Allan Boesak, a minister from Uitenhage, Reverend Abel Hendricks, former president of the Methodist Church and about 250 other people.

Everyone was arrested and taken to Caledon Square Police Station. The Western Province Council of Churches assisted with legal aid and other help. Fifty people appeared in court on March 27 and the rest over the following two days. The case was remanded until June 3. The incident immediately attracted media attention and was the first item on SABC television and radio news that night as well as the lead story of all local newspapers the next morning. The demands, which the 250-odd marchers wanted to take to parliament, were the following:

"We wish to salute the people of the Eastern Cape for their bravery and courage in as direct a manner as possible. We say loudly clearly that we do not believe the Police or the Minister of Law and Order, Minister Louis Le Grange, when they give us their version of the tragic events in Uitenhage on March 21. Overwhelming evidence shows that people marching between Langa and kwaNobuhle were not armed with rocks and petrol bombs. Nor were they about to attack the white suburb of Uitenhage as the SABC TV claimed. We do not believe that the police fired in self-defence. We demonstrate our continued commitment to a process of peaceful change in South Africa, and rededicate ourselves to a non-racial and democratic future. We restate the demands of the people of Uitenhage as explained to us by them:

'Police and SADF to stay out of black townships, especially during funerals and vigils; the right of people to hold funerals when they choose, and without interference from the police; the Government must speak to the leaders chosen by the people and not to Government chosen community councils; the community council system must be abolished, and, finally, we demand full citizenship for all the people of South Africa, equal participation of all in the central Government and freedom from economic exploitation.' " ²

Botha's regime continued its policy of reform and repression, as can be seen in his holding out the olive branch to jailed ANC leader Nelson Mandela, when in a speech to parliament in February, offered to free Mandela, provided he foreswore violence. Mandela rejected this offer in the now famous speech read out to a packed Jabulani amphitheatre on 10th February 1985 by his daughter Zinzi, scuppering any hope of an early resolution of the South African conflict. However, the undoubted import of this move by Botha cannot be lost, because it represented the first time that a National Party government publicly recognised the ANC as a political reality on the South African scene without whom there could be no resolution to the conflict.

² Ecunews, March /April, 1985, p. 2

In another move designed to 'win the hearts and minds' of the oppressed majority, Botha attended and addressed the annual Easter gathering at Moria in the Northern Transvaal of the Zion Christian Church, an African Independent Church which boasted a membership of over 6 million. Black organisations and the black community were not impressed by this blatant political opportunism.

A month later, the government scrapped the Mixed Marriages Act and Section 16 of the Immorality Act, two laws that the SACC had consistently campaigned against and asked its member churches not to implement. However, this move turned out to be meaningless since, as Minister F. W. De Klerk put it in parliament, apartheid in the political, residential and educational spheres would remain unaltered. The anomalous situation existed where a mixed couple might have to vote for representatives in different houses of parliament and their children when grown, possibly for a third. Whites who found themselves in such marriages would lose their right to vote in municipal elections. Children would have to attend schools in the groups they had been classified but if there were problems they could apply for permits to attend schools of other race groups. Whites would lose their 'white status' and have to live in the group area of their husband or wife, though they could apply for a permit to live in a white area. Were such a permit to be granted, they would not be allowed to own property in such an area. If public amenities, which were not open to all races, were to be used, then permits would have to be applied for. It was little wonder then that prominent black and white political, Church and community leaders stressed that the scrapping of the laws were in fact meaningless.

Before the June Conference of the SACC the country learnt via the media, of the brutal murder of four UDF and Cradock community leaders on the road between Cradock and Port Elizabeth. The bodies of the four

men, Matthew Goniwe, Fort Calata, Sparrow Mkhonto and Sicelo Mchlauli, were found in the bushes near New Brighton Beach. They had been stabbed and burnt out. Their burnt out car was found nearby. The feeling amongst activists was that it could only have been the work of the security forces as the men had told some of their comrades in Port Elizabeth that they would only stop for the police or army. Government and police denials came in fast and furious. Police blamed the killings on internecine violence between Azapo and the UDF. It has only recently come to light post-1990, that indeed the real killers were the State and its death squads.

The killings incensed the nation and protests were held all over the country. As opposed to dampening the spirit of the people it only served to inflame it further. Students came out on boycott in the Western Cape and soon the Cape and other places around the country were burning once again. The funeral of the four in Cradock turned out to be one of the largest this country had ever seen and was addressed by Church leaders such as Allan Boesak and Beyers Naude among others. ³ Busses carried mourners from all over the country in their droves. It was also at this funeral that the clergy were alleged to have marched under the flag of the South African Communist Party. This only served to support the South African Government's Total Onslaught theory, which it had long been propagating against the SACC and more recently, the UDF. This, as well as the much publicised first necklace murder of an alleged informer at Sebokeng on the East Rand, became part of the pretext for the declaration of the second State of Emergency in the country's history, the first having been in 1961 when the ANC and PAC were banned.

³ By this time Dr. Naude had been unbanned and had been elected as General Secretary of the SACC after Tutu had left to take up the position of Bishop of Johannesburg.

With the necklace killings, it was clear that the struggle had catapulted onto another level, namely the retaliatory violence from the people to the oppressive violence they were experiencing daily at the hands of the army and police. It was at this time too that the ANC announced its strategy of a 'People's War', to counteract the violence of the State. Part of the strategy of the ANC was to make the townships 'ungovernable' and to declare 'liberated' zones. In no time many townships across the length and breadth of the country, rural and urban were establishing street, area and zone committees. The Low Intensity Civil War had begun in earnest and, as could be expected, the casualties grew.

The challenge to the Church was therefore more acute than ever. For ordinary people on the ground in the townships, the concepts of love, reconciliation, forgiveness, and non-violence were becoming increasingly obsolete, as Boesak had predicted in 1979. The Church was once again in danger of being left behind by the people in their quest for freedom. It had to face the challenge head-on and come up with a meaningful faith response for the people, especially the young people.

The responses did come but not initially from the Church hierarchies and institutions, but rather from smaller Christian groups and individuals in different parts of the country who could no longer countenance the seeming helplessness of the Ecumenical Church in this situation of conflict. One of these responses was the "Call to Prayer for an End to Unjust Rule" initiated by Dr. Allan Boesak and taken up by the WPCC from amidst the cauldron of the coloured townships on the Cape Flats. Another response came in the form of the Kairos Document, initiated by a group of ministers and clergy in the strife torn township of Soweto, Johannesburg.

Both documents were controversial. Both succeeded in responding to the need of oppressed people of faith, suffering at the hands of unprecedented State violence and brutality, for a message of hope from God's Word and His Church. Both constituted a fundamental challenge not only to the State but to the Church as well. We shall examine briefly both these seminal contributions to the Church struggle against apartheid in South Africa.

3.1 June 16, 1985 - A Call to Prayer for an End to Unjust Rule

Since June 16, 1977, the Soweto uprising had been commemorated with Church services and vigils and political mass rallies where these were countenanced by the State. The day became symbolic of the fight for liberation by the black people of South Africa from apartheid and exploitation. On that day, which over time was observed as an unofficial holiday for black people, those who had been killed in 1976 in the cause of freedom were remembered. It was also a day on which blacks were called upon to recommit themselves to the struggle for liberation in this country. The remarkable thing about this day is that it succeeded in uniting blacks in the anti-apartheid camp, albeit once a year, across ideological persuasions, from the ultra-leftist Unity Movement to Black Consciousness and Africanist groupings, to the non-racial Charterist UDF.⁴

Over the previous nine years, the day hardly ever passed by without incident. Meetings were often banned or broken up by teargas and rubber bullets resulting in injuries and deaths. There was often stay-aways and boycotts as well. The Ecumenical Church recognised the important symbolic and religious significance of this day. It is therefore

⁴ Charterist was the name given to political groupings that adhered to the Freedom Charter of the ANC as their political manifesto.

not surprising that the SACC took its first official stance on June 16 in 1982. It passed a resolution calling for June 16 to be seen as a National day of Prayer and for its member churches to make their buildings available for such a purpose.

By June 1984, the UDF had been in existence for almost a year and the campaign against the Tricameral Parliament elections scheduled for August of that year had reached a crescendo in coloured and indian townships. In certain african townships on the East Rand and in Cradock in the Eastern Cape, the parallel struggles against dummy community councils, rent increases and bus-fare hikes, had mobilised those communities into unprecedented organised action. The government had responded with its characteristic brute force and troops occupied many a township. Many in the church and society were saying that the border had come to the townships. The Low Intensity Civil War had begun and was not going to end until the then regime had been removed from power.

It was in this climate that Dr. Allan Boesak first made the call at the SACC Conference of June 1984, for a National Day of Prayer for the Downfall of the Government in South Africa. This call, as could be expected, made massive waves within the SACC between some elements in the liberal English-speaking churches and the majority of black delegates. A compromise solution was reached whereby the call was softened to a National Day of Prayer for the Abolition of 'Apartheid' structures to be made on 19 December 1984.

However, this controversy was not going to be swept under the carpet that easily. By March 1985, the more radical Western Province Council of Churches (WPCC), under the leadership of the Reverend Lionel Louw and with the support of Dr. Allan Boesak, reissued the call under a new title,

namely, A Call to Prayer for an End to Unjust Rule. They also produced a Theological Rationale for the Call to Prayer. According to Professor Charles Villa-Vicencio, this document had been commissioned by the WPCC and had been thoroughly and extensively researched over a period of a few months, drawing comment from a wide range of people from every part of the country.⁵ It could not therefore be attributed to Dr. Boesak alone, as the liberal English Speaking press as well as the conservative Afrikaans and English press, tried to insinuate at the time. Certain white Church leaders who were opposed to the call also used the liberal press to air their views before taking it to the Council. This was unacceptable to Boesak and the WPCC. They insisted on a fair hearing within the Council.

As a result the Rationale and The Call was placed before the SACC executive committee in April 1985 for adoption as a Challenge to the Churches. The Executive did not adopt it as a statement of the SACC but did recommend it to Regional Councils as a useful document to be used at June 16 services. What was clear is that the executive did support the idea that the focus of prayer for June 16 of that year was to pray for the end of unjust rule. In this regard they even encouraged their Regional Councils and member churches to organise services. It is in this context that the service of Hazendal was organised.

The press played a huge role in reporting on the Call and displayed biases across the political spectrum. We will now analyse in more detail the response of the press.

⁵ A Call To Prayer to end Unjust Rule, Boesak and Villa Vicencio, eds.

3.1.1 The Response of the Press.

Allan Brews conducted a detailed analysis of the response of the press, both white English and Afrikaans, liberal and conservative as well as the black press and discovered that over 200 newspaper articles were devoted to this issue alone in a space of three months leading up to June 16. From his analysis it is clear that for once English liberals and Afrikaans conservatives were unanimous in their condemnation of Dr. Boesak, the Call and the W.P.C.C., and mischievously tried to create the impression that it was a call for the violent overthrow of the government. Some also tried to drive a wedge between the SACC and Dr. Boesak, attempting to create the impression that neither the SACC nor its member churches, supported the Call, or Dr. Boesak.

This devious campaign on the part of some newspapers forced the SACC to come out in support of the Call and Dr. Boesak, at a special meeting to discuss the matter on June 15. The meeting had been called to resolve another more pressing matter namely the fact that the Rev. Peter Storey, President of the Methodist Conference and Archbishop Phillip Russell of the C.P.S.A. had:

- (i) publicly distanced themselves from the Call through the media without first going through the proper channels of the SACC and
- (ii) had contradicted the W.P.C.C.'s claim that the SACC executive had officially accepted the theological rationale as its own. The main objection from W.P.C.C. and Dr. Boesak to these Church leaders was not so much that they opposed the Call as that they had chosen to express such opposition through the media before going through the channels of the SACC first.

Charles Villa-Vicencio, when later reflecting on this reaction of English Speaking liberal churches and Christians in general, described it as a moral impasse that they had reached in their Christian witness in South Africa. They were 'trapped in apartheid' as it were, not willing to give up the privileges that apartheid had afforded them, while still wanting to salve their consciences with nominal protest against the system.⁶ They had grown used to reconciling evil with good. It is in this sense that the Call to Prayer for an End to Unjust Rule can be seen as another watershed moment in the Ecumenical Church in South Africa, a moment of truth, a Kairos. It exposed the duplicity of the white liberal English speaking churches in South Africa and the limitations of their stand against apartheid.

These tensions had of course always been there in the SACC over the years, simmering just below the surface. It had reared its head at particular moments and on a smaller scale in the past. One such incident was the arrest, trial and subsequent conviction during the time of the Eloff Commission into the affairs of the SACC in 1982-1983, of former General Secretary of the SACC John Rees, for corruption and theft of SACC funds. At the time Tutu and the SACC first came out in support of Mr. Rees, convinced of his innocence and saw his much publicised arrest at the end of the Annual Conference in 1982, as an attempt to embarrass the SACC. However, over the following year, Mr. Rees was found guilty, but there was still doubt in the minds of some who knew him well.

White liberals in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg came out in support of Rees while accusing the SACC and Tutu in particular, of abandoning Mr. Rees and even hindering his defence by refusing him

⁶ Villa-Vicencio wrote a book with the same title 'Trapped in a Apartheid', dealing with this moral impasse of the English-speaking Churches in South Africa.

access to certain SACC documents. Tutu reacted swiftly to these charges, categorically rejecting them and blamed Mr Rees for mismanaging SACC funds and for breaching his and the Council's trust, thus opening up the SACC to the government probe in the form of the Eloff Commission. Tutu was prepared to forgive and reconcile with Mr. Rees but was doubtful whether this was possible because Mr Rees was unrepentant and had even stated that he would do it all again were he to have a second chance. This incident revealed that the fragile unity between white and black Christians within the SACC had begun to fray at the edges. Through the Call to Prayer and the Kairos Document, this unity was threatening to come apart.

There can be no doubt that the Call to Prayer was the pre-cursor and impetus for the Kairos Document, which, written in a different context by different people, brought essentially the same message:

- (i) that the present rulers were illegitimate and needed to be removed from power.
- (ii) the Church had a God-given obligation to join the struggle for their removal, non-violently.
- (iii) the Church had no right to condemn those who chose to do so violently.

We shall now examine the Kairos Document in more detail.

3.2 The Kairos Document

The Kairos Document (KD) was penned during the period July to September, 1985. Originally it was supposed to be a theological reflection on the present crisis in the country following the declaration of the state of emergency on 25 July 1985 and the earlier South African raid on so-called ANC terrorist bases in Gaborone, Botswana in which some people

were killed. The troops were in the townships and the ANC had announced that they were going to intensify the armed struggle. The Kairos Theologians, as they were later to be christened, lay and professional, got together as part of the Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT) team to produce a theological response to this situation, which they interpreted as a declaration of war.

Initially the response was only supposed to be a report in the monthly ICT - newsletter. However, once work was started on it, it grew in proportion until it eventually became a project on its own. The concern of the ICT team was that the crisis in South Africa had reached critical proportions and needed a different response from that which the Church usually gave. They then decided to research Church Statements of the past in times of crises, in order to analyse why it was that the Church had responded in the way that it did. Certain individuals were asked to research, analyse and write on the Theology of the Church, the Theology of the State and to come up with a new theological response which could speak a powerful word of hope to the situation South Africa found itself in.

This was done and the work of the different writers was critiqued at a subsequent meeting to which more theologians were invited. Copies of the work was also sent to theologians in different parts of the country. The writers had to go away for a second time and incorporate into their work the critiques, suggestions and additions that were given. Additional writers were engaged to write on new topics, which had emerged out of the discussion. It was when the second draft came back and was critiqued, that it was called the Kairos Document, 'Kairos' meaning, a moment of truth or opportunity.

It was then decided that this document was too long to be in a newsletter and needed to be published as a separate document on its own. Thus the Kairos Document was launched on 25 September 1985 as a Challenge to the Church in South Africa.

3.2.1 The Significance of the Kairos Document

The Kairos Document was of great significance for the struggle, the Church, and theology in general in South Africa and the world.

(i) The Struggle

The Kairos Document contributed to the intensification of the struggle against apartheid.

After it was launched on 25 September 1985, the document was personally taken by Dr. Beyers Naude' to the World Council of Churches in Geneva to request the W.C.C. to convene an emergency meeting to discuss the situation in South Africa. The World Council of Churches convened this Kairos meeting of Church leaders from Europe, North America, Australia, South Africa and other parts of Africa, to discuss the crisis in South Africa in Harare, Zimbabwe, from 4-6 December, 1985.

37 South African Church Leaders were present at this meeting including the chairman and organising secretary of the ABRECSA, the Revd's Mr BB Finca and Dr. J.F. Bill respectively. At this meeting Finca made the important point that it was misleading to speak generally of the crisis in South Africa, since it implied that the people of South Africa was facing a crisis. This was not true. It was the apartheid regime which was facing a crisis, precipitated by the struggles of the people against it. The task of all those who had declared it evil, a sin and its theological justification a heresy, was to intensify this struggle until

it was totally destroyed. It was with this basic understanding that the historic Harare declaration was adopted at this conference.

The declaration called on the international community to:

1. apply immediate and comprehensive economic sanctions on South Africa;

called on the churches locally and internationally:

2. to support the South African labour and liberation movements working for the liberation of their country;

called for:

3. the immediate implementation of U.N. resolution 435 for the independence of Namibia
4. churches inside and outside South Africa to continue praying for South Africa and to observe June 16 1986 - the 10th anniversary of the Soweto uprising - as a World day of Prayer to End Unjust Rule in South Africa. ⁷

The Day of Prayer was eventually held (this time with official sanction from the SACC) on June 16 1986 with the aid of WCC liturgies and appeals from the SACC. This time it was accompanied by none of the controversy which had plagued it in 1985. The reason for this was that by this time, events in the country had made it patently clear to Church leaders that the message of the Call to Prayer and the Kairos Document was correct after all. The South African government was irreformable and had to be removed from power altogether.

On the local front, the SACC National Conference passed a resolution on

⁷ The Harare Declaration, 6 December 1985

disinvestment on 28 June 1985. This resolution represented a fundamental shift in the previous stance of the Ecumenical Church on this issue. This time, undeterred by possible Government sanction the SACC proceeded with the resolution, which resolved:

“ to express our belief that disinvestment and similar economic pressures are now called for as a peaceful and effective means of putting pressure on the South African government to bring about those fundamental changes this country needs.”⁸

In addition to this they resolved:

1. to ask partner churches in other countries to continue their efforts to identify and promote effective economic pressures to influence the situation in South Africa, towards achieving justice and peace in this country and minimising the violence of the conflict.’⁹
2. to promote fuller discussion on the issues of disinvestment and economic sanctions by the Executive Committee of the SACC, its regional councils and the councils of its member churches and organisations with the request to encourage their congregations to study and debate them.
3. to appoint a task force to examine the whole question of economic justice, issues of disinvestment and economic sanctions, to review and co-ordinate the response from the churches, and to assist church leaders by making information and analyses available to them.
4. to call on individual Christians and member churches to re-invest money and energy in alternative economic systems in existence in the region.

Church leaders supported the resolution and stressed that sanctions

⁸ in Info '89 HAP, Religion 2, "Issues", p.C27

⁹ *ibid.*

should be treated as a conditional measure to achieve peaceful negotiations and not as a punitive measure against South Africa. They countered the age-old argument that sanctions caused unemployment thus further harming those they purported to help, by pointing out that unemployment had been an issue in South Africa long before there was any talk of sanctions. Economic growth would be virtually impossible unless apartheid was abandoned.

On 8 February 1986, Desmond Tutu, Bishop of Johannesburg, Alan Boesak, President of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and Beyers Naude, General Secretary of the SACC, issued a statement reaffirming a statement they had made in October 1985, in which they requested leading American banks not to reschedule South Africa's debt unless the present regime resigned and was replaced by a government responsive to the needs of all South Africa's people. They also called for the "immediate release of all political prisoners, the return of exiles and the lifting of banning orders on all banned political organisations", ¹⁰ if such a government were to become a reality. They offered their services together with other Church leaders as facilitators to ensure the transition to a government, which was committed to the goal of democracy.

They further called upon banks involved in negotiations on the rescheduling of South Africa's debts to reject the proposals which Dr. Fritz Leutwiler was going to present in London on 20 February 1986. Dr. Leutwiler's proposals were based on unsubstantiated assurances of reform in South Africa. They had warned on many previous occasions that this so-called "reform" process was designed to entrench rather than

¹⁰ "Statement by Bishop Desmond Tutu, Bishop of Johannesburg, Dr. Beyers Naude, General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches and Dr. Alan Boesak, President of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches." In ABRECSA Newsletter, Nos. 10/11 – Feb./Mar. 1986, p.12

eradicate apartheid and thus would only serve to aggravate the violence, injustice and hatred, which afflicted the country. In addition they requested banks to prevent further government stalling tactics by providing substance to such rejection. They also proposed that “the banks should immediately “freeze” all South African bank balances in their books and refuse to effect any transfer instructions over these accounts.”¹¹ Banks should also “ obtain court attachment of aircraft, ships and other South African assets, and apply the proceeds against South African indebtedness.”¹² They agreed with Dr. Leutwiler’s assessment that financial pressure would be more effective than economic sanctions in bringing an end to apartheid.

It is clear that the SACC and some of its Church leaders were prepared to stick their necks out in taking more far-reaching and radical resolutions than before, on sanctions and disinvestment.

(ii) The Church

For the Ecumenical Church the Kairos Document was a turning point. No longer would it be able to get away with lame excuses and well-worded statements. They were hard-pressed to get involved in action to eradicate apartheid. Another factor which led to their increasing participation as churches in the struggle was the large scale bannings and detentions of political leaders and organisations ranged against apartheid. Some denominations like the UCCSA responded to the challenge of the Kairos Document by commissioning a task force into the implications of the document for the Church.

By 1989 the task force had come up with a Pastoral Plan for Transformation aimed at the transformation of Church structures and

¹¹ *ibid.*, p.13

¹² *ibid.*

ministry, a process which is still underway. It was the only denomination which undertook such an extensive revision of its Church-life in the light of the Kairos Document and was the only one to produce a comprehensive bible study on the document aimed at local churches.

Other churches responded to the Kairos in their own way, taking stands in favour of economic sanctions against South Africa, against conscription and a host of other issues on the South African political landscape. In this regard the response of the white Dutch Reformed Church and the Synod of Bishops of the Church of the Province of Southern Africa was significant.

On 22 October 1986, the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk, NGK made a bold move away from its traditional support of apartheid on theological and biblical grounds. It took a resolution wherein it condemned apartheid as a system which was unacceptable in terms of Christian ethics and that any biblical justification of it was an error. The Church also opened its membership to all races except at the levels of clergy, Church elders or moderators. "Church councils which discriminated in their admission of black members would be subjected to a synodical disciplinary committee."¹³ The Church did not say that apartheid was a sin, but it did urge its members to "confess their participation in apartheid with humility and sorrow."¹⁴

Most commentators, journalists, theologians and Church leaders of the anti-apartheid camp alike, interpreted the NGK Synod's decisions as a fine balancing act between 'verkrampste' and 'verligte'¹⁵ factions within the NGK. Professor John De Gruchy of the University of Cape Town, put

¹³ Ebrahim Moosa, "Qualified 'no' to apartheid from NGK", in Cape Times, 23 October 1986

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ This is Afrikaans for conservative and enlightened factions respectively.

it thus:

"The historic monolithic presence of the Nationalist Party has become something of the past, and the Synod debates reflected the growing splintering in Afrikaner politics." ¹⁶

For some, this attempt at trying to preserve unity in the NGK at the cost of spiritually and morally inspired reform only served to blunt the prophetic effectiveness of the resolution. Hannes Adonis, assistant scribe of the 'Nederduitse Gereformeerde Sendingkerk' (NGSK) and chairman of the "Ring of the SA Gestig", said that the NGK had cleverly avoided calling apartheid a sin as the Sendingkerk had done, by saying it was an 'error'. By so doing it had avoided speaking theologically. Allan Boesak, speaking from the Hague, Netherlands, concurred with Adonis and said that the NGK's refusal to declare apartheid a sin would cause problems. He was shocked that the NGK had taken a decision not to merge with its 'sister-churches'.

"The pain-filled testimony (of black Christians) was simply set aside by the white church. What will be the sense of continuing discussions (with the NGK) when what we wanted has already been shot down by the synod right from the beginning." ¹⁷

Other theologians and politicians such as the conservative Ds. Izak Mentor Assessor of the coloured NGK 'Sendingkerk' on the other hand welcomed the move as a 'progressive step'. Colin Eglin, of the Progressive Federal Party (PFP) was also very optimistic. He said that the NGK's rejection of apartheid as UN-Christian had finally stripped the government of any excuse to continue to cling to its apartheid policies. For the NGK to denounce apartheid was clearly an event of major significance.

¹⁶ Elsabe Wessels, "Cottesloe Regained" in Sunday Times, 26 October, 1986

¹⁷ Ebrahim Moosa, "Boesak 'shocked' at NGK merger hard-line", in Cape Times, October 1986

"Here is what is perhaps the most important Afrikaner Institution in South Africa publicly rejecting the practice of apartheid and this must have a profound effect on white political attitudes." ¹⁸

However, this kind of optimism was dampened by the reaction of the National Party itself through its Information director, Chris Rencken. Mr. Rencken said that the NP did not have a problem with the Synod's decision to denounce apartheid as an unscriptural error, if what was being referred to was the type of apartheid, which the Conservative Party and Herstigte Nasionale Party advocated. The NP, however, would continue to be committed to protecting groups (races) and minorities. Most commentators however agreed that the decision represented a qualified 'no' to apartheid,¹⁹ and the tentative first-steps towards shaking off the increasingly heavy millstone of apartheid. ²⁰ In this sense it was historic.

The Church had come full circle after it had refused to denounce apartheid as unchristian and scripturally unsound at the Cottesloe conference 25 years before, thus severing its ties with the WCC and the then Christian Council of South Africa. ²¹ The writing was indeed on the wall for the National Party government, with its main supporter beginning to question the basis of its support. However, this seemingly had little effect on their unbridled arrogance and disregard for the prophetic voice of the Church, which reached new heights when Cliff Saunders launched a scathing attack on Archbishop Desmond Tutu in a programme on "Liberation Theology", on the South African Broadcasting Corporation's (SABC) Network programme.

¹⁸ Anthony Johnson, "NGK stand strips govt. of excuse for policies" in Cape Times, 23 October, 1986

¹⁹ "Qualified 'no' to apartheid from NGK, op.cit.

²⁰ Elsabe Wessels, op.cit

²¹ The Christian Council became the South African Council of Churches in 1968?

In a joint statement slamming this despicable attack, 11 Professors of theology, including Godfrey Ashby and David Bosch of the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) and Unisa respectively, saw it as the preparation by the government for renewed assaults on those churches who opposed apartheid and injustice. They pointed out that Saunders, who had suddenly become an authority on the Church, Theology and Religion in general, could do no more than indulge in half-truths and distortion of the facts in order to bring across what was purely and blatantly political intentions. He provided a caricature of Liberation Theology based primarily on the views of committed members of the religious right wing in America, for whom authentic Christianity was indistinguishable from the American way of life and the Free Enterprise System. ²²

In November of 1985 the Synod of Bishops of The Church of the Province of Southern Africa came up with a statement on "Christian Obedience and Unjust Law ". In it they gave their pastoral support on the basis of the following biblical principles, to Christians who believed that they were called, in obedience to Christ to obey unjust laws:

- (i) '...Christian obedience is owed supremely to God, the Creator and sovereign Lord of the Universe.' (Phil. 2: 9-11)
- (ii) "'Laws", "The State" or "Law and Order" are not of themselves absolutes to be accepted at all costs and above all else, nor should they be elevated to the status of a god in whose name obedience is demanded.(Jn. 19:11a, Rom. 13)
- (iii) 'The conduct of any government and the laws it makes are to be judged in the light of God's Law.'²³
(Ps. 72, 1Kgs. 21, 2 Sam. 12, Jer. 22, Lk. 4: 16-21, Mtt. 25: 31-46, Acts: 5: 29)

²² "Liberating Theology from Cliff Saunders", in *InterNos*, No.4 Nov. 1986

²³ Synod of Bishops, CPSA, "Christian Obedience and Unjust Law, November 1986, in Grace and Truth, 1987, p. 194

To this end they provided practical guidelines for those who wished to participate in civil disobedience, reminding them that the central biblical imperative for all Christian action was love of God and one's neighbour. (Mk 12:30-31) They recognised that:

"in the circumstances of our time this (civil disobedience) may be a truly Christian and non-violent way of working for a more just society, and of fulfilling our calling to be makers of God's peace in our land." ²⁴

It was not long before the Ecumenical Church leaders collectively came up with the "Standing for the Truth Campaign" in 1988. This campaign was taken up by grassroots structures within the Church throughout the country such as: Justice and Peace and Church and Society Departments, the Catholic Youth and Young Worker structures, Inter Church Youth, etc. Regional structures were also set-up and the campaign successfully campaigned against the Tricameral elections of 1989, participated in the Defiance campaign of the Mass Democratic Movement of 1989 and the release of Nelson Mandela and other political Prisoners. The Ecumenical Church had come of age and was now fully participating in non-violent action to end apartheid, 10 years after Boesak first made his call for civil disobedience in 1979. The culmination of this kind of participation came in September 1989 when about 20 000 people marched to Parliament led by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Allan Boesak and other Church and religious leaders. It was the biggest march that Cape Town had seen since the sixties' PAC march from Langa to Cape Town. Most of the people participating were ordinary Church people.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p.197

(iii) Theology

The Kairos Document raised theological issues which according to Charles Villa-Vicencio, were still ahead of the English speaking Churches. Issues such as: "economics and the tough political implications of what Christians mean by reconciliation, the pursuit of justice, and the place of reconciliation, violence and non-violence" ²⁵, threatened to divide the church.

It was clear that neither the country, the English-speaking churches, nor theology in South Africa could be the same again post-Kairos.

3.2.2 The Relationship between the Kairos Document and The Call to Prayer for an End to Unjust Rule

The Kairos Document can be seen as a continuation and deepening of the Call to Prayer for an end to Unjust Rule. Boesak, in a book by that name published in 1986, edited by himself and Charles Villa Vicencio, claimed that the Call to Prayer had laid the theological basis for the Kairos Document. In the preface he says:

"What happened on June 16 1985 set the stage for another document that is important today, the *Kairos Document*, which was signed by a group of theologians in South Africa and distributed to churches world-wide." ²⁶

The Call to Prayer preceded the Kairos Document by a few months, in bringing the churches in South Africa to a moment of decision. The reaction to the Call to Prayer was also much more vociferous from some

²⁵ Charles Villa-Vicencio, "A Reluctant Response: Has the Challenge been Heard?" in JTSA, No. 55, June 1986, p. 56

²⁶ Boesak A. & Villa Vicencio C., eds. A Call for an End to Unjust Rule, 1986, p.10

English speaking Church leaders, such as Storey and Russell, newspapers and the State alike, than to the Kairos Document. Boesak suggested that the reason for this might have been that the Church leaders were reacting in that way because they couldn't face up to the consequences of their own traditions which the 'Call to Prayer' had brought to their attention through the sayings and thoughts of the Church Fathers. Nevertheless he conceded that the Kairos Document would take the Church further than the 'Call to Prayer' had, precipitating what he called 'the Great Divide' within the churches in South Africa.

The Document itself gives a clear indication of how it differed from the 'Call to Prayer' when it stated that what Christians needed to do in the current situation was more than just pray for the 'end of unjust rule' but that the most loving thing they could do for both oppressor and oppressed in South Africa was to:

" *mobilise* its members in every parish to begin to think and work and plan for a change of government in South Africa...to look ahead and begin working now with firm hope and faith for a better future. And finally the moral illegitimacy of the apartheid regime means that the Church will have to be involved at times in *civil disobedience*." ²⁷
(italics mine)

The focus in the Kairos Document had clearly moved from challenging the Church to radical prayer, towards radical non-violent action in bringing an answer to that prayer.

Boesak was indeed justified in saying that the Kairos Document was nothing new in a sense. It could be seen as a logical extension of the churches' previous statements against apartheid over the years and its

²⁷ The Kairos Document: Challenge to the Church, A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa, Braamfontein, Kairos Theologians, 1985, p.24

declaration of apartheid as a heresy, including Boesak's own call on the Church to civil disobedience in 1979. Many of the arguments used by these statements were repeated in the Document e.g. the explication of Romans 13 and its proper interpretation is something that Boesak used in his address to the SACC in 1979, in his letter to Minister Schlebusch in 1981, in the Message to the People in 1968, as well as in the theological rationale of the 'Call to Prayer.'

What was new was the call to action as a *sine qua non* for the churches in the present situation on the side of the oppressed and exploited. The Call was therefore not for the Church to take sides, because it had already, wittingly or unwittingly taken the side of the status quo over the years. The Call was now for the Church to change sides to that of the black oppressed.

3.3 Conclusion

June 16 1976 saw the waving of placards and banners against the implementation of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction by Soweto schoolchildren. Latent in their demands was the realisation that their problem lay deeper within the very fabric of the system of racial and economic oppression in South Africa called apartheid-capitalism.

By June 1986, the students, who were now leaders in the United Democratic Front and other liberation formations inside and outside the country had long moved beyond protest to fundamental challenge of the status quo including its violent overthrow. For the ecumenical Church, the day also marked a significant step in its stance against apartheid. It too now moved from its previous stance of acknowledging the legitimacy of the apartheid government while protesting against its worst excesses, to declaring it illegitimate and irreformable and therefore needing to be

replaced. The Call to Prayer for an End to Unjust Rule of 1986 represented this definitive move from protest to challenge and non-violent direct action.

With the churches unequivocally on board in the resistance struggle in South Africa on the basis of non-violence for the first time in its history, undoubtedly marked the beginning of the end of the apartheid regime. The battle had been joined in earnest and would not end until one party had emerged victorious. In bringing the churches to this point, the pivotal role of Allan Boesak and the predominantly coloured Western Province Council of Churches is unmistakable.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE ROLE OF COLOURED CHURCH LEADERS IN THE ANTI-APARTHEID STRUGGLE

In this chapter I will analyse the role of coloured Church leaders in the anti-apartheid struggle in terms of three categories namely: ideology, theology and ecclesiology.

4.1 Ideology

On the ideological level we can discern two discourses which challenge the coloured Church leaders throughout the period under question. These are Liberal Ideology, which emphasised the primacy of race in understanding the South African reality and Historical Materialist analysis, which emphasised class. On the level of class a word must be said. In his study on the "The Role of the English Speaking Churches in South African Church History 1903 - 1930", Jim Cochrane points out the importance of the largely neglected historical materialist perspective for understanding the Church in South Africa. Cochrane finds that the generally, English speaking churches and its leadership generally reflect the interests of the ruling classes and big business who were mainly white, during the period 1903 - 1930.

I think the same was largely true for the period 1976 -1986. The Church and Church leaders, whether white black or coloured still tended to accept the economic status quo of capitalism as a given while objecting to its more vulgar racial features, such as job reservation etc. Neither Boesak nor Thorne outrightly condemned the capitalist system in South Africa. Their main concern was that it had excluded blacks and in such a vulgar way. In an article on Christian Resistance to Apartheid in Prozesky's, Christianity in South Africa, Cochrane shows that with the

publication of the Kairos Document in 1985, there was a change in this position.

The Document utilised Marxist analysis on the South African crisis and placed the agenda of the poorest of the poor and the working class in South Africa firmly in the lap of the churches. The position amongst coloured Church leaders was that the older generation such as Thorne and Hendricks was a tacit acceptance of the Free Enterprise system. Amongst the younger emerging leaders however, there was not only an embracing of Marxist analysis but also of Socialism as the nearest approximation to the Kingdom of God on earth. This kind of thinking was influenced by the ideology of the Charterist movement and supported by the theology of Karl Barth.

An area which needs special attention is the response the coloured Church leaders to the ideological challenge of race. Of these we can discern three trends overlapping one another in the period under investigation namely: the challenge of Black Consciousness, the challenge of Multi-Racialism and the challenge of Non-Racialism. We will look at each in turn.

4.1.1 The Challenge of Black Consciousness

John Thorne displayed an ambivalent attitude towards BC. On the one hand he publicly used BC rhetoric in his speeches, e.g. at the Hammanskraal conference of the SACC of 1975, when in his famous speech announced that the "Day of the white man was over ...the black man will take command and control over his own destiny." ¹ Putting it into practice however, was not that easy. At the SACC conference a year

¹ EcuNews 2, 1977

later in the wake of the June 16 uprising, he refused as President to countenance the request from some black delegates to suspend the prepared agenda in favour of a general discussion on the Soweto uprising. As we have seen, this action precipitated a walkout and the formation of a Black Caucus within the SACC.

Some would argue that Thorne's action could be ascribed as much to his stubborn personality as to his ambivalence towards BC and the black struggle in general. It would appear that he too was still trapped in the old paradigm of statements and protest and not yet fully understanding the practical implications of BC and Black Theology. He redeemed himself somewhat when he came out in full force in support of the coloured school's boycott in 1980 suffering detention as a result. Some would argue that he did that because it was coloureds and not africans, evidence of a narrow coloured consciousness or theology.

In September of 1976, Abel Hendricks President of the Methodist Church averted a similar walkout at the Methodist Conference when he showed more sympathy to the black cause when he granted a similar request to the Black Consultation of the Methodist Church (BCM). Thereby averting a major crisis in the Methodist Church. It was not clear at this stage whether Hendricks' actions could ascribed to astute leadership or regarded as unequivocal identification with BC and the black struggle. Subsequent events seem to point to the latter. Hendricks' cut short an official trip to New Zealand in order to return home 'to be with his people', at a time when the coloured people of the Western Cape had risen up in revolt.

In the Eastern Cape there was the Rev. Chris Wessels of the Moravian Church and Chairperson of the Eastern Cape Council of Churches who took a leading role. For this role he became the first coloured minister to

be detained in 1976. Wessels was much more firmly entrenched in the BC tradition.

Allan Boesak was still a rising star in the Church and struggle at this time. Boesak was firmly entrenched in BC. His Doctoral thesis was one of the early seminal treatises on Black Theology, which was published in the form of a book with the title: A Farewell to Innocence. His achievements in this regard are too numerous to mention: co-founder in 1974 of the Broederkring within the black NG churches, with the aim of effecting unity within the NG church as a whole, starting with the black (coloured, indian and african) churches. Sympathetic whites were allowed to join from the beginning as long as they were committed to the black struggle. Boesak's conception of blackness, which we have noted before was a matter of attitude and commitment to the black struggle for liberation and not skin colour. ² But Boesak had not yet achieved prominence within his own Church or the Ecumenical Church as a whole at this stage.

Thus it can be generally said that the attitude of some coloured Church leaders towards BC at this stage was ambivalent while others embraced it.

4.1.2 Multi-racialism vs. Non-Racialism

In response to increasing international and internal pressure from anti-apartheid groupings, including BC, the Vorster regime instituted what was called multi-racialism in sport and amenities. They did away with petty apartheid in public places such as park benches, toilets. Blacks could attend certain restaurants, called 'international' restaurants,

² Christian Leader, March 1980, p.5

which had special permits to admit them. Generally if blacks wanted to be admitted to any public amenity or institution which were previously only for whites, they had to apply for a permit to do so. Black students wishing to study at white universities had to therefore apply for such a permit and only if the quota of black students had not yet been exceeded.

In 1977 Vorster revealed his plan to extend this idea to the political realm with new constitutional proposals which made provision for political rights for coloureds and indians in separate chambers of parliament and africans in the homelands. These proposals had to be shelved in 1978 in the wake of the Information scandal, which rocked the government, after which Vorster was forced to resign. P.W. Botha came to the helm on a so-called 'verligte' ticket, but in 1981 announced his own new constitutional proposals which were not much different to those of Vorster. Thus multi-racialism was to be firmly entrenched in the reform politics of P. W. Botha. The problem for Botha was how to co-op the coloured and indian and african communities to accept this plan.

In 1980 John Thorne showed that in no uncertain terms that he was not going to be co-opted into any such schemes. He came out strongly in support of the coloured school children against gutter education and the apartheid system in general, demanding equal political rights for all. He was detained for all his troubles. However, his friend Allan Hendrickse, a fellow Congregationalist, was not so clear. He first vacillated about and then finally announced his decision to take his Labour Party into the Tricameral Parliament of P.W. Botha, thus accepting racially based politics. He faced massive opposition from his community, as well as his own denomination, which scrapped him, and a few other ministers like him from their role of ministers.

For Allan Boesak there was never any question about accepting racially based politics, steeped as he was in the Black Consciousness philosophy and the black struggle in general. Boesak in fact went on to initiate one of the biggest and most effective mass movements against apartheid that the country had ever seen, namely, the United Democratic Front.

One of the founding principles of this movement was non-racialism. Chris Wessels and many other coloured Christian ministers and leaders found themselves at home in the UDF. In fact for the predominantly coloured WPCC led by the Revd Lionel Louw of the AME church, membership and participation in the UDF was a foregone conclusion. For people like the Rev. Martin Wessels however, participation in the UDF was out of the question, not on the grounds of non-racialism but because it placed the national democratic revolution before the class struggle.

It would be fair to say that most coloured Church leaders except some like Allan Hendrickse, accepted the principle of non-racialism in the struggle against apartheid. Thorne, while not accepting the Tricameral Parliament, however, does not completely renounce the notion of a coloured identity within the black struggle. He argued against his Church's decision to expel Hendrickse and others. Boesak however, made a complete swing from BC to non-racialism in which for him there is no room for a separate coloured identity. This is not surprising as the roots of non-racialism already lay in Boesak's definition of what it meant to be black. At the Hammanskraal Consultation on Racism in 1980, he argued that whites who identified with blacks in attitude and action were black. Conversely, blacks, who in turn did not have such an attitude and actions, could not rightly be called blacks.

The proponent of the other school of thought on Black Consciousness at the same conference, Bonganjalo Goba, of the UCCSA, held that blackness was about the colour of one's skin. Whites could therefore never be able to completely identify with black suffering as they had not experienced racism. The proponents of this view of what it means to be black could not accept the UDF's non-racialism, and therefore did not join the UDF. They founded an alternative movement for Black Consciousness and Africanist adherents called the National Forum (NF) in 1983.

It would be fair to say that most coloured Church leaders, activist ministers and lay Church activists accepted the non-racial philosophy and thus aligned themselves with the UDF.

4.2 Theology

Coloured Church leaders were challenged by what can be identified as at least three theological challenges during the period under question: 1. Black theology; Liberal theology and Liberation theology

Most of the older coloured Church leaders would have been given a liberal theological training. This was certainly true of John Thorne, Abel Hendricks and others. Thorne was a classical liberal theologian. He did not espouse a class analysis of society and neither did he unequivocally identify himself with Black Theology or the BCM especially in the late seventies. However, by 1980 and the coloured schools boycott he was considerably more militant and moved in the direction of Black Theology. However one could say that he was decidedly still purely liberal, condemning apartheid as an evil system primarily due to its racism.

Allan Boesak on the other hand, was also trained in a liberal Reformed tradition but became exposed to Black Theology in the early seventies along with many others of his time. However, Black Theology at this stage itself still very dependent on Western theological constructs and theologians such as Karl Barth. This was one of the major criticisms levelled at James Cone, the leading black theologian in the world at the time, by his compatriots Gayraud Wilmore, brother Cecil Cone, and others. Boesak's Black theology, being very dependent on Martin Luther King jnr.'s theology in general, therefore suffered from the same malady as Cone's did earlier on, namely, a lack of emphasis on the culture and religion of black people as sources of theology. Cone relied heavily on Barth, Pannenberg and Bultmann and Boesak on Reformed theology.

Another weakness of Cone and Boesak's theology was the lack of a class analysis, a weakness not inherited from Barth, who was a socialist in certain respects. Cone acknowledged and corrected this in his book, For My People, after extensive contact with Latin American Liberation Theologians through the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians(EATWOT). It is only when Latin American liberation theology began to make its mark on the South African theological scene through institutes such as the Institute of Contextual Theology (ICT), and Documents such as the Kairos Document, that Marxist analysis of society crept into South African Black Theology and Boesak's in particular. Boesak later signed The Road to Damascus, a document that went further than the Kairos Document in identifying the global, racial and economic nature of oppression rooted in Capitalism. This is testimony to the shift in his theology.

But Boesak was never completely comfortable with a materialist analysis. His main focus remained race and racism as the primary determinant of oppression in South Africa. This uneasiness with identifying himself

completely with a the Marxist ideology can be seen in his reluctance to be identified with the South African Communist Party (SACP), after becoming Western Cape leader of the ANC, post 1990.

Boesak's Reformed theological roots could also be seen in his spearheading of the Confessing Church movement within the Dutch Reformed Mission Church as well as the declaration of apartheid as a heresy by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches as well as his own Church. The theological rationale for the Call to Prayer for the End to Unjust Rule was firmly entrenched in European liberal theology of the Just War theory and teachings of Reformers such as Calvin and Luther on tyranny.

Less high profile coloured church leaders and ordinary ministers such as Lionel Louw, Courtney Sampson, Chris Nissen, Charles Martin and others had no problem in signing the document and moving the Western Province Council of Churches into active resistance to apartheid on the basis of Liberation Theology. However, it would be simplistic to suggest that there was this natural progression within some coloured Church leaders from Reformed, to Black, to Liberation Theology. To many blackness remained an important determinant in the class oppression of blacks in society and was not to be easily dismissed. People like John Thorne never signed the document and although anti-apartheid, he was not an anti-capitalist. To him the only thing wrong with capitalism in South Africa was the feature of racial oppression. All that was needed was that it should get a face-lift to one of non-racialism. The same could probably be said about other coloured Church leaders such as Habelgaarn, Hendricks and Chris Wessels.

Allan Hendrickse showed that he was a racist and Capitalist when he opted for the Tricameral Parliament. While still in the coloured labour party, he was still able to get away with the argument that he was fighting the system from within to achieve the result of a non-racial society. But with the majority blacks being excluded from the system and the system weighted so heavily in favour of the white ruling party ³, it was clear that fundamental change of the system from within was a pipe dream. Hendrickse's theology can therefore only be described as a narrow 'volk's teologie' in which extracting even the meagre concessions for the 'his people' was of paramount importance.

4.3 Ecclessiology

During the period 1976 -1983 the Church was still very ambivalent in its attitude to what kind of politics were needed to rid the country of the scourge of racism. The Church was still a few years behind the Black Consciousness Movement. Within the church there were those such as Hendrickse of the Congregational Church, who chose to engage in ethnic politics, ostensibly to go into the system to try to change it from within. There were others in Homeland governments who also did the same. The Church tolerated these people within their ranks and largely ignored the calls of those voices within its ranks to sanction these people.

The break however came in 1983 with the announcement of the new Constitutional Reforms of the Botha regime, which excluded 'africans' from the political process within South Africa. These proposals marked a watershed because any serious analysis would have revealed that the argument of Hendrickse and others about changing the system from

³ The white ruling party, the NP, had veto rights over any other party in the coloured and indian chambers when it came to general affairs. The President's Council was also so structured that the NP would always have the majority over any other party.

within, would have been well nigh impossible given the way in which the system was weighted in favour of whites. The system was still so obviously racist in its structure with a separate house for the three races, coloured, indian and white, that it was clear that the regime had no intention of moving away from race-based politics. This was unacceptable to a growing body of liberal/radical opinion in all the churches, comprised now of young activists schooled in the BC tradition and also the resurgent ANC Charterist, non-racial tradition.

This new breed of activists ministers and priests were also influenced by black theologians and Church leaders such as Manas Buthelezi of the Lutheran Church, Boesak of the DRC and Tutu of the Anglican church. Among coloureds, Boesak had been particularly influential through the Belydende Kring, ABRESA and the WARC and the subsequent declaration of apartheid as a heresy and the drafting of the Belhar Confession in 1982. The days of racial politics in the Church were seemingly over. The legitimacy of the State was also increasingly being called into question. The demand for nothing less than full political representation in a non-racial, non-sexist democracy at all levels for all races was by now firmly entrenched. The June 16 uprising and 1980 coloured school boycotts had been instrumental in entrenching these notions.

Thus it was that when the Tricameral Parliament was announced that the churches were unequivocal in announcing their opposition to this new attempt at reform. Anyone therefore still arguing for this route such as Hendrickse and Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi found themselves very quickly at loggerheads with the churches and in particular their own denominations. Hendrickse, in particular was ignominiously asked to resign his position as a minister or give up his position in the Tricameral Parliament. Within the Congregational church this caused a split

between those for the new dispensation and those willing to become more actively involved in the politics of liberation. Significantly, John Thorne, a close friend of Hendrickse's abstained from voting on the matter, perhaps an indication of loyalty in friendship on one level, or continued political ambivalence on the other.

The cleavage that appeared in the Congregational Church was being mirrored in all other denominations including the SACC. The cleavage came to be seen as one between those who were for liberation and those against. This cleavage intensified in the years to come with the formation of the UDF and soon manifested itself in 1985 with the publication of the Kairos Document as one between liberals and radicals within the church. The Church became increasingly a site of struggle according to Cochrane. This struggle must be seen as being one around racism within the Church but also between the classes, the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'. The issue of sexism also became a terrain of struggle as well as the debate concerning violence versus non-violence as a means of bringing about change. These were the same issues, which were being played out in broader society and within the Liberation Movements. It can therefore be said that 'the world', in the form of the Liberation Movements, had once again set the agenda for the Church, which by 1986 had caught up with that agenda.

4.5 Conclusion

De Gruchy maintains that:

" Saying the right thing at the right time in the most concrete way possible is at the heart of Christian witness...confessing Christ has to be engaged in anew in every situation." ⁴

⁴ De Gruchy, J.W., "From Cottesloe to the Road to Damascus". in Listening to South African Voices: Critical Reflection on Contemporary Theological Documents, 1990, p17

In this context, coloured Church leaders, activists and ministers such as Boesak, Thorne and others had faithfully played their part in being true Christian witnesses for their time. They engaged in reinterpreting the Gospel anew for their time and boldly said the right thing at the right time and in the most concrete way possible, given the limits of their ideology, theology and ecclesiology.

But they have done more than that. As coloureds, even though they rejected that description of themselves at one stage as negative, they have wittingly or unwittingly dealt a severe blow to the historical image of all coloured people as a politically collaborationist people, unable to take a clear stand for justice and liberation on the side of the poor and oppressed in South Africa. They have played a major role in shaping the identity of many coloureds from the black consciousness era, as well as the post '76 generation, as black and African. For this they need to be saluted.

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