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Christian Mission in South Africa

Political and Ecumenical

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FOREWORD

In this book, Willem Saayman scrutinises the mission of the Christian churches in South Africa from the perspective of the ecumenical and political dimensions of that mission. It is a critical scrutiny, but not a judgmental one; there is a continuous ambivalence in his evaluation of the mission of the churches and the missionary pioneers he studies. It is particularly his evaluation of the mission of three Black pioneers which is immensely valuable, as the contribution of these Black pioneers is largely unrecognised in the history of Christian mission in South Africa. His evaluation of three well-known White pioneers also opens new perspectives on their lives and work, especially with regard to their motivation within the context of their times.

This book is a missiological venture in the true sense of the word. According to the Concise Oxford Dictionary, a *venture* is 'a risky undertaking'. The author was courageous enough to undertake a risky attempt to 'redefine mission for our time and our situation in South Africa'. In his redefinition he concentrates on the political and ecumenical dimensions of mission. The time is long overdue for these dimensions of Christian mission in South Africa to be thoroughly scrutinised in order to point out to what extent mission, politics and the ecumene are inseparably interrelated. Any attempt to separate them, emasculates the mission of the church and turns it into religious propaganda. What is even more dangerous and tragic is that it neutralises the relevance of the church as an agent of change and liberation in the world.

I am personally very thankful that Saayman undertook this venture into the history of Christian mission in South Africa. Mission in South Africa has become in many ways a stagnant introversion. There is a desperate need for a new way of understanding and undertaking mission. This book opens attractive and challenging new venues towards such a new way of understanding and undertaking mission. It can evoke new enthusiasm for mission as a matter of life and death for the Christian church in South Africa. The historical reality of the fading and eventual vanishing of the Romanised church in North Africa early

in the Christian era should be a constant reminder to the Westernised church in South Africa at present that unless the church continuously finds new ways of relating to its context, the same tragic reality may befall it. Saayman's book is therefore to be welcomed as a serious call to the church in South Africa to become a site of struggle in order to keep alive the ideals of humanity, freedom and justice, and thus to contribute towards God's drawing of his creation towards its eschatological fulfilment.

Nico J. Smith
Pretoria
January 1991

INTRODUCTION

In this book I am going to study the Christian mission in South Africa from the perspective of its political and ecumenical dimensions - in other words, the *missio politica oecumenica* of the church in South Africa. The Christian church the world over, as well as the church in South Africa, always practised a *missio politica oecumenica* in some form or another. In chapter 1 I give a brief overview of this dimension of the Christian mission, as well as my understanding of the concept itself. In the meanwhile, I want to sketch briefly the development of this concept as a 'technical' term.

The concept of the *missio politica oecumenica* of the church has been developed in the ecumenical movement. It was especially the ecumenical missionary movement, specifically the International Missionary Council (IMC), that initiated co-operation in international affairs. After the merger of the IMC with the World Council of Churches (WCC) this co-operation was carried further in the work of the Churches' Commission on International Affairs (CCIA) (cf. Teinonen 1961). It was in this context that the concept *missio politica oecumenica* was developed. The Dutch Missiologist J. Verkuyl developed the concept further in his book *Inleiding in de nieuwere Zendingswetenschap* (1975). So far nobody has studied church and mission in South Africa explicitly from this perspective - something which I hope to do in this book.

Behind the concept *missio politica oecumenica* as developed in the IMC and CCIA lies the supposition that 'the political work of the churches belongs to their "mission". The Church is sent to all the spheres of human life, including the political one. The study of the co-operation of the churches in political affairs is, therefore, a subject which is common to both missiology and ecumenics' (Teinonen 1961:10). I will obviously have to spell out my understanding of the interrelationship in detail later on. For the purposes of this introduction it is sufficient to say that my understanding of the concept differs slightly from the

above, especially as a result of my living in the South African context. With *missio politica oecumenica* I understand that Christian mission in South Africa at this stage has a political responsibility as its central dimension, and this responsibility is carried out in communion with the Christian ecumene. By calling the responsibility the 'central dimension' instead of, for instance, the 'heart' of mission, I try to avoid any attempt at prioritising, which has so often in history proved to be the bane of Christian mission. I will give my definition of mission in chapter 1. Let me just note here that I do not accept that either evangelisation or healing or socio-political involvement or whatever has any inherent priority in Christian mission. It is the context in which mission is practised at any given moment that determines the central dimension for that situation.

I do not pretend to come to this task in a 'neutral' or 'objective' way. It has nearly become a cliché to say that theology is autobiography, yet it is necessary to state the obvious once more. I come to this subject as a middle-class, White, male, Reformed South African missiologist, with a conscious as well as an intuitive commitment to Africa - and all of these factors have influenced my perceptions. With this statement I also affirm that what I am going to write will of necessity be contextual. I therefore agree that 'theology is by definition contextual. Theology's formative factors include experience, revelation, scripture, tradition, culture and reason. Each of these reflect to a lesser or greater degree contextual insights' (Pobee in WCC-PCR 1985:35).

Why is a study such as this necessary? In general, one can point to Teinonen's remark (1961:ii) that the problems inherent in the *missio politica oecumenica* 'are so urgent and central for ecumenical theology that any contribution, however narrow and faulty, seems to be worth the risk of one's neck'. More specifically, I want to mention the crisis in Christian mission in South Africa. This crisis is related to the worldwide mission crisis: as Freytag pointed out at the Ghana Assembly of the IMC in 1958, at least since the fifties of this century, mission itself has become problematic (Bosch 1979:3). Much has already been written about this crisis, and I am not going to add to it here. The crisis is, however, also specifically related to the South African context, and I need to say a little more about that. Christian mission in South Africa, it seems to me, is in crisis for especially three reasons:

- Because of the history of entanglement between mission and colonialism, the victims of the colonial system, in other words especially Black South Africans, view mission unfavorably as a leftover from the colonial past. In an era of decolonisation, they feel that we no longer need Christian mission.

- Some White South African Christians doubt the validity of Christian mission for reasons very similar to this. Since Western culture has moved out of its aggressive, conquering phase, there is no need for something as aggressive as mission any longer. The church (and Theology) can therefore exist quite well without mission.

- Because of the crisis in mission, and because none of the proposed remedies so far have seemed to work, some South African Christians (both Black and White) have retreated into the laager of the well-known from the past: for them mission is simply evangelisation, saving souls for Jesus. For these reasons, therefore, mission is marginalised or its meaning reduced. I think this is a very unhealthy state of affairs, as mission should be central to the existence of the Christian community. We therefore have to reclaim mission for South Africa, and it seems to me that the place to start is with an attempt to redefine mission for our time and our situation in South Africa. I am, however, not going to attempt a comprehensive redefinition; I am going to concentrate on the specific aspect of the political and ecumenical dimensions of mission. I have chosen to use a historical approach as the best way to analyse the *missio politica oecumenica* of the church in South Africa. This seems to be the most promising way to go about the study, because 'for almost two hundred years, from the age of Dr Van der Kemp and Dr Philip to the age of Dr Banana and Dr Tutu, southern Africa has presented what we may well regard as a *locus classicus* for the relationship of church, state and mission - the complex and diverse interaction of politics and religion within a missionary context' (Hastings 1985:22).

It is obviously not possible to study the complete history of the South African church in a volume such as this. I therefore had to make further choices, which I hope can be justified. I have chosen three White and three Black pioneers from the period of the earlier history of the

church here. I think that subsequent events have already shown that all six of them played a significant role in laying the foundations of the South African church. For the more recent period of the history of the church I will examine three ecumenical documents. I am convinced that all three of them articulated vital issues for the continued existence of the Christian community in South Africa. I am aware that it can be argued that my survey is too fragmented. A kind of fragmentary survey like this remains cursory and controversial, but I have decided to embark on it nevertheless in order to raise these issues pertinently, aware of its importance for Christian mission in South Africa.

The first two chapters will be used to set the context for the examination of the *missio politica oecumenica* in South Africa. In chapter 1 I will spell out my understanding of the interrelationship between mission, politics and the ecumene. In chapter 2 I deal with the entanglement of mission and colonialism, as South African church history cannot be understood apart from an understanding of this entanglement. This is especially true of the *missio politica oecumenica*. In chapter 3 I deal with the White pioneers I have chosen (Philip, Colenso and Murray), and in chapter 4 with the Black pioneers (Ntsikana, Soga and Tile). Chapter 5 will be devoted to a study of three recent ecumenical documents (Cottesloe, The Message to the People and Kairos). In the final chapter I will attempt to spell out the implications of all this for the future of Christian mission in South Africa.

The bulk of this manuscript was written in 1989, before the momentous announcement by the State President on 2 February 1990 unbanning the ANC, PAC, SACP and other organisations, and the freeing of some political prisoners. The final revision of the manuscript did take place after these events. It is my opinion that the content of the first four chapters is not materially affected, but I rewrote sections of chapters 5 and 6 in the light of the change in context.

I make use of inclusive language throughout and reject sexist language. Where sexist language appears in quotations that I use, though, I leave the language unchanged as the continual pointing out of this fact in some way (e.g. by using *sic*) becomes boring and probably counterproductive.

1 MISSION, POLITICS AND THE ECUMENE

1.1 INTRODUCTION

It is clear already from the title that the three key words in the book are going to be *mission, political* and *ecumenical.* In the Introduction I have also described their interrelationship in a preliminary way, namely that Christian mission in South Africa in our day has a political responsibility as its central dimension, and that this responsibility is carried out in communion with the Christian ecumene. Before setting out in more detail my understanding of both the meaning of the words and their relationship to each other, it is useful to point out how, at various times in history, Christians understood what I am calling their *missio politica oecumenica*. I am not going to attempt a comprehensive survey. I am going to paint a few broad strokes only in an attempt to outline the history which brought us where we are today and helped form our convictions.

Let me begin with one of the first Christian congregations, that of Jerusalem. Very early on in its life one of its leaders, Peter, openly made some bold (political) claims about the injustice involved in the killing of Jesus (Acts 2:22-24; 3:13-16). He made these claims openly and as part of important public statements. When the inevitable happened and Peter and John were arrested, they openly claimed for themselves, on the basis of their faith, the right to civil disobedience (Acts 4:18-20). This decision of Peter and John was unanimously supported by the whole congregation (Acts 4:23-31). In this light it is interesting to consider also the characterisation of the early Christians in Acts 17:6-9: people who cause trouble all over the world, people who turn the world upside down, people who defy Caesar's decrees. It seems to me, on the basis of this account of the history of the early Christians, that political involvement through clear public testimony, as well as through their way of life, was a natural part of their life and being. Of course I am not claiming that it was the *only* dimension to

their lives; there were others. What I have set out to do, though, is to look at history specifically from the perspective of the political-ecumenical dimension.

The church in the Constantinian era, after the emperor Theodosius, in other words when the church became the state church, looked quite different as far as its *missio politica oecumenica* is concerned. Because of its increasingly cordial relations with the state, the church had to redefine its political responsibility. The kind of confrontational, even revolutionary, stance which the early Christians sometimes took, was no longer acceptable. The growing alliance between church and state called for a completely different political relationship. Thus the church increasingly adopted the responsibility for the cultural and religious extension of the empire. As the church benefited more and more from the growth of the empire, it felt the need to justify the political status quo and the reasons the church had for supporting it. In the Constantinian dispensation, therefore, the church understood the political dimension of its mission no longer as mainly critical and confrontational, but rather as providing the theological underpinnings to the ethos of the state. It also had its influence on the evangelising mission of the church, in that evangelisation became basically the incorporation of subjected peoples and the responsibility for their acculturation to the 'Christian' imperial culture. The way in which the Christian community understands the political dimension of its mission therefore clearly also determines its understanding of the evangelising dimension.

The Constantinian dispensation in the relationship between church and state was still in force when the era of Western colonialism began in the fifteenth century. The various Western powers, both Catholic and Protestant, worked on the assumption that a country had to accept the religion of its ruler. Very clear in this assumption is the Constantinian understanding that religion should bolster the state. The close entanglement between mission and colonialism (which I discuss in more detail in chapter 2) was therefore to be expected. The colonialist state expected that the missionaries would aid them in 'civilising' the 'natives'. Most missionaries accepted this as the political dimension of their mission - although there were exceptions (some of these exceptions are discussed in chapter 3). Another significant devel-

opment in theological thinking about the political and ecumenical mission of the church is reflected in the Social Gospel movement. This movement started in the nineteenth century. Impulses from many theological developments (Reformation, Pietism, Puritanism, the Great Awakening, etc.) were absorbed by this movement. Of special importance is the fact that proponents of the Social Gospel basically located the commonwealth of God in *this* world. This made the political involvement of God's people very important, for social evils such as poverty, unemployment, poor medical care, exploitation of workers, etc., couldn't be justified or tolerated in 'Christian' countries (that is to say, countries in which a majority of the people defined themselves as Christians and where the culture was broadly based on Western 'Christian' values). Proponents of the Social Gospel believed that the Western industrial powers had at their disposal the economic and technological resources to create the ideal society through development and progress. Christians had to be the conscience of the state to prod the state into the right direction. Christian mission meant therefore the joint involvement of Christians in actions such as rallies, protests, political parties, etc. They believed, though, that their political involvement should lead to evolution, not revolution. As far as their involvement in the 'mission fields' is concerned, it was coloured by an undeniable element of cultural superiority, and remained in the realm of charity rather than solidarity.

The twentieth century was characterised by great development in thinking about the involvement of the total body of believers in political affairs. I want to describe briefly just two of these schools of thought because of their relative importance for South Africa. In the first place I want to mention the group of Christians generally called Evangelicals. They are the heirs of movements such as Pietism and the Great Awakening especially, and were very closely and enthusiastically involved in evangelisation. Earlier they were often suspected of an anti-ecumenical stance, especially because of their opposition to the WCC, but since the sixties of this century they developed a very strong ecumenical vehicle of their own through organisations such as the Lausanne movement. The political dimension is not completely absent from their agenda, but it does not really have any priority either. They tend to what they call an apolitical or neutral stance, which unfort-

unately often turns out in practice to be supportive of the status quo (I argue this in more detail below). Generally they would propagate socio-political changes where there is injustice, but they argue that such changes will only come about as a result of a change in the hearts of converted or born-again individuals. It is therefore not the role of the believing community to propagate or participate in direct political actions. Christians who wish to see political change should work and pray so that those individuals with political responsibility are converted to Christ.

More or less on the other end of the spectrum is the group of Christians who have opted for a liberationist perspective. They have some common characteristics with the Social Gospellers, so that people sometimes claim that the liberationist perspective is simply the Social Gospel in new form. This is not correct, though, as there are radical differences between the two positions. From a liberationist perspective, there is no realistic possibility that the huge social, economic and political injustices will be rectified through evolutionary development. The gulf between rich and poor, the powerful and the oppressed, is so vast that only a revolution will be able to overcome it. Christian mission therefore means becoming politically active, moving among the poor and the oppressed in the form of a servant, expressing the love of Christ in the form of solidarity with them. Where possible, those who regard themselves as Christian missionaries may join in conscientising and organising the poor, but never in a superior way, as the poor will have to liberate themselves, for the poor are the real agents of the Christian mission in our day. Rich Westerners (and most Western missionaries, whether short-term or career missionaries, are rich in comparison with most inhabitants of the Third World) will not be able to do it for them. And it is only as the poor achieve a human standard of living, as they achieve the political rights which are their due, that they can also achieve their true standing in Christ, and so become truly human.

It is all these various understandings of the political-ecumenical dimension of the mission of the church which have gone into creating the context in which we are to consider our political and ecumenical mission. When I now try to articulate my understanding of the meaning of the terms and their interrelationship, it is these developments,

as well as my situation in South Africa at this time, which will be reflected in what I say.

1.2 DEFINING THE TERMS

Mission I want to define as the *missio Dei*, the great mission of the triune God in the world, and then especially as characterised in the mission of Jesus the Messiah (Luke 4:18-21). *Politics* I want to define in its simplest form as the practice and art of the government of human affairs in relation to the whole of life. *Ecumenical* I want to define as pertaining to those organisations and movements striving for the unity and renewal of the Christian church. Obviously these definitions do not go far enough. Neither do they clarify the interrelation among these three concepts. In the rest of this chapter I will therefore attempt to fill out my definitions somewhat and to establish my understanding of the interrelation among them.

1.2.1 Mission

I have already indicated that I regard Luke 4:18-21 as fundamental to my understanding of mission. I would go so far as to say that I find in this passage the most comprehensive and satisfying paradigm for the *missio Dei*. As Arias (1984) has pointed out, this passage can only be adequately understood in the light of the teaching about the Jubilee, and specifically the Jubilee as a paradigm of the kingdom action in the world. Nolan (1988:128-129) also finds in this concept one of the central ideas embodying the reign of God on earth. Mission understood in the light of the teaching about the Jubilee is therefore a comprehensive, encompassing mission. This comprehensiveness is illustrated by the range of activities of the Spirit-filled Servant of God (the Messiah): preaching good news to the poor, proclaiming liberty to the captives, restoring sight to the blind, setting free the oppressed - in short, announcing in word and deed the year of the Jubilee, the year of God's all-inclusive liberation (Arias 1984:44-45).

Perhaps I can illustrate my understanding of mission in the light of Luke 4:18-21 by using the image of a rainbow. The rainbow always reflects the full spectrum of colours, wherever we may be. These colours belong together, and if one were to be lacking, we no longer have a real rainbow. In the same way the various dimensions of the task of

the Spirit-filled Messiah - and therefore of those whom he empowers to be his followers (John 20:21) - reflect the fullness of the *missio Dei*. In correspondence with the tasks of the Messiah, I want to define these dimensions as an evangelising dimension; a healing dimension; and a dimension of striving for social, political and economic justice. These dimensions belong together, whether we are involved in mission in Berlin or Soweto or Pretoria. There is no inherent priority among them - the one is as important as the other, so that the context must determine the priority. Furthermore, if one of these dimensions is completely lacking from our mission, we are no longer involved in the mission of the Messiah of God. This does not mean that in every instance we must at the same time be *both* proclaiming liberty to the captives *and* restoring sight to the blind; *both* preaching good news to the poor *and* setting free the oppressed. It *does* mean, though, that if, at the end of the day, our mission is evaluated in its entirety, it must reflect the fulness, the whole spectrum of colours of the rainbow. And like the overarching rainbow, the *missio Dei* is the horizon underneath which the Christian community lives and works, the horizon spanning and illuminating every activity in the life and being of the church. Understood in this way, mission is not some peripheral idiosyncrasy which can be left to some little group of enthusiasts (or crackpots!), nor is it some quaint relic of the colonial past which, thank God, we can now lay to rest forever; rather it becomes, as it should be, central to the life and being of the church.

By defining mission in this way, as a comprehensive ministry with distinguishable but inseparable dimensions, I am attempting to overcome the dualisms and prioritising which have so often in the past led to polarisation in mission. Very often, for example, the relationship between evangelisation and social involvement is described in primary-secondary terms, leading to polarisation and a divided witness. Even where sincere attempts are made to overcome the polarisation, the widely-held view of mission as consisting of separate parts still prevails and prevents a holistic, integrated view from taking root. So, for example, the National Conference of Churches at Rustenburg in November 1990 defined mission thus:

> The Church's work of mission is a ***consequence*** of its worship, prayer, fellowship and spirituality. We commit ourselves to deepen these aspects of the practice of our

> faith. We resolve to fulfil the Great Commission and by evangelistic faithfulness to bring men and women to repentance and personal faith, new birth and salvation and to help them *to work this out* in a witness that engages the world (Rustenburg Declaration 1990:4.4.1; emphasis added).

I wish to draw attention especially to the two words/phrases which I emphasised. As long as we view mission as a *consequence* of our worship, fellowship, etc., we can express our faith separate from our mission, and mission remains an appendix to our faith. It is this view which prevailed at the beginning of the era of modern Western mission, which relegated mission to the interests of a few 'enthusiasts' in the churches, who had eventually to form mission societies because of the disinterest and inertia of the churches. As I understand the story of Jesus Christ, the Christian faith cannot be expressed apart from its expression in mission; indeed, in the words of Castro (1978:87), the church as the body of Christ has no other life than a life in mission. For this reason the Christian social witness is not something to be worked out subsequent to new birth and salvation. New birth and salvation can take place only in society, and are therefore in themselves a social witness. At the same time involvement in the social dimension of mission brings about ongoing conversion and a deepening of the understanding of salvation. These dualists can only be overcome by a holistic, comprehensive understanding of mission.

I therefore agree fully with Kritzinger (1988a:6) that 'Mission is ... the attempt to embody God's liberating presence in every human situation. It never takes place in a vacuum, but is always concerned with specific people in specific situations, and searches to discover the meaning of the Good News in each context.' Let me spell out clearly what this means according to my understanding of mission. In the first place, mission means *participating in God's liberating activity in the world*. God's liberating activity in the world therefore sets the agenda, so that no church or any group of Christians can ever be the author or subject of their 'own' mission. In the second place, mission means *human liberation in the light of the Jubilee.* In fact, mission can be characterised as humanisation, the restoration of the genuine humanity of the new human being, Jesus of Nazareth, in all human *and environmental* relationships (for the year of the Jubilee dealt also with the restoration of the earth).[1] In the third place, *mission cannot be anything*

1 For a fuller exposition of my understanding of humanisation, see Saayman 1984:41-42.

but contextual. It is therefore impossible for the church or a group of Christians to decide beforehand what their mission in a specific situation is going to be, or that it will be the same as someplace else. In the fourth place, *mission leads us to a new understanding of the Good News of Jesus of Nazareth.* Mission therefore does not simply mean the church *teaching*, but the church *learning*; the evangelisers must be evangelised. Evangelising people, healing them, working with them for full social, political and economic justice, therefore means growing with them into the full human potential which has become possible for us in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth - that, according to my understanding, is the *missio Dei.*[2]

1.2.2 Politics

I have stated that politics in its simplest form can be described as the practice and art of the government of human affairs in relation to the whole of life. It is not so much what is generally known as the *party-political* expression of that art which interests me, but rather the *ideological* expression of this science and art. It is necessary for me to say that I do not necessarily attach a pejorative meaning to the term *ideology;* I rather understand ideology to mean a blueprint of society which is designed in order to mobilise people to bring into being a specific kind of society. It depends on the kind of society that is being created whether an ideology should be evaluated positively or negatively. An ideology usually also implies certain strategies and methods which will have to be used in order to achieve the desired end. If such strategies are inhuman and unjust, obviously the ideology cannot be approved. Another important dimension of my understanding of ideologies is that ideologies are closely related to history. Indeed, as Verkuyl (1975:507) points out, all ideologies analyse the near past, interpret the reasons for the present state of affairs, and then give a blueprint of a different, better future which can be realised.

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2 What I have given here is of course no more than a minimal definition of mission. In order to define mission fully one would have to dedicate a book just to that subject - something which is not my intention here. I hope I have given a minimal definition which will enable the reader to follow the narrative. As I progress, my understanding of mission should of course become clearer all the time to the reader.

My understanding of the term *ideology* therefore implies a neutral meaning until the specific ideology is tested against the humanising dimensions of the mission of Jesus as described in the previous section. If an ideology leads, either in its goal or strategies, to the dehumanising of people, then indeed it deserves a pejorative meaning. Taking the two definitions together then, what I mean when I write about politics will be concerned with the goal set for the government of human affairs, the strategies and methods envisaged, and the understanding of history implied in it. Because a political ideology in this sense usually implies also an economic system, I want to point out that there is no watertight separation in my understanding between politics and economics. The art and science of governing human affairs in relation to the whole of life by definition include the economic organisation of human life. Similarly, ideology as a blueprint for a specific kind of society by definition includes a certain understanding of economy. My discussion of the political dimension must therefore always be understood as relating also to the economic dimension.[3]

Some readers may perhaps object to such a neutral or even positive meaning of ideology. Many would argue that ideology is by nature partisan, while the Christian gospel and Christian theology should be neutral and objective in political matters. Theological neutrality in political affairs is, however, not such a simple matter, for

> ... in our liberal/conservative culture the socially established and dominant system of ideology can function in such a way as to present - and misrepresent - its own rules of selectivity, bias, discrimination, and even systematic distortion as 'normality', 'objectivity', and 'scientific detachment' (Mészáros 1989:3).

It is necessary therefore to recognise that 'in our societies everything is "soaked in ideology"' *(ibid.)*, and that any claim, by a Christian theol-

3 There is a well-known saying that theologians make notoriously bad politicians. I am fully aware that I face many dangers in attempting a political dimension in my evaluation. It has to be pointed out, though, that it is an illusion to believe that the political narrative is a complete and exhaustive system in itself. Theologians, like many others, can also *contribute* to the political narrative - please note my emphasis on the word *contribute*. Obviously I am not claiming that theologians have the last word; and equally obviously my argument implies that politicians can and *should* also contribute to the theological debate.

ogian or anybody else, to be 'supra-ideological', is untenable. I find the acceptance of the neutral meaning of ideology, given above, preferable. According to my view, Christians then have the responsibility to be fully involved in the articulation and implementation of a political ideology in harmony with the humanising dimensions of the gospel. Of course, what I said above implies that ideologies can indeed also play a negative role, viz. if they hinder or prevent the implementation of the humanising dimensions of the gospel of Jesus of Nazareth. I will have more to say about that in section 1.3 below.

As was the case with my definition of mission, this is also a very brief definition of politics and ideology. When in the next section of this chapter I define my understanding of the interrelation between mission and politics, I hope it will also give greater clarity to my understanding of politics and ideology.

1.2.3 Ecumenical

Finally, the concept *ecumenical*. This concept was derived from a Greek word *(oikoumene)* which signifies the whole inhabited earth. In terms of the Christian church it was used to signify the unity of all believers across the whole inhabited earth. Especially in the twentieth century we have seen the growth of a number of organisations striving for greater unity among Christians, a unity which would at the same time lead to the renewal of the whole Christian community. All these organisations are called ecumenical organisations (e.g. the World Council of Churches) and the whole movement is called the ecumenical movement. With *ecumenical* I therefore understand that striving for the unity and renewal of the church and all Christian believers. It is necessary, though, to say a bit more about my understanding of the form this unity needs to adopt. For many Christians, unity is exclusively a spiritual experience which has nothing visible or organic about it. For me, however, especially because the biblical metaphor for Christian unity is a *body*, a whole, living organism (cf. 1 Cor. 12), unity of necessity needs to be visible and organic. This does not mean that the only possible model for Christian unity is therefore one worldwide church structure. I would rather follow the definition of the Nairobi assembly of the WCC in 1975 of unity as *conciliar fellowship*. This means that

> ... the one church is to be envisioned as a conciliar fellowship of local churches themselves truly united. In this *conciliar fellowship*, each local church possesses, in communion with the others, the fullness of catholicity, witnesses to the same apostolic faith, and therefore recognizes the others as belonging to the same church of Christ and guided by the same Spirit (in Saayman 1984:106).

1.3 MISSION: POLITICAL AND ECUMENICAL - DEFINING THE INTERRELATIONSHIPS

Of my three key words, *mission* is central: the noun described by the two adjectives *political* and *ecumenical*. Therefore I am going to relate mission first to politics, then to unity, and eventually attempt to draw out the interrelation among all three.

1.3.1 Mission: political

The most common objection against getting mission involved in politics is that mission is or should be concerned about purely spiritual matters, whereas politics has to do with secular, worldly matters. But as Archbishop Temple pointed out already at the Jerusalem assembly of the International Missionary Council in 1928, the only purely spiritual matters are good intentions, and we know the road to which part of the universe is paved with them! No, mission and politics *are* interrelated and I would therefore agree with Shelley that 'there is no pure ecclesiastical [also missionary] neutrality, just as there is no apolitical theology; there are only those who are conscious of their political assumptions and consequences and those who are not' (in Sölle 1974: xiv). This true political nature of God's liberating mission is also revealed in the exodus. Having been freed from Egypt, the Israelites do not say,'We worship the God who has liberated our souls'. No, they say, 'We worship the God who has delivered us from bondage in Egypt', in other words the God who has liberated them for a new social, political and economic existence in the world - they are no longer slaves of Pharaoh (cf. Cox 1965:26-27). Furthermore, because mission can be characterised as humanisation, as I have pointed out above, therefore mission is deeply involved with politics, which is supposed to bring about the best possible ordering of human society. De Gruchy (1985:17) is therefore correct in stating that the simple reality of our South African context enjoins us to take the political dimension of the Christian mission in South Africa seriously:

> The church in South Africa is both an agent of just social transformation and a stumbling block in the way of such transformation. But either way the church and Christian faith is socio-politically significant, and this must be taken into serious account in attempting to understand what is happening in South Africa today.

I therefore also agree with Verkuyl (1975:534) that the confession 'Yahweh is God' (OT) and 'Christ is Lord' (NT) has always been both a faith statement and also a political credo which leads inescapably to political choices and tasks.

What I have done so far has been somewhat in the line of sloganeering. I have stated what I believe in generalised statements without really arguing my convictions more specifically. To this task I now turn my attention.

In my argument that the gospel and politics, and therefore mission and politics, are interrelated, I would begin with the meaning of the cross of Christ.

> The cross of Christ was not an inexplicable or chance event, which happened to strike him, like illness or accident ... The cross of Calvary was not a difficult family situation, not a frustration of visions of personal fulfillment, a crushing debt or a nagging in-law; it was the political, legally to be expected result of a moral clash with the powers ruling his society (Yoder 1972:132).

Thus does Yoder state the central thesis of his book: that there is no way in which Jesus or his teaching can be divorced from politics.

There is a second reason for this interrelationship. The close identification of gospel and politics, mission and politics, flows from two dimensions of God's acts in the world: the decision for history, and the decision for the neighbour. The whole Bible, Old and New Testaments, resounds with God's acts in the history of this world, as well as his radical choice always for the other, the neighbour (cf. Robinson 1960:112-115). Because of this very basic choice for the other, and especially for the underprivileged and oppressed other, *justice* is so central to the church's mission - and binds it so firmly to the ordering of human society (politics) (cf. WCC 1967:118). Indeed, in the words of Shriver one can say '"justice" is only one word in the Biblical description of God's saving will for human society, yet justice is indispensable to the description. *Outside of justice there is no salvation*' (1980:21, emphasis mine). This statement is crucial to my understanding of the political

dimension of Christian mission, and also to my understanding of the relationship between the political and evangelising dimensions. Emphasising the political dimension does not mean becoming hostage to some unrealisable this-worldly utopian model. On the contrary, the *missio politica* has everything to do with that eternal reality which Christians call salvation. Furthermore, this choice for the other, this striving for justice, is related especially to the humanising aim of mission, because it means striving to be a specific kind of person within a just and human society. Striving to do and be this is of course in itself an act of mission, an act of both proclaiming the good news and setting the captives free. Seen in this way, there is indeed no incompatibility between mission and politics; rather 'being a Christian may actually *require* one to be involved in the attempt to create a certain kind of human society' (Hincliff 1982:57). To put it in more general terms: not only is there a link between gospel and politics; this link is focused in the mission of the church.

Seen in this light, the denial of the political dimension of the church's mission, and the justification of this denial by pious statements that mission should be 'purely spiritual' and 'apolitical', is therefore more than a simple misunderstanding - it may indeed be sinful. It is the sin of apathy and slothfulness, and consists of 'not caring, not deciding, not taking responsibility [for the other] and of avoiding the issue by saying that it is not my business' (Nolan 1988:41). This ultimately implies that we are prepared to settle for being less than human - for a person is a person through other persons. Therefore 'the apathetic avoidance of politics is the sophisticated way in which we, like Cain, club our brothers [and sisters] to death ...'(Cox in Nolan 1988:41).

There is a point which I should perhaps clarify at this stage. By establishing such a close link between gospel/mission and politics, I do not want to leave the impression that I am of the opinion that there is only one, clearly agreed on 'Christian' political, social and economic system. Actually there are only a variety of Christian attitudes towards such systems. However, that does not relieve us of the responsibility of testing the claims and realities of such systems. Our missionary responsibility is especially to question whether a specific system will contribute concretely towards justice and humanisation (cf. Niebuhr 1957:253-254). This does not imply that the church must occupy a sort of 'middle

position' or posit a sort of 'third way'.[4] There should be solidarity involved, which would have to be (self-)critical solidarity. But more about this when I discuss the ideological implications in the next section.

The essential link between gospel and ideology (in its neutral sense as defined above) is for me another reason why there is a strong interrelation between the *missio Dei* and politics. There is such an essential link between gospel and ideology especially because the gospel is always incarnational and therefore contextual. Being incarnational and contextual, the gospel thus articulates a specific set of 'ideas' to order human society in a just, orderly and free manner - it fulfils the function, in other words, of an open ideology as defined above. The attempts to bring about this specific society are focused in the mission of the church. Hence the link between gospel and ideology, mission and politics.[5] Am I not, in positing this link, merely turning the gospel (and mission) again simply into yet another political ideology, such as the apartheid theology which for so long reigned in South Africa? Certainly the danger exists and many examples can be quoted from history to confirm it. Yet I would still argue that the interrelation *has* to exist and can be prevented from turning into such a closed political ideology. This is possible if we understand the true ideological, political sense of the gospel as *critique*. In the words of Villa-Vicencio (1980:75):

> ... gospel as an incarnational, contextual message is in dialogue with various optional ideologies or ideas for a peaceful society. It will side with one or other option from time to time and make its own independent critique and contributions toward a peaceful society. But it is never identical without remainder to a particular ideology.

Understood in this way, I think one can prevent the development of the gospel simply into a support for a closed political ideology. In those instances in history where this has happened, e.g. with the theological support for the apartheid ideology, it happened specifically because this essential critical essence of the gospel was suppressed or not realised at all. (A second reason why it happened was that this ideology was consciously developed in isolation from the ecumene - but

4 For a discussion of Third Way theologies in South Africa, see Balcomb 1990.

5 This is a very brief exposition of this link. For a more detailed argument, see especially Villa-Vicencio 1980.

more of this below.) If this critical heart of the gospel is maintained, the complete identification with a particular, party-political ideology, should be prevented. Yet Villa-Vicencio points to another important dimension: this critical distance is not to be understood as some 'neutral' position, somehow keeping oneself above the fray. This critique is to be conveyed from a position of solidarity with that option closest to the ideal of an open, just, orderly and free society, a society in which people can be fully human in the sense of the true humanity of Jesus of Nazareth. This is definitely not an easy or risk-free task. For what we are called to is something 'more than academic, unengaged judgment and also more than blind commitment to a specific political ideology'. Yet it is an urgent missionary responsibility, for 'faith which is not related to contextual reality by way of ideological commitment is abstract theory, while ideological commitments devoid of the critical renewing power of faith can become political tyranny' (Villa-Vicencio 1982:79).

There is still another dimension of the interrelation that needs to be addressed. That is the objection often raised against Christian involvement in politics because it is argued that the gospel is basically personal in nature. Mission should therefore be concerned primarily with personal salvation, and not with structural issues such as politics and ideology. It should be clear from my definition of *missio Dei* that I consider mission to be more than something purely personal. There is still another argument against this objection, however. In terms of the Christian gospel, that which is personal is never individualistic. According to both the Old and the New Testament, personal being is intertwined with the collective existence - very much like the African view according to which a person is a person through and with other persons. Even the most personal act (or even thought) therefore affects the communal well-being (cf. Costas 1982:25-26). My view therefore argues against an understanding according to which the gospel can be understood as purely personal in its essence. The structural dimensions of the life and being of Christians are clearly undeniable, and this provides another strong argument that the mission of the church should be politically involved.

Finally, the political dimension of Christian mission should always be understood in the light of eschatology. Eschatology implies that the longing for a more human, just, responsible and free society is some-

thing more than the evolutionary fulfilment of our expectations. For eschatology creates room for the unexpected, because it stands in the expectation of the unexpected, even revolutionary, breaking in of the kingdom of Christ. The eschatological dimension thus protects Christian socio-political involvement from being 'mere' romantic idealism or revolutionary fervour; rather, it infuses our political involvement with a special hope. By ending on this eschatological note I do not want to escape or deny the historical. Eschatology, as I understand it, takes history completely seriously, for, as Max Warren once remarked, history is the stage of God's greatest experiment.

1.3.2 Mission: ecumenical

I have not included the striving for unity as one of the dimensions in my definition of mission. I will therefore have to spend some time indicating the necessity of unity-in-mission and mission-in-unity.

My *first* argument in favour of mission in unity has to do with the acknowledgement of Jesus as Messiah and King. Neither church nor mission exists as an end in itself. Both are directed towards the coming of God's jubilary reign (see 1.2 above) in the *world*, which is the object of God's love (Jn. 3:16). The crucial aspect of the coming of this reign on earth is the recognition of Jesus as Messiah and King. Jesus himself indicated how important it is that his followers should be united so that the world might come to this realisation (Jn. 17:20-23). This makes clear also that the unity with which we are concerned is not simply a pragmatic or functional unity, in other words it is not merely a question of mission in unity 'working better'. On the contrary, it is an essential (in the sense of belonging to the very essence) unity based on the unity between the three persons of the Trinity, which is, as I have said, the subject and origin of the *missio Dei*. One would be hard pressed to find a more convincing argument in support of the theological connection between unity and mission.

A *second* argument in favour of mission in unity is to be found in the nature of the church itself. According to some of the oldest Christian creeds, which are accepted by all Christians, two essential features of the church are its *catholicity* and *apostolicity*.[6] *Catholicity* as an es-

6 *Apostolicity* can be understood in a variety of ways. Some, especially in the Episcopal churches, understand this term as indicating the apostolic succession which can be

sential feature of the church implies that the church is (has to be) universal, representative of the whole ecumene (that is, the whole inhabited world). It indicates in other words that Christians 'from every tribe and language and nation' are bound together into a single new community - the body of Christ. It is clear therefore that catholicity and apostolicity are intimately linked. For the church to be catholic, it has to be spread across the entire world and among all people. Where the church is so spread across the entire world by means of (apostolic) mission, the newly created communities may not exist in isolation, but must be united with believers everywhere by virtue of the inherent catholicity of the church. Hence the nature of the church brings the interrelation between unity and mission sharply into focus. It is therefore a contradiction in terms to confess an urgent missionary zeal but at the same time to display no zeal for the unity of the catholic church. Similarly, a zeal for the unity of the catholic church which is isolated from the essential apostolic mission of the church in the world is doomed to irrelevance and stagnation.

> Mission is therefore rooted in the ecumene - the unity as it actually exists in Christ - and is directed at the ecumene; at a single church as at the world. Mission invokes the ecumene in a call to unity; the ecumene as a divine imperative gives impetus to mission (Jn. 17:21) (Durand 1961a:177; my translation).

A *third* argument in favour of mission in unity is to be found in the person and ministry of Jesus. The nature, as well as the task of the church, springs from him. Church and mission are therefore based on his person and ministry. As the final assembly of the International Missionary Council at Achimota in Ghana put it: 'The Christian world mission is Christ's, not ours.' Since this is so, since Jesus precedes both church and mission, there is a fundamental theological link between unity and mission. It becomes clearer still if we consider Jesus' ministry. This was

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traced back to the apostles of Jesus. Others, especially in the Reformed and Presbyterian churches, understand apostolicity as the faithfulness to the pure doctrine of the apostles. A third possibility, held by many Roman Catholics, but refined and emphasised especially by the Theology of the Apostolate, is to understand apostolicity as indicating the basic 'sentness' (apostle - one who is sent) of the Christian community in the world. It is in this third sense, especially as understood by the Theology of the Apostolate, that I am using the word in this book.

made very clear in the Rolle statement of the Central Committee of the WCC in 1951. They pointed out that the interrelation rests upon his finished work upon the cross, upon his continuing work through his body and Spirit, and ultimately upon his promised return, when there will be one flock with one shepherd.

> Thus the obligation to take the Gospel to the whole world, and the obligation to draw all Christ's people together both rest upon Christ's whole work and are indissolubly connected. Every attempt to separate these two tasks violates the wholeness of Christ's ministry to the world. Both of them are, in the strict sense of the word, essential to the being of the church and the fulfilment of its function as the Body of Christ (in Saayman 1984:15).

A *fourth* argument for the theological interrelation between mission in unity lies in the various *charisms* or gifts worked in Christians by the Holy Spirit. It is made clear in various places in the New Testament that the Spirit grants various *charisms* to various Christians (e.g. 1 Cor. 12; Ephes. 4). These *charisms* are however not given to be exercised and enjoyed in isolation, in an individualistic way. It is made very clear that these gifts are given to serve the welfare of the whole body (e.g. 1 Pet. 4:10). A gift for evangelising, or for working to establish justice and peace, or for healing people, is therefore meant to serve the whole body; mission can thus not be undertaken in isolation. The gift for evangelising must be supported by the gift to work for justice and peace. And the fruits of this mission (if any) belong in the whole body. In this way the charisms Christ has given to his followers presuppose mission in unity.

A *fifth* argument in favour of mission in unity has to do with the political and ideological dimension of mission. Mission which takes its own context seriously and gets involved politically and ideologically, runs a great risk of becoming introverted, self-satisfied and self-sufficient. Mission can in other words easily become captive to the political and ideological environment in which it is practised. In order to prevent this from happening, self-criticism is essential. For healthy Christian self-criticism to take place, the ecumenical community has to be closely involved in our local mission. Yoder (1979:370) stated it in these words:

> The discernment of God in history [or, in other words, mission] demands ideologically ecumenical conversations ... at the best we must pledge that as we each read all

> history from within our own ideological skins, we must juxtapose to that reading those of churches in other worlds and in other times.

To prevent mission from itself becoming a captive to a negative, closed ideology, it has therefore to be self-critical and the process of becoming self-critical is greatly aided by, indeed demands, the involvement of the wider (ecumenical) body of believers. I am convinced that a study of such closed, captive ideological systems, for example the doctrine of the German Christians in the time of Hitler, and apartheid theology in South Africa, will reveal that both these elements, the self-critical and the ecumenical, were lacking. Mission, according to my understanding, need therefore not become ideologically captive because of its strong political involvement and critical ideological solidarity - on condition that self-criticism and ecumenical interaction are nurtured.

1.3.3 Mission: political and ecumenical

Having articulated my understanding of the interrelation between mission and politics and mission and unity, it remains to be stated more specifically why I consider mission to be necessarily both political and ecumenical.

One reason has already been stated in the previous paragraph. In fulfilling its political dimension, mission runs the risk of ideological captivity. The necessary self-critical dimension to counteract this captivity can only originate in close contact with the wider body, the ecumene. Mission must therefore of necessity be *both* political *and* ecumenical.

A second reason for this interrelation is to be found in the purpose or goal of mission. According to my definition of mission given above, one can say that the goal of mission is erecting signs of the coming reign of God. But in other terms this can also be described as the establishment of *shalom*, the Old Testament concept of well-being, wholeness, peace with justice. However, in the words of Hoekendijk (1966:43),

> ... shalom is not a something which can be objectified and set apart; not the *plus* which the haves can serve out to the have-nots; nor is it an intra-human quality ('peace of mind') that someone could enjoy in isolation. Shalom is a *social happening*, an event in inter-human relations, a venture of co-humanity.

What Hoekendijk is saying is that we cannot establish *shalom*, we cannot erect signs of God's reign in isolation - *shalom* cannot be established in sectarian terms, nor can it be some individualistic happening. We can carry out our task of establishing *shalom* only in interaction with other human beings. In other words, we can achieve the goal of the social, political and economic dimension of the *missio Dei* only in fellowship and solidarity with our fellow human followers of Jesus. Thus mission has to be both political and ecumenical.

There is also a pragmatic or functional reason for this interrelation. Already the Stockholm Conference on Life and Work in 1925 realised clearly this pragmatic need for the necessity of united action if political, social and economic justice were to be established. Therefore the report of this conference stated, 'The sins and sorrows, the struggles and losses of the Great War [World War I] and since, have compelled the Christian churches to recognize, humbly and with shame, that "the world is too strong for a divided church"' (quoted in Abrecht 1988:149).[7] The practical realities of the difficulties encountered by Christians in trying to establish political, social and economic justice in the face of dehumanising and oppressive ideologies therefore enjoins them to united action - hence mission which is both political and ecumenical.

Finally, the very nature of Christian ecumenicity places on us the necessity for mission which is both political and ecumenical. As I have stated above, *ecumene* is derived from the Greek *oikoumene*, signifying the whole inhabited earth. These roots of the concept *ecumenical* mean that we can never be satisfied with an understanding of ecumenism as that pertaining to 'churchly unity' only. According to its roots, *ecumenical* must signify a relation to the total affairs of the one inhabited earth. Such a wider understanding of *ecumenical* places on us therefore the responsibility for mission both political and ecumenical.

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7 My use of this quotation can be easily misunderstood. I do not wish to place a 'holy' church over against a 'sinful' world; neither do I wish to place them in some competitive relationship in which the church is triumphant. My interpretation of this quotation, which makes it possible for me to use it, is that the harsh social, political and economic realities of our day require a commitment of all available Christian resources.

Having articulated my understanding of mission, politics and the ecumene, as well as the interrelations among them, I can now turn more specifically to the context of mission in South Africa. But this specific context has to be evaluated against the wider context in which it had its birth. In the next chapter I propose therefore to deal with the entanglement of mission and colonialism, for it was in the context of colonialism that the Christian mission came to South Africa.

2 *MISSION AND COLONIALISM IN SOUTH AFRICA*

2.1 INTRODUCTION

As I see it, any attempt to understand the present context of church and mission in South Africa, and especially the political and ecumenical dimensions of that mission, has to begin with an analysis of the entanglement between mission and colonialism. This entanglement had lasting influence on both older and younger churches in the whole world, both South and North. As far as politics and the ecumene are concerned, the foundations for the political attitudes and actions were laid during this period, while this era was also responsible for the transferring of all the denominational differences from the old world to the new. As such the situation in South Africa was part of the worldwide phenomenon of both the missionary and the colonialistic outreach. When discussing the entanglement between mission and colonialism in South Africa one therefore has to keep in mind the worldwide as well as the specific dimensions. Undoubtedly the phenomenon of colonialism was not monolithic in nature - there were specific differences of time and space as well as the different approaches of the various imperialist powers. I will be dealing mainly with the influence of British colonialism in South Africa, as I will be concentrating on developments which took place since the second half of the nineteenth century, when both mission and British colonialism started flourishing. British colonialism furthermore had a more lasting influence, especially on political developments and race relations in South Africa, than Dutch colonialism.

Perhaps I need at this stage to deal with a question which might be raised: is it really necessary to deal with this subject? Has this specific horse not been flogged to death already? I have already referred to one reason why I do consider it necessary. One cannot speak sensibly about the *missio politica oecumenica* of the church in South Africa without dealing with the consequences of colonialism. For, as Krit-

zinger (1990:55) points out, 'it was under the pious gaze of the "universal" and "orthodox" theology that the whole system of colonialism and capitalism was established in South Africa' (my translation). The consequences of this entanglement are still very much alive in the minds of those who were on the receiving end of both mission and colonialism, that is, in the minds of the Black 'objects' of mission. In the words of Magubane (1979:70):

> It is important, therefore, to see the present in terms of the past. Since the Africans have been subjected to settler rule, they have been born into a world where alienation awaits them. But present alienation is the result of outrageous violence perpetrated by the agents of the settler state.

While White South Africans therefore may claim that the colonial era belongs irrevocably to the past (although many Afrikaners still vividly remember the Anglo-Boer War, and some of them still base their actions on the consequences of the colonial past), for Black South Africans colonialism is much more immediately part of everyday life. In the words of Motlhabi, to be Black in South Africa means to be an 'object of colonisation, disinheritance and exploitation' (in Kritzinger 1988a:125). Because colonialism is still such a reality for the majority of Christians in South Africa, any attempt to study Christian mission in our country will have to deal as honestly as possible with this entanglement.

I cannot and do not claim to write as a representative of the 'objects' of mission and colonialism, as part of the Black 'underside' of history. I can attempt though to write as someone who has become aware of this specific dimension of the problem and who therefore attempts to write about the entanglement in dialogue with that point of view. Seeing the present in terms of the colonial past is in itself reason enough why the entanglement of mission and colonialism should be addressed. A very specific aspect of the colonial past which still causes very serious problems today for church and mission is the institutional racism which originated as part of the economic exploitation inherent in colonialism. Although a start has now been made in abolishing institutional racism in South Africa, its effects in many areas of life will last for generations, and the Christian church will have to deal with them in its mission.

So far I have simply taken for granted the existence of an entanglement between mission and colonialism. Can such an entanglement be taken for granted? Various studies such as those of Neill (1966), Hinchliff (1974), Williams (1978) and Boer (1979) clearly indicate the entanglement. By taking the point of view that such a relationship existed, I am not saying that missionaries and colonialists deliberately set out to create an empire in collusion with each other. On the contrary, as Cochrane (1987:37) clearly points out in relation to the situation in South Africa:

> The matrix of forces which characterised colonial conquest and economic penetration did not represent self-conscious missionary ambitions. Yet these forces did enfold the missions and to them, in the stamp of Victorian self-assuredness, they made their contribution. They did so not because they were scheming, half-witted or malicious, but because they were of their time, of their place, and in an advantaged position in an expanding political economy increasingly characterised by a capitalist hegemony.

The fact that some of the consequences of the entanglement were not consciously sought by the missionaries does not alleviate the detrimental effects of those consequences. Indeed, it can even be argued that the missionaries bear greater responsibility for the consequences than the colonialists. The colonialists had more limited ends in view, aimed mostly at external ordering and domination. Of course it was not always so easy to limit domination to external factors only - obviously they also had psychological and cultural consequences, especially in Africa with its holistic world-view. But the missionaries consciously aimed also at 'colonising the mind', at changing whole systems of belief and practice. According to Beidelman (1982:5-6) 'missionaries demonstrated a more radical and morally intense commitment to rule' and therefore bear an even greater responsibility for the detrimental effects of the entanglement between mission and colonialism.

So far I have only spoken about detrimental effects. Did the entanglement of mission and colonialism have no positive effects at all? Of course it had - the fact that the Christian church became a worldwide body in a relatively short space of time, is one. If I had been writing a book about mission and colonialism I would have had to argue carefully both the positive and negative effects of the entanglement. For my restricted purpose, viz. setting the scene for a discussion of the

missio politica oecumenica of the church in South Africa, I have chosen not to not to do this.[1] As will become clear below one can argue that, from this specific perspective, the negative consequences so clearly outweighed the positive that one can ignore the latter. What then were the causes of these negative consequences?

2.2 COLONIALISM AND CAPITALISM

Perhaps the outstanding negative effect of the entanglement between mission and colonialism proved to be the role of capitalism. Colonialism was meant mainly to increase the wealth of the capitalistic 'mother countries'. This could be achieved especially by gaining access to the unexploited natural resources in the colonies. These resources could only be 'profitably' developed by making use of the vast pool of cheap labour available in the colonised areas. Capitalists therefore had a direct interest in the process of colonisation. So strong was this interest that Max Warren (1965:83) could state that the Western nations (in co-operation with capitalist financiers, industrialists, etc.) did not hesitate even to use naked force in their subjection of colonial people to gain this increase in wealth wherever it was available. Another commentator on this era, Guy (1983:347-348), finds in 'the changes brought by capitalist advance and the strategies required if capitalist production was to progress' the ultimate reasons for the tragic destruction of the Zulu kingdom in the 1870s and 1880s. It should not come as a surprise, then, that for those on the receiving end of mission and colonialism it seemed as if missionaries were part and parcel of this capitalist exploitation. So, for example, Majeke (1952:4) is most critical of colonial missionaries exactly because of their role in this collusion between colonialism and capitalism:

> It is against this background of vast economic forces that the influx of missionaries to the colonies acquires meaning. The missionaries came from a capitalist christian civilization that unblushingly found religious sanctions for inequality, as it does to this day, and whose ministers solemnly blessed its wars of aggression.

It is therefore furthermore understandable that she finds in mission the *method* by which the ultimate *aim*, the introduction of capitalism, was to be achieved (1952:18). The economic exploitation involved in

1 For a more positive evaluation of colonialism, see Sanneh 1989.

colonialism (because of its capitalist origins) thus has, to this day, a detrimental effect on mission.

There were specific theological and economic reasons for this role of capitalism. According to Boer, it was 'a fatal combination of pietistic dualism and class blindness' (1979:472). The pietistic theology which by and large formed the theological basis of the Protestant missionary movement during the colonial era reduced the gospel to little more than the salvation of individual souls and salvation from (neurotic) feelings of guilt (Nolan 1988:108-109). One can call to mind here the injunction of Von Zinzendorf (father of Pietist mission) to his missionaries that where political problems made it impossible for them to continue their mission, they should rather retire than try to influence political structures in any way.

> It was the 'spiritualisation' and privatisation of religion that enabled the system of exploitation and colonialism to be justified, enabled it to expand through the world and to cause the most barbaric excess of suffering in the history of humankind. This religion is, without doubt, the opium of the people (Nolan 1988:110).

As far as class is concerned, colonialism was the economic and political expression of the restlessness of especially the upcoming middle classes in industrial Europe. This same restlessness expressed itself in the missionary enterprise (Boer 1979:81). As far as British colonialism in South Africa in particular was concerned, it should furthermore be remembered that 'the clergy was an integral part of the English ruling class, and the ideas that they propagated were part of the ideology through which that class defended, and attempted to maintain, its position within the upper reaches of the social hierarchy' (Guy 1983:183). For both theological and economic (class) reasons, therefore, colonialism became a function of capitalism. This capitalist motivation of colonialism meant that economic exploitation of the colonies became the rule rather than the exception. It was unavoidable that mission would therefore come to be seen by the colonised people as the religious justification for this economic exploitation. This view is expressed in the oft-quoted saying of Africans, 'When the missionaries came they had the Bible and we had the land [in other words, the wealth]. They said, "Let us pray", and when we opened our eyes we had the Bible and they had the land.' This is what most missionaries, even the most philanthropic among them, never realised - that all their high-sounding,

idealistic defences of colonialism (which they used in order to justify the entanglement between mission and colonialism) would shatter themselves on the hard rock of capitalist economic exploitation.

2.3 COLONIALISM AND RACISM

The serious disadvantages of the entanglement between mission and colonialism are aggravated by the reciprocal relationship between colonialism and racism. It has been pointed out that racism can be seen as a product of colonialism, and vice versa (Ross 1982:2). That is why Magubane (1979:54) considers racism in South Africa not an 'incidental detail', but rather 'a substantial part' of colonialism. Indeed, he says, one can argue that racism 'is the highest expression of the colonial capitalist system and one of the most significant features of the conqueror's ideology'. Mosala also is of the opinion that racism was a necessary ingredient of the capitalist core of colonialism in South Africa. The development of apartheid can therefore be traced back to the British colonial period, for 'apartheid as a political structure of oppression is the soul of the particular form of capitalist accumulation found in this country' (in Kritzinger 1988a:143).

This is not to say that the relationship between mission and racism was a simplistic or one-sided result of the entanglement between mission and colonialism. What about missionaries such as Van der Kemp and Philip and their tireless efforts to establish equality between the races? It is clearly an over-simplification to regard missionaries in this respect simply as the agents of the capitalistic colonisers. One should therefore also consider this relationship in the light of the long-term effects of mission as 'the moral rationalisation of the colonial enterprise as a whole rather than the immediate selfish interest of settler or planter' (Ross 1982:210-211). In this light, the link between mission, colonialism and racism, as well as the role of individual missionaries, can be explained. (My evaluation of Dr Philip in this regard will be found in the next chapter.) Moorhouse (1973:282-283) is therefore not overly cynical in his evaluation of missionaries towards the end of the nineteenth century:

> ... the racialism which had never been far from the surface whenever a white man contemplated a black one in Africa, was beginning to flow more freely than ever before. Missionaries had generally been no more exempt from this feeling than

> traders, though their professional ethic had given them a vocabulary and gestures which allowed them to camouflage their racialism with unlimited euphemism.

Again one is compelled to ask what theological factors made possible the transfer of the link between colonialism and racism also to mission and racism; or, to use McDonagh's terms, how political exclusivity could be allowed to dominate the inclusivity of faith and salvation. He finds a number of reasons for this state of affairs, among them the dominant theological thinking of the time about the (pietistic) separation of religion from 'politics', and the cultural arrogance which considered African political systems as totally inferior, and which therefore regarded the introduction of European cultural and political systems as patently to the Africans' benefit. Furthermore it should be remembered that missionaries often depended on the colonialists to create the necessary political atmosphere in which mission could 'successfully' take place. Ultimately all of this reflects the missionaries' belief that 'the divine inclusivity vastly exceeded in importance and effect any human and political exclusivity and in its eternal fulfillment more than compensated for the suffering and privations of this world' (McDonagh 1980:106). A typically pietistic understanding of Christian eschatology, which has a fundamentally pessimistic outlook on this world, transferring the expectation of most of the good things which God has promised to the next world, therefore helped make this development possible. Together with capitalism, racism thus became an essential ingredient of colonialism and both were responsible for most of the detrimental effects of the entanglement between mission and colonialism.

2.4 COLONIALISM AND THE OWNERSHIP OF LAND

I guess it is by now a well-known fact that the Western concept of individual ownership of land was mostly foreign to Africans. African tribes 'owned' land communally and, according to their pastoral and nomadic lifestyle, regarded land as 'theirs' also while they might not have been occupying it at a given time. There is a Herero saying which expresses this view well: Wherever our cattle's feet have trodden, there is Herero land. Western capitalist colonialists with their concept of individual ownership of land, of individuals being able to buy and sell tracts of land, which then excluded the original African 'owners' of the land,

were therefore unavoidably set on a collision course with Africans about this issue. Missionaries became directly involved in the issue through the fact that large tracts of land were alienated and 'given' to missionary societies or churches, generally after they had made an appeal to the colonial authorities. Indeed, owning land became an important foundation stone on which the system of missionary values was erected. Once the missionaries 'owned' the land, it became a foreign enclave within the African environment - and on this land an African very often became a foreigner in his or her own country. To understand the profound influence of this event one should keep in mind the very intimate link between African people and their land. Certain places on this land are holy, either because they are places where God speaks to his people, or else they are places where the guardian spirits of the land live and where they can be revered or consulted. Also on this land are the graves of the ancestors, the living link between the generations, guarantors of present and future well-being. This is the land which was summarily dispossessed, generally without any awareness of the meaning of the deed. In this estranged enclave missionaries, like other settlers, could now rebuild 'a home away from home', which enabled them to live according to their own cultural norms and standards. They thus minimised the amount of adaptation to the African culture. Indeed, 'the missionaries in fact became settlers ... whose example would show the Africans how life should be lived' (Murray 1986:185).

Apart from the profound effect this alienation of land had on African culture, it also fundamentally changed African economic life. In the words of Villa-Vicencio (1988:51):

> The traditional, communal, pastoral structure of African life was, for better or for worse, giving way to a dependent African peasantry and rural proletariat compelled to look to white bosses and ecclesiastical benefactors for survival. The acquisition of manufactured goods became the accepted mark of civilization and progress, often to the neglect of a sound economic and political infrastructure as a basis for self-reliance and esteem.

Again the dispossession of land did not come about by accident. There was a good economic reason, according to the capitalist system being introduced, why Africans had to leave their land. The exploitation of the Colony depended on the availability of cheap Black labour. As long

as the Africans had land (and cattle), they could exist independently by way of successful subsistence farming. As soon as they were dispossessed of land, they became dependent on the colonists (and missionaries) for their livelihood. Black South Africans were therefore increasingly forced off their land to supply the cheap labour needed by the growing capitalist system (cf. Bruwer 1988:59-62). Because the missionaries owned land just like the settlers and apparently (in the eyes of the Africans) lived according to the same foreign cultural and economic norms, it must have been very difficult for the Africans to make any distinction between mission and colonialism. Missionaries are therefore today held equally responsible for the profound religious, cultural and economic change forced on the Africans, a change which they basically ascribe to the alienation of their land. The missionaries reinforced the idea that they were co-responsible for the economic changes brought about (albeit sometimes unconsciously). They did this by inculcating in various ways the typical work ethic, variously typified as Western, Protestant or Calvinistic. Black South Africans 'heard' this injunction to work as a call to provide the farmers, miners and developers with cheap labour.

In South Africa this dispossession of land gave rise (together with other factors) to a whole series of border wars between colonists and colonised, wars in which the missionaries also became embroiled, sometimes as chaplains, but always on the side of the colonial government. One has to mention here in all fairness, in mitigation of the missionaries, that these wars caused at least the directors of the London Mission Society to protest:

> The Kaffirs are charged with robbery and encroachment; but whose lands have they sought but the lands of their fathers? What soil have they claimed but the soil that gave them birth? Why should the love of home and the love of country be eulogised as the virtues of patriotism in the civilized, and be branded as crimes and rebellion in the savage? (In Groves, vol. II, 1954:133.)

Apart from the typical contemporary cultural arrogance reflected in their words ('civilized/savages'), it unfortunately did not give rise to a consistent policy of protest against the systematic alienation of land also by the missionaries - neither from the side of the LMS, nor from the side of other, less critical societies and churches. As will become clear in the next chapter when I discuss the role of LMS director John

Philip, the LMS made good use of colonialist policies and practices when it suited them.

2.5 COLONIALISM AND DECULTURATION

The process of colonialism was accompanied by an intense process of cultural domination. (I deliberately do not use the term *cultural exchange*, because the power structures were so unequal that no real exchange could take place.) This process of cultural domination was introduced for the well-known reason that missionaries generally tended to have a very negative opinion about African culture - although, according to Sanneh (1989), the fact that the missionaries translated the Bible into the African languages reflected a basically positive attitude towards culture. I think the negative attitude was predominant, though, for as Sanneh also points out, the missionaries did not realise that Christian mission 'implies not so much a judgment on the cultural heritage of the convert (although in time the gospel will bring that judgment) as on that of the missionary' (1989:25). It is surely unnecessary to mention examples here - missionaries disapproved of African dress, music, religion, housing, etc. (cf. Kritzinger 1988a:105-106 for a fuller discussion). They therefore actively sought the introduction of 'superior' Western cultural norms as an inherent dimension of Christianisation. Actually the attempts to Christianise Africa could not fail to have enormous cultural consequences. This was so because the African social, religious, political and economic system was such an integrated whole that any attempt to change one dimension of the system unavoidably influenced all the other dimensions. To illustrate this, the image of a spider's web can be used: any contact with one strand of the web sets the whole web quivering. From the missionary side the process is often described in positive terms as *acculturation*. However, this is not how it was experienced by Africans. Indeed, as Magubane (1979:65) points out, 'Westernised' Christian Africans were not *acculturated* but *deculturated* and therefore alienated. Biko saw it in these terms:

> Their arrogance and their monopoly on truth, beauty and moral judgment taught them to despise native customs and traditions and to seek to infuse their own new values into these societies (quoted in Kritzinger 1988a:107).

When the whole process of Christianisation is examined from this perspective, this seems indeed to be a more correct and honest way to describe the process. As Freund (1984:156) makes clear, there was a direct link between political and cultural conquest of Africans and the number and degree of conversions taking place. It was actually only after such conquest that conversion followed on an intense scale. This truth was realised by most missionaries in South Africa by the second half of the nineteenth century: that real Christianisation would take place only if the hold of the traditional African system could be broken. The only power which could really break this system (and thus bring about deculturation) was the colonial authority. Of course this could not be so blandly stated. That is why the 'Missionsberichte' of the Berlin Mission Society for 1861 stated it in more pious terms (the BMS was one of several German mission societies at work in South Africa at that time):

> ... it was certain that in a country where God's judgment has broken the people politically the seed of evangelism is most conveniently sowed, that is where the missionaries enjoy the legal protection of the colonial government (in Delius 1983:118-119).

Missionaries therefore mostly actively supported the political and cultural conquest of the African people - indeed in some cases they actively helped the process along. This can be very clearly seen in the case of the Griquas. So strong did the missionary influence in their social and political system become that Galbraith (1963:56) can describe the Griquas as a 'client kingdom' of the missionaries. Again the entanglement between mission and colonialism therefore caused missionaries to become involved in the negative process of deculturation.

Was it then such a terrible thing to introduce modern Western culture to South Africa? I think it should already be clear from what I have said above that the introduction of colonial culture had many negative effects on the African people. Perhaps the most damaging effect needs to be spelled out clearer still: that when the wholeness of African culture was broken by the dualistic view of the colonial missionaries, somehow the wholeness of the African perception of themselves was destroyed, to be replaced (in most of them) by the perception of themselves as abject, colonised human beings. Because of a wrong perception of culture, and a lack of sensitivity in intercultural

communication, understandable as it was against the social and religious background of the late nineteenth century, mission became part of colonial deculturation and thus did not contribute to humanisation in colonial South Africa.

2.6 COLONIALISM AND NATIONALISM

So far my evaluation of the entanglement between mission and colonialism has been overwhelmingly negative. However, with this paragraph and the next one I want to end on a more ambivalent note. This ambivalence is highlighted in the relationship between colonialism, mission and nationalism. So, for example, the great Albert Luthuli could describe the White colonial conquest in very gloomy terms. But amid the gloom there was 'a shaft of light' - and this shaft of light had its origins in the lives and deeds of missionaries such as Livingstone, Philip and others (1964:14). There is therefore a clear dichotomy here in the consequences of the entanglement between mission and colonialism. While on the one hand mission acted as the agent of imperialism, thus causing subjection, the loss of land, deculturation, etc., on the other hand Christianity was, as Oliver calls it, 'the religion of nationalism and revolution' (1965:183; cf. also Sithole 1968:85-86). Thus, in a paradoxical manner, mission prepared the way for the eventual demolition of the whole colonialist structure. Perhaps the most revolutionary idea of all to come out of missionary Christianity 'was the notion that all Africans were one people, regardless of tribal origin. Every missionary society which regarded its operation in south-east Africa as a jumping off place for the conversion of the whole continent subscribed to this idea.' This lay 'an essential ideological foundation for African nationalism' (Etherington 1978:172-173). Although not necessarily consciously done, missionary Christianity did therefore provide a vehicle and some opportunities for the idea to grow that Africans belong to a supra-tribal community. Despite this positive consequence, one is left with an ambivalent impression, though, because missionary Christianity was also 'the religion of a White race that threatened the African way of life in many ways, and claimed land which the African regarded as his own' (Williams 1970:380).

2.7 AN AMBIVALENT CONCLUSION

I have consciously described very clearly the negative effects of the entanglement between mission and colonialism. In its *missio politica oecumenica* today these negative consequences form an important dimension of the South African context and they therefore have to be taken very seriously. Yet, in concluding this chapter on mission and colonialism I want to end on an ambivalent rather than on a strictly negative note. What I want to say is therefore that we cannot simply convict the missionaries for their entanglement with colonialism. That would be very easy to do today, with our benefit of hindsight. But we have to evaluate this phenomenon within its own historical context, and then we come to the conclusion (in the words of a statement which I have already quoted) that the missionaries did what they did 'not because they were scheming, half-witted or malicious, but because they were of their time, of their place, and in an advantaged position in an expanding political economy increasingly characterised by a capitalist hegemony' (Cochrane 1987:37). Sometimes they used exactly this privileged position to the advantage of the colonised peoples. In the words of Neill (1966:68):

> Yet where the Amerindian or the Negro had a friend in almost every case that friend was a churchman, one who acted in the name of Christ, and in the light of a vision of the love of God which was denied to most of his contemporaries.

Even the truest element of philanthropy, though, was undeniably paternalistic. For Majeke (1952:26), therefore, this philanthropy was nothing more than an attempt of the missionaries, in the classical liberal sense, to act as intercessors for the Blacks with the government, as intercessors between oppressors and oppressed (1952:26). I find this judgment at the least a bit too unkind, however, one which is easily made from the benefit of our vantage point. Most probably that was not the light in which the South American Indians would have seen the acts of Las Casas, or the Khoi-Khoi the acts of John Philip. I opt therefore rather for an ambivalent evaluation, one which I think does more justice to the historical circumstances.

There is another reason why I think ambivalence is the correct evaluation. From what I have said so far it should be clear that the missionaries were agents of the colonial authorities - at times con-

sciously, at other times unconsciously. Again, though, there is still another facet to the picture. As Wilson and Thompson (1982:401) point out, a crafty and wise king like Moshweshwe also made use of the missionaries for *his* own purposes, using them to procure training for his people and placing them on exposed frontiers to act as agents for the expansion of his authority. 'He made it clear that the missionaries were *his* white men, utterly dependent on his goodwill' (cf. also Galbraith 1963:95).

Does what I am saying now not stand in total contradiction to my earlier negative evaluation? Would a positive evaluation not be necessitated by these arguments? Taking into consideration all that I have said, I stand by my largely negative evaluation with a clear ambivalent note to qualify it. The essence of my point of view has been very well stated by Freund (1984:157):

> It was not unusual for missionaries to fight the settler interest where this was a factor, which enormously increased respect for them among Africans. Even then, with rare exceptions, they did not oppose the essence of the colonial system: segregation, land alienation and migrant labour. Few if any missionaries challenged the political and economic imperatives of colonial domination, as opposed to specific policies, and they usually accepted the racist aspect of it fairly easily.

I feel that my ambivalent conclusion is justified, therefore, when I am evaluating the missionaries in terms of their own socio-historical context. I feel that there is little ambivalence, though, when I am evaluating the entanglement of mission and colonialism from within our present context. This entanglement had extremely damaging effects on Christian mission in South Africa, many of which still endure today, and which must therefore be urgently addressed in the *missio politica oecumenica*.

3 *THREE WHITE PIONEERS*

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Before I begin my discussion of six South African Christian missionary pioneers, there is an important matter which needs to be cleared up. All six pioneers were men. That does not mean that women did not also play a very important pioneering role, or that I deny the role women played. The problem which prevented me from including women in this section is that very little has been written about the pioneer women. In order to evaluate women's contribution I would therefore have had to do primary historical research, which is not my aim with this study. My aim is to evaluate existing historical material specifically from the perspective of the *missio politica oecumenica*. It must be pointed out, though, that it is no mere coincidence that nearly nothing is written about the role of pioneer women, despite their undoubted contribution. In various areas of Africa, the pioneer women are still alive in the memory and oral tradition of the people - to mention just one example, the famous pioneer missionary among the blind in Zambia, Ms Ella Botes, known far and wide as Botie of Magwero. Apart from some hagiography about such women, aimed mainly at drumming up support on the 'home front', very little serious historical analysis of their role exists. Obviously this reflects the patriarchal domination of the church, and serves in itself to indicate an area of concern for the liberating mission of the church.

The three White pioneers I am going to discuss all three belong to the nineteenth century. The history of organised Protestant mission in South Africa, though, can be said to have started in a rather tentative way with the history of the colonial occupation of the Cape through the landing of Jan van Riebeeck in 1652. A very brief historical introduction therefore seems to be necessary to close the gap before I begin my detailed discussion of the three pioneers.

In line with the philosophy and practice of that time, Van Riebeeck's prayer upon landing at the Cape was the typical contemporary

mixture of commerce and Christianity. In it, Van Riebeeck prayed for the (commercial) success of the Colony, inter alia so that 'the true Reformed faith can be spread among these wild and brutal people' (the San and Khoi-Khoi, the original inhabitants of the Cape Peninsula). Quite early on, therefore, there were a few sporadic and unorganised attempts to spread the faith among the Khoi-Khoi, but they basically came to nothing.

Fairly soon after its inception, the Cape began to be seen (by some of the early colonists) not only as a halfway station on the route to India, but as a permanent settlement. With the growth of the Colony, religion and education also began to be placed on a more permanent footing. Mission therefore also began to be practised in a more organised way, especially after the arrival of the first Moravian missionary, Georg Schmidt, in 1737. At that time the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) was the state church, and this church did not recognise Schmidt's ordination as a minister. When he himself baptised his first five Khoi-Khoi converts, therefore, the church reacted sharply and negatively. As a result Schmidt returned to Europe.

In the DRC itself, though, new missionary enthusiasm began to flow as a result of the ministry of two young ministers, Rev. H. van Lier and Rev. M. C. Vos. One result of their ministry was a better attitude towards mission societies, so that it became possible again for the Moravians to return to the Cape in 1792. In 1795, though, the Cape Colony was occupied by British forces, thus bringing to an end the era of Dutch occupation (although the Colony was briefly returned to Dutch control from 1803 to 1806). The new colonial authority brought changes to the power structures of church and mission, especially in its relation to the state. In 1799 the first LMS missionaries landed. One of their first missionaries, Dr. J. T. van der Kemp, was destined to have a strong influence on the relationship between church and state and especially on the relationships between Black and White. This relationship was beginning to get more and more problematic as more and more colonists (especially hunters and stock farmers) settled deeper in the interior, bringing them into conflict with the African tribes on the ownership of land.

Great dissatisfaction was caused among the Dutch settlers on the northeastern frontier of the Colony (the present Eastern Cape) by the

emancipation of the slaves by the British government. On top of that the LMS missionaries intensified their campaign for equality before the law for White and Black (especially the Khoi-Khoi) - something that went against the grain of the colonists with their increasingly racist way of life. Thus the foundation was laid for an attitude of mistrust between (Dutch-Afrikaans) colonists and (mainly British) missionaries. Among these mistrusted and disliked missionaries, John Philip took pride of place. It is with him that I begin my study of White missionary pioneers from the perspective of the *missio politica oecumenica.*

3.2 JOHN PHILIP, 1775-1851

John Philip was born in 1775 into the Scottish working class. In his early years he was a worker in the weaving industry. Scotland was at that stage developing dynamically. When Philip felt himself called to the ministry, he was sent to London to be trained as a minister in the Congregational Church. After completing his studies, he became minister to a congregation in Aberdeen. While ministering there, he became strongly aware of a call to go to the 'mission field'. He therefore presented himself to the LMS, and was accepted by them. His first missionary appointment was as superintendent of the LMS in the Cape Colony, where he arrived in 1819.

To understand Philip's thinking and actions, one must always keep in mind his Scottish descent. At that time Scotland was going through an exciting and dynamic period of its history. Philip was especially deeply influenced by Scottish evangelicalism, and one must always keep this in mind in attempting to evaluate his labours (Ross 1986:4-5). Characteristic of this evangelicalism, and characteristic also of Philip's life, was the desire for evangelisation. That is why he was so strongly interested in the evangelisation of Southern Africa. So, for example, it was due to his influence that a whole number of mission societies came to do mission work in Southern Africa. Philip also always emphasised the spiritual foundation of mission work, together with the need for education and industrial development (Van der Merwe 1936:102). According to Ross (1986:219) Philip always regarded the preaching of the gospel as the number one priority of mission work, although he also considered the development of civilisation very important. It was therefore on the basis of his evangelical convictions

that Philip became involved in the life of the community around him. About his attempts to improve the quality of life for South African Blacks he himself stated:

> Let the advocates of religion and humanity use their efforts to put a period to the slavery of the Aborigines within the colony of the Cape of Good Hope, and they will, by that single act, do more for the promulgation of the gospel in South Africa, than all the funds of the London Missionary Society could effect while things continue in that colony as they now are (Philip 1828, vol. I:xxix).

In reality Philip was a typical missionary of the imperialist and colonial era. With typical paternalism he believed that British rule would bring justice and equal opportunity to the (Black) population of the colonies. This is how he himself judged on the role of mission in the colonial era:

> While our missionaries, beyond the borders of the colony of the Cape of Good Hope, are everywhere scattering the seeds of civilization, social order, and happiness, they are, by the most unexceptionable means, extending British interests, British influence, and the British empire. Whenever the missionary places his standard among a savage tribe, their prejudices against the colonial government give way; their dependence upon the colony is increased by the creation of artificial wants; confidence is restored; intercourse with the colony is established; industry, trade, and agriculture spring up; and every genuine convert from among them made to the Christian religion becomes the ally and friend of the colonial government (Philip 1828, vol. I:ix-x).

His loyalty towards the colonial authorities was clearly illustrated during the border war of 1834. He instructed all the LMS missionaries to call upon their congregations to remain faithful to the colonial government, even to serve in the colonial army.

At the same time Philip became an outstanding champion of the rights of the Black colonial peoples. He was especially a strong advocate for equality before the law for Blacks (especially the Khoi-Khoi) and Whites. For this reason he was a strong supporter of Ordinance 50, in terms of which equal status before the law was provided for the Khoi-Khoi, at the same time abolishing the requirement that they should carry passes at all times. It was especially his support for Ordinance 50 which made Philip public enemy number one in the eyes of the colonists. He was equally not a very great favourite of the colonial authorities, with whom he had many running battles about the rights of

Black people. However, Philip never campaigned for Black rights because he was fundamentally *against* the White population, but because he believed that the key to the solution of the problem of bad race relations, especially in the border areas, was a just solution to the question of land rights. He was a total realist and did not oppose White intrusion *per se* (the earlier quotations clearly prove this), but because he believed it should be possible for the Black tribes to be able to retain their identity and internal unity. Therefore he opposed an uncontrolled intrusion which would eventually, he believed, leave the land like a checkerboard with small Black and White blocks (Macmillan 1959:124-125).

> From first to last Philip's themes were land and livelihood, sometimes the state of the law, but always *life* and the means of living it. His most severe and persistent censure even of the frontier Boers related to their rapacious and uneconomical use of land; his evidence hurt, when it did, because it was hard-headed and, above all, comprehensive ... In its simplest terms, Philip's plea was that if the Xhosa were ever to be tolerable neighbours they must themselves be able to live tolerably (Macmillan 1936:332-333).

It seems fair to conclude, then, that Philip firmly believed in the civilising and Christianising mission of the British empire by means of colonialism. There was, however, a fundamental paradox in his views, because he could not approve of the constant expansion of White land - a fundamental dimension of colonialism.

Something else which had an important influence on Philip's views on mission was his firm belief in capitalism, especially as it was expressed in the theories of his countryman Adam Smith. Philip believed that capitalism would bring prosperity to the whole community (Ross 1986:96). He was therefore a firm believer in the typical nineteenth-century coupling of commerce and Christianity. It was for this reason that he wanted the colonised people to be drawn more and more as consumers into the Western (capitalist) economic system. Macmillan (1959:115) comes to the conclusion therefore that no other missionary saw as clearly as Philip that there was a need 'to think of these backward peoples not merely as a convenience, "animated tools", but rather as potential *consumers*, who would be better for consuming more'. This economical foundation of Philip's views about mission is very important - and its influence should not be underestimated. It

most certainly facilitated for him the entanglement between mission and colonialism, with all the accompanying negative consequences. In my final paragraph on Philip I shall return to this influence of capitalism on his life and work.

A word needs to be said about Philip's views on the unity of the church. Mention is often made of the strong ecumenical impulse which came from the 'mission fields' to the 'mother churches' at home. Galbraith (1963:89) points out that in actual fact there was a great degree of rivalry among the various churches and mission societies in their mission work. Indeed, writing about the situation in the Cape Colony, Macmillan (1963:89) states:

> The rivalry between the London and Wesleyan societies could not be explained in ... doctrinal terms, but their conflict was intense. They were like rival imperialist states fighting over colonial territories.

Philip, unfortunately, did not bring to an end this rivalry, but rather became involved in it to such an extent that 'the conflicts between Philip and the Wesleyans were conducted with an intensity comparable to his battles with the Cape government and the settlers' (Galbraith 1963:85-86; cf. also Boucher 1966:84). Having said all this, honesty requires of me to point out that Philip's relationship to the Wesleyans was the exception, not the rule. Indeed, Philip was influential in getting the Paris Mission, the Rhenish Mission and the American Board Mission to come to Southern Africa. Throughout his life and service as superintendent of the LMS in the Cape, Philip retained a close association with all these societies. The ecumenical dimension of the Christian mission was therefore important to him.

How should one evaluate Philip's contribution from the perspective of the *missio politica oecumenica*? In general one can say that he was a typical nineteenth-century colonial missionary, with the typical cultural arrogance and paternalism which characterised his time and his race. According to Gailey (1962:421-422),

> Philip was a Tory who had come to his post with certain preconceptions about the role of a mission society. Key among these was that such an organization should not interfere in politics. In pursuance of this, Philip early adopted a favourable attitude towards the Colonial officials.

This probably conflicts with the widely held view, especially among White South Africans, that Philip was a rabid political activist, but I think it conveys a truer picture, especially as far as his early years are concerned. He believed that the British colonial structure was the best system for the advancement of the colonised peoples. Philip was, however, a sensitive man and he soon became aware of the colonial reality of oppression, especially of the Khoi-Khoi. True to his evangelical convictions, he actively resisted this oppression and sought to bring it to an end. This change in favour of the Khoi-Khoi gives evidence of a man sensitive to his context, and especially to the poor and oppressed in that context. Thus Philip became deeply involved in colonial politics.

Yet, having said this, I feel the need arises immediately to qualify this statement. Philip became aware of some of the evils perpetrated in the name of a system in which he had earlier believed, and he rebelled against them. But his rebellion did not go far enough. It seems to me that the key reason for this is the fact that Philip did not realise the strong interrelation between colonialism, capitalism and racism; in the nineteenth century they always came together, a kind of imperialistic 'package deal'. Philip rejected racism, but remained to be a firm believer in colonialism and capitalism, not realising that his high ideals would inevitably be shattered on this hard rock at the core of the whole imperialist system. And that is the main reason why I eventually come to an ambivalent conclusion about his contribution to the *missio politica oecumenica* in South Africa. He was a firm proponent of the necessary unity of the Christian missionary effort, but his position lacked ideological clarity. This is true especially as far as the influence of colonialism through its link with capitalism and its role in the alienation of land is concerned. Yet his firm resistance to the racist oppression of Black people did lay a foundation upon which the South African church can build a century later. In so doing, the church needs to be aware that the forces of political power and class are intertwined with that of racism. Any attempt by the Christian community in South Africa to root out racism should deal firmly and consistently with all three. If this does not happen, the attempt is doomed to failure - as Philip's history illustrates.

3.3 BISHOP COLENSO, 1814-1883

John William Colenso was born in England in 1814. After finishing school he became a teacher and later a tutor in Mathematics. He was deeply religious and belonged to the group we call 'evangelicals' today. He had an abiding interest in all spiritual and theological matters and in 1846 decided to become a priest in the Anglican Church. During this period he became involved with the (Anglican) Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG), one of the mission societies in the Anglican Church. In 1852 the Bishop of Cape Town invited him to become Bishop of Natal. Colenso undertook an exploratory journey to Natal, before setting out in 1855 with his party of forty people. While still on board ship they started learning Zulu.

Colenso did not regard himself simply as bishop of the White Anglicans of Natal. He rather regarded himself primarily as a missionary bishop in the typical contemporary sense of the word, in other words as shepherd to the Black 'pagans' who had to be evangelised. He therefore immediately started building a mission station outside Pietermaritzburg. The experience of preaching the gospel to Black people in the colonial context had a profound influence on Colenso's theological thinking. More and more he clashed with his fellow colonists because of their racist views; as a result many White Anglicans wanted to have nothing to do with him. The result was that Colenso absorbed himself more and more in his missionary activity. His mission station, Ekukhanyeni (the place of light), developed rapidly, he studied Zulu, and with his Zulu helper, William Ngidi, he soon began translating the Bible into Zulu.

It was a question William Ngidi asked about the Bible (namely about the veracity of stories such as those about Noah) which caused Colenso to re-evaluate his own views on Scripture (Guy 1983:90). He started an intensive study of the first six books of the Old Testament. The results of this research were published eventually in a study of seven volumes, *The Pentateuch and Book of Joshua critically examined* (the first volume was published in 1862). This publication caused a furore in ecclesiastical as well as non-ecclesiastical circles. Colenso made use of the results of the historical-critical method in Biblical scholarship which had been developed since the beginning of the nine-

teenth century in Germany. His opponents accused him of abandoning the literal inspiration, and together with that the trustworthiness of the Bible, especially because he questioned the historicity of the Old Testament. As a result of all this the SPG withdrew their support from Colenso, while his fellow bishops prohibited him from preaching in their dioceses. A charge of heresy was also brought against him with his metropolitan, Bishop Gray in Cape Town. In December 1863 Colenso was found guilty of heresy; he had four months in which to abandon his 'heretical views' - otherwise he would be deposed as bishop. Because Colenso could not and would not repudiate his views, he was deposed by Bishop Gray four months later. Colenso disputed Gray's action in court and in 1865 the court ruled that Gray had acted *ultra vires*. Colenso was thereby reinstated as Bishop of Natal. This was the beginning of an unpleasant struggle between Colenso and the Anglican Church, as he tried to maintain his position as Bishop of Natal in the face of opposition from the rest of the church. Ultimately this resulted in a split between the Anglican Church (the Church of the Province of South Africa) and the Church of England (Colenso's supporters). It is a pity that Colenso is mainly remembered for this split rather than for his unique theological contribution.

In considering Colenso's views on mission, the first interesting aspect is the Scriptural passage which for him was central to mission. At the ordination of a missionary priest Colenso preached on Luke 2:13-14: 'Suddenly a great army of heaven's angels appeared with the angel, singing praises to God: "Glory to God in the highest heaven! And peace on earth to men with whom he is pleased!"' This verse, said Colenso, is 'the very watchword of a Christian missionary and the very essence of the gospel' (in Edgecombe 1982:29). At this time, the vast majority of missionaries based mission almost exclusively on the so-called Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20). In a very original way, Colenso based mission on the praise which we owe God. Apart from this spark of originality, though, Colenso held the typical nineteenth-century views, especially on the relationship between church and colonial authority in christianising and civilising the 'natives'. Actually he held the typical colonial (Constantinian) view on the relationship between church and state, mission and governmental authority (cf. Edgecombe 1982:16). Furthermore he regarded the English people as the people specially elected for this task:

> Christians of other nations have, doubtless, their share in this mighty enterprise (mission); but we, sons and daughters of England, have a far higher calling than others, the first and foremost post of duty. For who can doubt, that, if our country has been suffered and strengthened, in the Providence of God, to girdle the earth with her might ... it is in order that God's name may be glorified, and the Gospel of His Son proclaimed, by our means, and the lands, which our warriors have conquered, become the fair possessions of the Prince of Peace (Colenso in Edgecombe 1982:38-39).

Throughout his life Colenso placed a high premium on the British sense for justice and truth. Actually one can say that he regarded his task as a missionary bishop as the responsibility to further British rule so that justice and truth could be spread in the 'heathen lands'. Because he held this view, Colenso was so deeply shocked by the British war with the Zulu (1879). 'For the war, in destroying twelve thousand lives, had also destroyed the meaning in Colenso's life. The fact that the invasion had been initiated and prosecuted by Britain, negated the basic principles upon which his political, moral and religious existence was founded' (Guy 1983:286). This is the background against which the sermon should be understood which Colenso preached on the day of repentance and prayer which was called after the British defeat at Isandhlwana. The colonial authorities hoped that the day would be used to rally support for their efforts to subdue the Zulu. Colenso used the opportunity, however, to enumerate all the political blunders by the authorities which had led to the disaster. He called his hearers not to some vague sense of repentance, but to concrete changes in their deeds. 'I will not prostitute my sacred office by speaking peace to you when there is no peace - by hiding the sins which we are bound to confess, and telling you of faults which are not the real burden that weighs us down' (in Guy 1983:275). It is difficult today to form a true impression of Colenso's moral courage and evangelical conviction to go so completely against the grain of his fellow colonists at such an occasion. Again one has to emphasise that his political involvement stemmed from his conviction that the gospel itself enjoined him to do this. It was a great shock for Colenso to discover that the British colonial authorities did not share his convictions.

> In the history of the last ten years of Colenso's life we see an intelligent and articulate man, drawing on nineteenth century liberal ideals, suddenly made aware that he was living in the midst of brutality and terror, brought into existence, not by the barbarians, but by the civilisers - his own contemporaries, peers and friends. It is the

> tension created by Colenso's invocation of high liberal ideals against the realities of colonialism and imperialism which provides the dramatic context of Colenso's last decade (Guy 1983:194).

How is one to evaluate Colenso's contribution to the *missio politica oecumenica* in South Africa? The first impression is an ambivalent one. On the one hand he was the typical Victorian missionary, full of the self-assurance that his British culture and system of government were self-evidently the best and therefore needed to be transplanted to the colonies - indeed, as I have pointed out, he believed it his *mission* to aid this transplantation. Yet he proved to be extraordinarily sensitive to traditional African religion, saying it should not be 'coarsely and violently rooted up', as it contained many seeds of 'true religion' (Edgecombe 1982:xvi). Furthermore he expected Zulu thinkers and theologians to make a lasting contribution to the universal church (Edgecombe 1982:223-224). The same ambivalence becomes apparent in his relationships with colonial authorities. He thanked God for colonialists such as Governor Grey and Theophilus Shepstone, but eventually came to abhor what these colonialists did to the Zulu nation.

Yet I feel such an easy judgment of ambivalence to be simplistic and inadequate - I would be begging the question if that was my final judgment. Perhaps Colenso's differing (even opposing) points of view are not due to ambivalence, but rather to his integrity. He came out to Natal as an ordinary nineteenth-century paternalistic missionary, with the typical liberal ideals about the relationship between the races. But his close and sincere contact with Zulu culture, as well as his personal experience of what was done to Black people in the name of colonialism, caused a serious change in his position, a change typical of a person of great integrity. His views on the value of African culture and tradition reflected openness and sincerity, while his opposition to the colonial authorities in several cases (e.g. in the unjust and inhuman treatment of Langalibalele - cf. Guy 1983:205-213) gives evidence of a pronounced sense of justice as well as great courage. Indeed, in today's terms I would say it gives evidence of a person aware of his mission of humanising life, also political life. His struggle with the Anglican authorities for the greater portion of his ministry in Natal so took up his time and energies that Colenso did and said little about relations with other churches. We know that he had an open and inclusive approach,

but apart from that, on the basis of available sources, we can really not claim that Colenso was an ecumenical figure.

It is time for the South African church to look past Colenso's role in the schism within the Anglican Church, and to build rather on his theological insights in the political and ecumenical mission of South African Christians. One of these insights, which is remarkable if we consider the context in which Colenso lived, is that the South African church should be African, not partly westernised. Also important is Colenso's discovery that the declared liberal values of the colonists were ultimately inadequate to bring about freedom and justice, indeed full human personhood, to the colonised people. In saying this I am not saying that Colenso was a saint without any shortcomings. Obviously he had many - some of which I pointed out above. What I am saying is that Colenso left us a valuable theological heritage which we can reclaim for our liberating mission today.

3.4 ANDREW MURRAY, 1828-1917

Andrew Murray jun. was born in 1828, a son of the Rev. Andrew Murray sen. of Graaff-Reinet, one of the band of pioneering Scottish Presbyterian ministers who were brought to the Cape Colony as part of Lord Somerset's strategy of anglicisation (there was also a shortage of Dutch ministers at the time). After school in Scotland, he (Andrew Murray jun.) went to the Netherlands in 1845 for his theological education. The theological scene in the Netherlands at that time was characterised by rationalism, although the revival (Reveil) also originated at that time. Murray chose revival over rationalism. Among the theological students the ideas of the revival were promoted especially by the student association *Sechor Dabar* (Search the Word) of which association Murray became a member. According to Du Toit, the members of *Sechor Dabar* consciously 'tended to insulate themselves from secular and liberal influences at the Dutch universities' (in Butler *et al.* 1987:50). This is completely in line with Murray's pietistic orientation and helped cement his conservative theological approach. He completed his studies in 1848, and returned to South Africa. His first congregation was outside the borders of the Cape Colony, viz. in Bloemfontein, where he ministered to the Voortrekkers in 1849. His

congregation included the whole central and northern Orange Free State, as well as parts of the Transvaal Republic.

In 1859 Andrew Murray was called to Worcester in the Cape Colony. With his return to the Colony, at that stage still the centre of Afrikaner culture, he started playing a more important role in the life and work of the Dutch Reformed Church. In 1864 he was called to Cape Town, and in 1871 to Wellington. During these years he came to be associated indissolubly with a series of inter-church conferences and revival movements which were destined to have a strong influence on the ecclesiastical scene in South Africa. Inside the DRC he exerted strong influence especially as secretary of the Ministers' Mission Association. So, for example, he was the real inspiration behind the decision of the DRC to start missionary work in Malawi, Zimbabwe and the Northern Transvaal. He was also one of the first Dutch Reformed theologians to occupy himself with systematic theological reflection on mission. The fruit of this reflection was his book *Die sleutel tot die Sendingvraagstuk* (The key to the mission problem), published in 1902.

Murray was a typical pietist in his understanding of mission. It comes as no surprise therefore that the Moravians are the first and foremost group he held up as an example to all other churches and mission societies in *The key to the mission problem.* In typical pietist fashion he also emphasised the personal aspect of mission very strongly. The mission problem, he said, is a personal problem: strive therefore for a deepening of the spiritual life of every individual, and dedication to mission will follow automatically, as the whole missionary task is a personal task (Murray 1944:99, 217). Another typical pietistic emphasis he lay was that on evangelisation as the main task of mission. Indeed, for him mission *was* evangelisation, especially understood as 'the evangelisation of the world in this generation' (as the Edinburgh conference was to articulate it in 1910), inspired by the love of Christ for lost souls. The Holy Spirit would provide the power in answer to fervent prayer - another important emphasis in mission for Murray. He was so totally engrossed in mission as personal evangelisation that he did not even refer to the so-called 'ancillary services' (schools, hospitals, etc.) in *The key to the mission problem.* For him, as I have already pointed out, mission *was* evangelisation, the winning of souls for the Lamb (Von Zinzendorf).

The political impact of Murray's ministry must be understood against the background of the 'liberalism struggle' within the DRC in the 1860s. This formed part of what Du Toit calls the broader '"Cape Afrikaners" failed liberal moment'. About this era he says:

> For a while the liberals seemed to be winning all the main battles, yet when the dust of the synodical disputes, theological controversies, and court actions began to settle after 1870, it became clear that the liberal tendency was a spent force. The real, lasting, victors were the 'orthodox' party, who would henceforth put their stamp on the mainstream of DRC piety and religious culture (Du Toit in Butler *et al.* 1987:36).

One of the main spokespersons for the 'conservative party' was Andrew Murray. The DRC was at that stage very much part of the broader political debate flourishing at the Cape, especially focused on the debate about responsible government. This was basically a debate about representative institutions both in church (DRC) and state. The doctrinal conflicts, especially between 'liberals' and 'conservatives', were therefore embedded in the wider social, economic and political structures (Du Toit in Butler *et al.* 1987:52-58).

With the advent of Murray a whole new generation of conservative church-people came to the fore, destined to change 'traditional patterns of DRC practices and religious sensibility almost beyond recognition' (Du Toit in Butler *et al.* 1987:59). Murray indeed established himself as a leader of this new group of well-educated young men, both theologians and 'lay people' who 'were not rooted in traditional rural communities or restricted to localized resources; they were highly mobile, skilled organizers and enthusiastic conference-goers, trying to reach a wider audience' (p. 59). Seen against this background, the inter-church revivalistic conferences inspired by Murray gain new meaning. Taking into account Murray's position of leadership in this conservative group during these formative years, one can better understand Durand's statement (in Villa-Vicencio & De Gruchy 1985:40-45) that 'the Scottish or Murray evangelical tradition' contributed decisively to the growth of Afrikaner civil religion, which came to play such a foundational role in the shaping of Afrikaner thinking on social and racial issues, later making possible the growth of apartheid theology.

Andrew Murray is widely regarded as an ecumenical figure of great importance in the South African church. Several factors play a

role in this regard, among them the series of inter-church conferences in Worcester while he was ministering there. It is undoubtedly true that the unity of Christians was of great importance for Murray. He saw unity as one of the important conditions for the church to receive that power of the Holy Spirit which would enable it to carry out the Great Commission. The unity brought about by true Christian love, empowers every Christian; in this way everybody gains more power by way of the co-operation of the whole body. This love, in a reciprocal way, empowers women and men in the unity of the body (Murray 1944:130-131). As could be expected, Murray co-operated in ecumenical endeavours of his time, for example the Evangelical Alliance and the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. In this respect he remarked, 'Would it not be wonderful and a blessing if the whole church could gather for a week at the feet of its Lord, to consecrate itself to this one task - the extension of the kingdom by way of mission?' (1944:190; my translation).

In the light of Murray's emphasis on unity it is interesting to note that he wanted to limit the first Worcester conference (1860) to White members of the DRC. Thus he wrote to his brother:

> In Europe the individual action of the various churches has been too strongly developed, and united labour is what is necessary to complete their efficiency. With our church the need, I think, is a stronger individual development ... We need to conquer the difficulties of our isolation and of the slow action of our church courts ... But I must confess I do not see much that will result from a Conference of English-speaking missionaries and ourselves. Our people are still so separated from the English on one side and the natives on the other, that you will find harmonious action to any great extent an impossibility. You know what a friend of the [Evangelical] Alliance I am, but I do think that a first meeting like that at Worcester would issue in higher results, if confined at present to the friends of our church (in Du Plessis 1919:185).

In the light of what I have already said about Murray's views on the unity of the church, we need not regard these words as a repudiation of those views. It was, however, for a pragmatic or functional reason (it would 'work' better) that he wanted to limit the conference to DRC members. It is interesting to note his remark about distance from both English and 'natives'. At the least this seems to imply that Murray was aware of the fact that unity between Whites only would not be enough; unity also with Black Christians would have to be sought.

Andrew Murray had a lasting influence on the South African church in general and the DRC in particular. It is especially his personal piety and devoted prayer life which is still held up as an example for South African Christians from various denominational traditions. What is not so clearly and so often emphasised is that Murray's pietistic understanding of the Christian faith served to pave the way for Afrikaner civil religion, which was later to become rampant (cf. Villa-Vicencio & De Gruchy 1985:40, 42-43). On the one hand, therefore, he had a negative influence on the *missio politica oecumenica* in South Africa. As I have stated, mission for Murray *was* evangelisation, and he would probably have denied its political dimension altogether - the typical pietist position. Yet on the other hand Murray's ministry was intensely political, as it helped create the theological climate within which the foundations of Afrikaner civil religion and its heretic twin, apartheid, could be established. This he did without becoming overtly politically involved, but exactly because of his supposedly 'neutral' position. Such a supposed neutrality is impossible; for, as I have already pointed out in chapter 1, 'there is no pure ecclesiastical neutrality, just as there is no apolitical theology; there are only those who are conscious of their political assumptions and consequences and those who are not' (Sölle 1974:xiv). Most probably Murray would not willingly have supported apartheid. His history illustrates, though, how dangerous it can be, theologically as well as socially, not to be conscious of the political dimension of our Christian mission.

The abdication of the political dimension of mission (implicitly or explicitly) is a very dangerous option to take for yet another reason. In essence such an option means that Christians write off *this* world and are looking only for a way in which to survive until the time comes for all of them to enter heavenly bliss. The implication is that the world, which is after all a particular object of God's love, is so evil that there is no real possibility of realising the reign of Christ in the here and now also ('Your will be done *on earth* as it is in heaven'!). Despite Andrew Murray's enormous influence on the people and the church of South Africa, especially on that part of the church which identifies itself as evangelical, his is thus not the way to exercise the *missio politica oecumenica* in our day. Even in his thinking on the unity of Christians I cannot follow him, as his was basically an apolitical, pietistic unity, an

'innocent' inner-churchly 'togetherness', and thus not the kind of unity I described in chapter 1.

4 THREE BLACK PIONEERS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

A general comment I want to make before starting my discussion of Black Christian pioneers in South Africa is that Black Christians played a very important role in the establishment of Christianity in Southern Africa, as they did in the rest of Africa. Because much of the history concerning Black pioneers is transmitted orally in an African language, White people everywhere, also in South Africa, are often not aware of the important contribution Black Christians made. I want to cite just one example: in a very thorough study of the Pedi, Delius points out the important role played by Black pioneers in the growth of the church among them. Their contribution was so important that King Sekhukhune accused one of them in these words: 'Jacob, it is actually your fault that all my people believe. You brought belief here from the old colony [the Cape Colony]. The missionaries are nowhere near as responsible as you' (in Delius 1983:121). Although I started this review of mission history in South Africa by discussing the contribution of three White pioneers (because they are first chronologically), it does not mean that I want to disparage the contribution of Black pioneers, or that I add them simply as some sort of an afterthought. Black mission pioneers made an invaluable contribution to the establishing of Christianity in South Africa. The time is long past that the history of Christian mission in South Africa can be regarded as basically an all-White concern. In developing and redefining the *missio politica oecumenica* of the South African church, the heritage of Black pioneers also must be reclaimed.

4.2 NTSIKANA, C. 1780 - C. 1821

Ntsikana was born about 1780 as a member of an important Xhosa clan. His father was a councillor of the Xhosa king, Ngqika. As councillor he represented his area and came into daily contact with the king. Ntsikana had a traditional Xhosa upbringing. It is not clear whether he had any contact with White missionaries, although there is an oral tradition that as a child he heard a sermon of the well-known missionary

Dr Van der Kemp. It seems therefore that his exposure to White missionaries was minimal. By the year 1815, when he was already a married man, Ntsikana converted to Christianity. Despite the possibility that he had heard Van der Kemp, missionaries apparently played no role in Ntsikana's conversion (Hodgson 1985:129-136).

Ntsikana started an evangelising ministry immediately after his conversion. He started by holding two daily meetings for all the people living at his homestead. At these meetings there were singing, praying and preaching. Especially singing played an important role in his ministry. We know today of at least four hymns which he composed and which were the first Christian hymns in Xhosa. In his preaching he focused strongly on 'this thing that entered him, this thing that hated sin' (Hodgson 1985:158). It is important to note that at the beginning of his ministry Ntsikana did not have a Bible (nor could he read it if he had one). Yet he placed great emphasis on 'the word of God', which for him was a word God directly revealed to him (Ntsikana). More important than his preaching, however, were his hymns, and especially his so-called 'Great Hymn'. In this Great Hymn Ntsikana acted as the traditional eulogist who sings the praises of his new king, namely God himself. Ntsikana very successfully used well-known traditional concepts, which he filled with a new content to lead his people into the new faith. This was indeed a notable achievement, especially if we keep in mind his lack of contact with any Christian tradition, and his illiteracy. As this was such a remarkable achievement, I want to quote the text of the hymn in its earliest published form:

He who is our mantle of comfort,
The giver of life, ancient on high,
He is the Creator of the Heavens,
And the ever burning stars:
God is mighty in the heavens,
and whirls the stars around in the sky.
We call on him in his dwelling-place,
That he may be our mighty leader,
For he makes the blind to see:
We adore him as the only good,
For he alone is a sure defence,
He alone is a trusty shield, He alone is our bush of refuge:
Even HE - the giver of life on high,
Who is the Creator of the heavens (in Hodgson 1985:249).

As is clear from the above, and as I pointed out in passing, the characteristic of Ntsikana's special ability to bring about change was his ability to fill old concepts and images with new content. In this way he succeeded in maintaining the connection with traditional Xhosa religion, while at the same time he made the transition to the new religion easier.

> Although it was primarily a new form of religious association, the ties of clan and lineage among the disciples satisfied the need for a corporate sense of belonging and integration within Xhosa society as a whole, rather than as a group apart like the mission station people. Through Ntsikana they expressed their new beliefs and practices as part of the Xhosa world, living among Xhosa in a Xhosa way (Hodgson 1985:222).

Where it was necessary, Ntsikana did not hesitate to introduce completely new things. An example of such new things were his daily services. Unlike the practice in traditional Xhosa religion, they knelt in prayer and addressed God directly, rather than through the ancestors. Thus he introduced a new regular act of worship in a new ritual context (Hodgson 1985:140).

As far as his relationship with his tribe was concerned, and especially his political role in the tribe, Ntsikana remained a councillor of Ngqika. He kept on providing the king with political advice, as for example in the war of Amalinde (1818) when he counselled Ngqika not to go to war against the other Xhosa leaders. This advice was rejected by the other councillors. They felt that the source of his advice was a new, strange God, not the traditional God. Furthermore, Ntsikana's pacifism ran counter to Xhosa tradition (Hodgson 1985:204-206). This was an accurate assessment, for Ntsikana's political involvement *did* indeed flow from his new faith. For this reason Hodgson (1985:166) writes:

> The Xhosa response to the white advance is generally seen in terms of two opposing 'strategies for survival'. The one is for resistance and is epitomized by the leadership of Ndlambe with Nxele as his adviser. The other is for collaboration as followed by Ngqika and Ntsikana is supposed to have given him full support. But we shall see that though Ntsikana accepted the white man's religion, he counselled Ngqika against asking the British for aid in deciding the struggle for power with Ndlambe. Those who would see him purely as a political innovator, articulating the need for change, do not do justice to his Christian conviction and the price he paid for his witness in the form of persecution and suffering at the hands of both black and white.

Ntsikana did not have much to say about the unity of all believers. One can say, however, that his conception of the Christian faith carried in itself the seed of universality. In one of his hymns, for instance, he says: 'You [God] are the one who gathers flocks together which reject one another.' Hodgson says about his Great Hymn: 'In the Great Hymn there is a transition from particularism to universalism ... God is now understood as being the uniter of all people everywhere through Christ so that reconciliation becomes universal' (1985:276). Ntsikana's universalism differed sharply from a tribalistic particularism and one seems justified in stating that, at least on the theoretical level, he laid the foundation for unity among African Christians.

Ntsikana can therefore be regarded as an authentic African prophet. 'African prophets go directly to the people and inspire religious and political movements ... prophets are often sources of creative religious change' (Ray in Hodgson 1985:171). It was especially his claim that God had revealed himself to him (Ntsikana) that was very attractive to the Xhosa, as it assumes a direct relationship with the Supreme Being.

> His appeal is precisely because he seems so unrelated to Vanderkemp and is revered as one sent directly by God as a prophet to the black people. It is this that united his following from the start (Hodgson 1985:183-184).

Although I claim that Ntsikana can be considered one of the Black pioneers in establishing Christianity in South Africa, his name is not well known, even in the Black South African church. Where it is known at all, it will probably be as the composer of the Great Hymn, which is still sung in the South African church today. Although his name may not be so well known, Hodgson (1985:334) argues that he serves as symbol of 'evolutionary change which [goes] hand in hand with the development of a non-violent Xhosa nationalism' to this day. His tradition was initially carried further by a group of Xhosa Christians who became members of the congregation of the LMS missionary John Brownlee. Although they belonged to Brownlee's congregation, they regarded themselves as having a separate identity, namely as 'the congregation of the God of Ntsikana' (Hodgson 1985:337). During the twentieth century Ntsikana's memory was kept alive in various ways, amongst others by the formation of the Ntsikana Memorial Association. This association especially attempted to have Ntsikana serve as a symbol for wider African unity. A very interesting link was established

a few years later by the fact that a number of Black leaders came to hold posts simultaneously in the Ntsikana Memorial Association and in the (South) African National Congress (ANC). According to Hodgson (1985:415), 'the non-violent teaching of Ntsikana almost certainly had its effect on ANC policy'.[1] Apart from his non-violence, his value as a symbol of supra-tribal African unity was also utilised by the ANC.

Another way in which the influence of Ntsikana was kept alive was through the church. In 1911 the Ntsikana Memorial Church was founded. It split from the mission church, the United Free Church. This church wanted consciously to follow in the footsteps of Ntsikana. According to Hodgson (1985:428) this recovery of the Ntsikana tradition

> ... can be seen as a major step in the reintegration of Christianity in the African past. The consequence was an African family church. The same symbols were at work as in nationalism, but quite different aspects were emphasized within the pietistic rather than within the nationalistic context.

In these two ways, via the nationalistic ideal and the church, Ntsikana's memory and influence were kept alive until the 1950s, when they started declining. Despite the decline, though, Ntsikana was and still is of seminal importance as a Christian pioneer, as through him 'the African people can find unity in all the complexity of their diversity' (Hodgson 1985:448).

How are we to evaluate Ntsikana's contribution from the perspective of the *missio politica oecumenica*? The first remark is really quite self-evident: according to his traditional, holistic African world-view, Ntsikana apparently did not see any contradiction between political involvement and Christian faith. His new-found faith became for him the well-spring of his political actions. That is one of the reasons why his heritage could be so easily integrated with the growing African nationalism. Of course the danger exists that such an application of faith can lead to the development of some form of an African civil religion. In

1 One should be careful of pressing Ntsikana's influence too far, though. At that time the ANC basically held liberal middle-class values, so that Ntsikana's non-violence would have fitted neatly with their own interests. It might therefore also have been the ANC making use of Ntsikana, rather than simply Ntsikana influencing the ANC.

order to prevent that from happening, the Ntsikana tradition will have to exist in self-critical dialogue with other South African Christian traditions. If we apply his heritage in this way, it can help us today to fulfil the political dimension of our mission in South Africa.

I pointed out above that Ntsikana himself did not say much about the unity among Christian believers. We have also noticed, though, that the Ntsikana tradition was used extensively to further the ideal of (especially) African unity. Since the fifties of this century his tradition has been in decline. It is especially since the fifties that the Nationalist party government imposed its ideal of ethnic separation on all the South African people (Black and White had long been separated, but now attempts were made even to separate the Black ethnic groups from each other). African nationalist organisations, like for example the ANC, have rejected this ethnic separation from the beginning. With all the instruments of power at its disposal, however, the regime imposed its will on South African society, and undoubtedly succeeded in making many people think exclusively in ethnic categories (as is evidenced for instance in the measure of success the regime enjoyed with its homelands policy). We can say therefore that the need for symbols which can facilitate unity in the face of our nearly overwhelming diversity is as urgent as in the days of Ntsikana. It is high time therefore that all the South African 'tribes', as well as and in particular the White 'tribe', should recover the Ntsikana tradition as one symbol of a supra-tribal unity, a symbol in which both the rich African as well as the rich Christian tradition plays a constitutive part.

4.3 TIYO SOGA, 1829-1871

Tiyo Soga was born in 1829. His father was a leading councillor of Ngqika (as was Ntsikana) and one can therefore conclude that he probably was influenced by Ntsikana. Tiyo Soga went to a mission school and later, for more advanced education, to Lovedale, which at that time was not yet a purely Black school, but multiracial. During the war of 1846 he fled with the Scottish (Presbyterian) missionaries and was then taken to Scotland by a teacher at Lovedale, Mr Govan. While in Scotland he was baptised in 1848 before returning to South Africa later in the same year. Soga then became a teacher in the Eastern Cape, until he fled with the Scottish missionaries again during the 1850

war. In 1851 he returned to Scotland to study for the ministry, inter alia at the University of Glasgow. In 1856 he was ordained in the Presbyterian Church - the first Black South African to be ordained as a minister. In 1857 he married a Scottish woman, Janet Burnside, before returning to South Africa. Back in the Eastern Cape he served as missionary at Mgwali (1857-1868) and Tutura from 1868 till his untimely death in 1871.

Soga's service as a missionary must be evaluated against the background of the entanglement between mission and colonialism. This entanglement placed missionaries (both Black and White) in an almost untenably ambivalent position. The colonial authority expected of them to be precursors of governmental authority and sources of information on the Black population. For this very reason the missionaries were distrusted by the Blacks, whose trust they had to win for a successful mission. Added to this was the tension created by the border wars in the Eastern Cape. It was especially the commando system which created problems, as the Black tribes often ascribed the depredations of punitive commandos to the influence of missionaries. In this respect the mission stations were regarded as outposts of White authority. It was against this tense and complicated background that Tiyo Soga started his mission work among the Xhosa.

Soga's mission methods were typical of the generally accepted approach of that time. They consisted mainly of preaching and rudimentary teaching (aimed particularly at literacy, so that people could read the Bible). In order to achieve this goal he made use of Black catechists and evangelists, who mostly had only had a very rudimentary education themselves. Next to preaching and teaching, Soga wanted to supply medical care (apparently with the typical Pietist motivation of that time, namely to facilitate evangelisation):

> The healing art is an admirable adjunct to the more direct ministry of the gospel. It is often astonishing to me that the Church did not till recently take up this idea, so admirably illustrated in the life of the Lord Jesus. In the Galeka country, as everywhere else in the habitable globe, melancholy cases of suffering humanity are to be met with very frequently. By our efforts in prescribing for, and relieving these sufferings, we get access into the hearts of not a few (Soga in Williams 1983:134).

In one important respect Soga's approach did however differ from that of his fellow (White) missionaries. By 1840 most missionaries were

convinced that their mission work would only be successful if the structure of the traditional Xhosa society and culture could be broken down. (I referred to this in chapter 2.) The authority of the tribal leaders and traditional customs therefore had to be destroyed. Against this background most missionaries welcomed the catastrophic consequences of the Great Cattle Killing (1856-1857),[2] as it nearly destroyed completely the tribal structure and customs of the Xhosa. Soga, though, could see no ultimate salvation for the Christian gospel in the destruction of the fibre of Xhosa life - although also here he was in an ambivalent position, which becomes clear in the following quotation:

> However, he [Soga] saw divine purpose in the catastrophe. Affliction was good for the soul [note the typical Pietist sentiment]; the scattering of the tribes would bring them into contact with Christianity, both in the Colony and at mission stations in Caffraria, to which they would flock (Williams 1978:60).

Soga's ambivalent position with regard to Xhosa traditions and customs is revealed even more clearly in an event that took place at Mgwali. A group of boys on the station had themselves circumcised, painted themselves White and isolated themselves for a period - all in accordance with Xhosa tradition. It was a great disappointment to Soga, who interpreted it as a return to traditional religion. For this reason he expelled the boys from the station. This caused great dissatisfaction with their parents, two of whom were elders in the church.

> The defiance boded ill for Soga and Chalmers (his fellow missionary at Mgwali). They therefore appealed for help to Charles Brownlee, the Ngqika Commissioner [thereby confirming missionary dependence on the strong arm of government]. They pointed out that 'whilst the principles of our Church were opposed to all Government interference betwixt ministers and their people, yet as the conduct of these lads [sic] was a public nuisance, a violation of all order, and a disturbance of the

2 The Great Cattle Killing took place when the Xhosa, apparently as the result of a prophecy by a young girl, Nongqawuse, killed their livestock and destroyed their crops. As a result, all Whites would be swept from their (Xhosa) land for ever. Great controversy surrounds the interpretation of this event, and many historians (and others) question the truth of the story as it has been handed down. As I am mainly interested in the consequences of the event here, I only state the fact that such a killing took place. I do not opt for any one of the different interpretations, as I cannot here engage in the research such an option presupposes.

peace of this station, we feel compelled to call in [your] assistance to put an end to this lawlessness' (Williams 1978:84-85).

As I have already remarked, this incident pointed up Soga's ambivalent position, It seems, indeed, as if the incident was meant to embarrass Soga, who was himself not circumcised (and therefore still considered a child according to traditional custom). Whatever the motive, it does emphasise Soga's difficult position. This incident also shows that he apparently maintained the typically Pietist 'neutral' view on governmental authority, which is in effect a support of and a reliance upon the status quo. Furthermore it is interesting that Soga and Chalmers evaded the ritual and religious motivation of the boys' act by typifying it as 'lawlessness' instead. I make these observations not to put Soga in a bad light, but to highlight the tremendously ambivalent position in which he as a Black missionary was placed by the entanglement of mission and colonialism.

This brings us to probably the most important dimension of Soga's life and work: his contribution to the origin and growth of an African nationalism. When one raises this subject, it is necessary to keep in mind his marriage to a Scottish lady. As a Black man with a White wife in the colour-conscious imperialist society, he made contact daily with racism. Inevitably this had to influence his view of Black nationalism. It is equally important to keep in mind that his training in Scotland made him part of the new educated Black elite in the Colony and established him firmly as a member of the middle class.[3] This fact also would influence his view of African nationalism.

To begin with our consideration of Soga's contribution to African nationalism, we can mention his advice to his children when he sent them off to school in Scotland. He told them to

3 With *middle class* I refer to the intermediate class between the rich (owners of capital) and the poor (labourers). It consists mainly of salaried technical, administrative and professional employees who are necessary to mediate between capital and labour; in other words, they do not themselves control capital, but are dependent on their salaries or wages for survival. Although there are differences within the middle class, in general one can say that they also share a specific social and cultural lifestyle. See Johnson 1982 for a fuller definition.

> ... take your place in the world as *colored*, not as white men, as *Kafirs* not as Englishmen ... For your own sakes never appear ashamed that your father was a Kafir, and that you inherit some African blood (Soga in Williams 1983:6).

However, he *did* send his children away from Africa, out of the African environment, to Scotland. If he felt so strongly about their African heritage, why did he send them out of Africa to be educated? In this connection he said:

> In our various colonial towns, there are Government aided schools, which may be attended by the children of all, black and white, without distinction; but it is a question whether the higher class of schools in these towns may be attended by colored children, even though their parents are respectable [sic]. I do not wish to be the first to raise this delicate question about my children, as it might lead to a controversy which might injure their prospects for life. God has enabled me to live down these prejudices so far as they concerned myself; but I would never think of subjecting young natives to an ordeal such as I have passed through (Soga in Williams 1978:87-88).

If we compare these two statements, what do we have here - a political coward, or a consummate political realist in the context of contemporary colonial society? I think that in the light of all that he said and did, we cannot condemn Soga without further ado for his apparent ambivalence. His dedication to the Black cause is too evident, for example, in his view on the place of Blacks in Africa. In this respect he believed that God had given Africa to the descendants of Ham. God himself would therefore establish and maintain Blacks in Africa, also in the southern portion of the continent; *nothing* would break this link between *all* Black people and Africa. In thinking thus, Soga demonstrated

> ... the great physical extent of Africa and the huge numbers of its Black inhabitants; he also pointed out that there were many Blacks in the Americas. This was the first evidence of *Africa-consciousness* on the part of a Black in southern Africa, and is Tiyo Soga's unique contribution to the origins of Black nationalism. Indeed, it seems that this is the first manifestation of this aspect of Black consciousness anywhere on the continent ... Africa-consciousness must be regarded as a basic ingredient of Black consciousness, and later nationalist thought, throughout the continent (Williams 1978:97).

According to this point of view the articulated Black Consciousness of the 1960s and later therefore had its origins and roots in the nineteenth century, in a process in which Tiyo Soga played an essential role (Williams 1978:ix).

It is in the light of Soga's Africa-consciousness that I want to say something about his view regarding unity in mission. This Africa-consciousness, which exceeded all tribal barriers, can be viewed as foundational in Soga's thinking on unity among Christians. It comes as no surprise that Soga was never sectarian (in the sense of divisive) in his approach. Indeed, Williams (1978:114) points out that Soga was probably the only minister of his time who preached in congregations of all the Protestant denominations of his time. His encompassing Africa-consciousness therefore carried in itself the seeds of the unity of the African church.

It is clear from the above that Tiyo Soga contributed in a foundational manner to the origin and growth of later Black Consciousness, which was to play (and still plays) an important role in African nationalism and Black politics. It is equally clear that this contribution sprang from his concern about the quality of life of his own people in the unequal and oppressive colonial context of his time. As such this first ordained Black minister can be regarded as the forerunner of a large number of Black Christians who would later come to play an important role in the development of African nationalism. It seems clear to me also that Soga made this contribution exactly because he wanted to be consciously Christian and African at the same time. Although his position in the colonial society of his day often caused him severe problems, so that sometimes he had to be ambivalent about important matters, and although in many respects he held the basically ('apolitical') Pietistic views of his time, Soga did contribute to the socio-political welfare of his people. Certainly he revealed no fundamental dichotomy between his faith and his social and political involvement. Furthermore his supra-tribal Africa-consciousness provides us with a solid foundation on which to strive for the unity of the African church. The very fact that it was at the same time *supra-tribal* as well as *African* indicates that for Soga the political and ecumenical dimensions of his faith belonged together.

It can be argued, then, that Soga left a legacy which is important today in the development of Black Consciousness and even Pan-Africanism. This dimension of Soga's contribution flowed from his concern about the quality of life of his people in the oppressive colonial context. Because of this basic concern for people, Soga served as a

symbol of unity already in his lifetime. As a loyal Presbyterian minister until his death, Soga can be seen as the role model of generations of African church people to come after him, people who were (and are) both consciously Christian and consciously African.

4.4 NEHEMIAH TILE - DIED 1891

We know very little about Nehemiah Tile's early life, especially about his birth and youth. Our records of him start really when he started work as an evangelist with the Wesleyan mission in the 1870s. Having worked some years as an evangelist, he was sent to Healdtown College for theological training. With him at Healdtown was another man destined to play a leading role in the Ethiopian movement, James Dwane. From 1879 he served as a probationer in Thembuland. While in this position, he clashed with his superintendent, Rev. T. Chubb, with the result that he left the Wesleyan Church in 1883 (cf. Balia 1985: 76) to start the Thembu Church. He was head of the Thembu Church until his death in 1891 (Saunders 1970:553-563).

The years of Tile's ministry coincided with a period of great importance in the Transkei's history. The Cape colonial authorities regarded the annexation of the Transkei as of great economic importance to the Cape; 'the income from hut taxation was to pay for the new roads and bridges, cheap labour could be provided for the Colony while much timber of quality was available' (Pretorius 1988:32). Once more the entanglement of mission and colonialism was therefore exerting great influence on the course of events. The Xhosa did not simply acquiesce in the annexation of their territory. It resulted in two frontier wars, that of 1877/78 and 1880/81. Tile's ministry must therefore be evaluated against this turbulent background.

Tile's Thembu Church was the first of the later series of African Independent Churches and as such is of great importance. It seems as if two things especially played an important role in Tile's secession. On the one hand he was very sympathetic to the national aspirations of the Thembu, while on the other hand he was dissatisfied with the degree of White control in the mission (Wesleyan) church. Tile, who was regarded as a very able preacher and a diligent worker by the missionaries, therefore started propaganda for an indigenous church free

from White domination. Once the break had taken place, he established his Thembu Church with the Thembu king Ngangelizwe as head (Lea s.a. 24; Sundkler 1961:38). To express the link between king, people and church, Tile composed a prayer which was to be sung everywhere in the Thembu Church. In this prayer he asks for God's blessing on the Thembu king, his son and the whole Thembu people. In the words of Saunders (1970:562):

> Tile's church stressed Christian allegiance to the paramount, and endowed him with a certain sanctity, which enhanced his traditional role and helped to buttress his authority, weakened by missionary activity and the economic and political change accompanying white penetration into the area.

There can be little doubt that Tile's activities as a Thembu nationalist played the leading role in his secession from the Wesleyan Church (cf. Kamphausen 1976:94-95). It seems also as if the church acted in conjunction with the Cape Department of Native Affairs. In any case, the church produced a whole series of accusations against Tile, inter alia that he was causing enmity towards the magistrates in Thembuland and that he addressed a political meeting on a Sunday. After Tile's secession, his influence in Thembu affairs increased rather than decreased. These activities of his are of great importance, as they introduced a new era of protest. By this time it was clear that Black military resistance to White conquest had failed. Tile introduced a new form of protest by petitioning the colonial authorities. This created a new channel for the expression of religious and political protest (Odendaal 1984:24).

> His church, then, was more than just a religious phenomenon. The political protest movement sought to escape from the reality of colonial rule. But only in the church, where all men were equal and black could control as well as white, was a total withdrawal from white rule possible. So the Thembu church should be seen in the context of the long history of African reaction to white penetration ... The founding of the Thembu church marked the trial of a new method, the use of a Christian framework within which to express African equality in an age of white control (Saunders 1970:569; cf. also Kamphausen 1976:107).

An important aspect of Tile's political involvement, which also had important missionary consequences, was his strong attachment to the Thembu king and the traditional power structure. The new Black elite of teachers, ministers, etc., which started exerting their influence by the 1870s, generally favoured the inclusion of Caffraria in a multi-

racial Cape society. Tile, on the contrary, wanted to have an independent tribal structure under the leadership of the traditional king. In this respect his prayer, to which I have already referred, can be said to be a new expression of Black Consciousness (Kamphausen 1976:102). In opposition to most White missionaries, he therefore wished to cooperate with the traditional power structures and to fortify them against White encroachment. Two consecutive Thembu kings employed his educational and political skills in an effort to maintain their independence from the Cape. However, 'the goal of chiefly independence, it soon became apparent, was one impossible to attain, and it rapidly faded away, though the idea of an independent Black state was to reappear as a practical programme in the Transkei some 70 years later' (Saunders 1970:569).

As is clear from what I have said above, the Thembu Church, like later Ethiopian-type Independent Churches, pursued a clear political agenda under Tile's leadership (cf. also Kamphausen 1976:88-89). This would eventually lead to another important aspect, namely that the Thembu Church would rise above its originally narrow ethnic base to exert a much wider attraction among Black people. Tile himself later gave evidence that he did not consider ethnic or tribal considerations of greater importance than a common Blackness. 'Thus Tile told Veldtman Bikitsha, so the headman reported later, that the church had as its object "a political move to free the Native from European control, and for the ultimate supremacy of the Coloured races throughout South Africa"' (Saunders 1970:567). The fundamental principle of later Black nationalists in South Africa, namely that White power had to be resisted by Black unity, thus finds its basis here with Tile (cf. Odendaal 1984:24; also Kamphausen 1976:108). That the Thembu Church set itself such a clear political agenda need not surprise us. In a basically illiterate society, the pulpit is an important tool in political conscientisation. Through the political involvement of the Thembu Church the foundation was therefore laid for churches in South Africa to become involved in the politics of African nationalism. 'And the element of African assertion in early religious independency, which first expresses itself in Tile's church, was to form a major ideological component of African nationalism' (Saunders 1970:39). While his church started out as a Thembu Church, Tile's thinking eventually rose above tribe-centred

particularism. Both in the light of his own achievements, as well as in the light of the later importance of Ethiopian Independent Churches, therefore, Tile is of foundational significance for church and mission in South Africa (Balia 1985:86).

In direct contrast to Tiyo Soga's ambivalence towards African traditional religious and tribal structures, Tile clearly regarded them in a positive light. So, for example, he was said to have contributed an ox towards the circumcision celebration of Dalindyebo, son of Ngangelizwe (Kamphausen 1976:105). Like Soga, however, he contributed in a very important way to the origin and growth of later Black Consciousness, which was to play an important role in African nationalism and Black politics. It seems clear that for Tile this involvement sprang from his understanding of the demands and promises of the gospel. Of special importance was Tile's conscientising role in his community - a role the Black churches are called to play increasingly in our day.

Another aspect of Tile's importance for us today is obviously his role as the leader of the first African Independent Church. When one considers the fact that between 20 per cent and 30 per cent of the Black population of South Africa today belong to the African Independent Churches, the importance of this pioneer founder of an Independent church is self-evident. Many commentators regard the Independent churches as basically fissiparous and sectarian, in other words that they have a negative effect on the unity of the church. On the basis of twenty years of empirical research on Shona Independent Churches, Daneel however disputes this view. According to him, there are positive signs of ecumenism within these churches:

> The *Old* (i.e. African) society, with its drive for an intimate sense of belonging in a geographically restricted area, is made *New* in the Independent Church context through the recognition that within the process of fragmentation of Church groups - as with the hiving off of villages - the new 'dunhu' (i.e. the 'family of Christian Churches' founded in God) remains a constant and stabilizing factor. It is in this sense that I referred to Shona or African society as containing the 'seeds of ecumenism' (Daneel 1988:412).

If one considers what I said earlier about Tile's supra-tribal Africa-consciousness in the light of Daneel's findings, it becomes clear that

one can indeed say that Tile's contribution contained seeds of ecumenism on which the South African church can build today.

As far as the political and ecumenical dimensions of Christian mission in South Africa are concerned, Tile therefore made an important contribution. His emphasis on holistic African traditional religion and culture enabled him to keep his Christian faith and his political commitment together integrally. Of special significance is also Tile's conscientising role in his community - a role many Black pastors and priests would have to play later when organised political activity was made impossible by restrictions and states of emergency.

4.5 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, let us consider all three Black pioneers. In a sense one can say that each one of them is representative of a specific group in the South African churches today. Ntsikana can be considered representative of the millions of 'ordinary lay' members who are responsible for such a large part of the growth of the Christian church in Africa today. Tiyo Soga can be considered representative of the thousands of ordained African ministers who labour faithfully and contribute towards the Africanisation of the church. And Nehemiah Tile can be considered the 'father and mother' of the influential group of African Independent Churches, who are indigenising the Christian gospel in a meaningful way. What is clear in the contribution of all three of them is that they did not regard their socio-political involvement as some sort of unnecessary adjunct, but as an essential dimension of their Christian existence. This undoubtedly was influenced by a holistic African world-view. It is also interesting to note that all three these early South African Christians gave evidence of a universalism in their outlook which transcended the traditional tribal particularism. The unity of the church was therefore for them at least a strong ideal to strive for. As far as the *missio politica oecumenica* of the church is concerned, they therefore made a useful contribution and left the South African church a valuable heritage on which it can build in the troubled times it is experiencing today.

5 *AN ECUMENICAL PERSPECTIVE*

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I am going to discuss three ecumenical[1] documents, the first of which stems from 1960. I am therefore making a marked jump in time from the end of the nineteenth century to the second half of the twentieth century. It is necessary to say something about this gap.

There are various reasons for this decision. In the Introduction I stated that I acknowledge the fragmentary character of my survey. Though fragmentary, it is however not completely arbitrary. I have chosen six pioneers to illustrate the foundations on which the South African church are built and have to be evaluated today. My choice of these ecumenical documents is meant to illustrate what happened to those foundations - in what way are they reflected in the present-day church; have they been utilised at all, or have they been neglected, forgotten or ignored? I am therefore attempting to draw the lines from the pioneers to the present time by analysing these documents. I have chosen the documents (Cottesloe, the Message to the People, Kairos) exactly because they are ecumenical, and furthermore because all three of them were formulated in times of existential crisis, when the South African church was forced to reflect very honestly and very thoroughly on its life and being in South African society. This explains my choice of documents. Something still needs to be said about the intervening years.

My discussion of the last pioneer, Nehemiah Tile, brought us to the end of the nineteenth century. Two events of very great importance for the future of South Africa took place towards the end of that century.

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1 As I pointed out in chapter 1, I understand the term *ecumenical* to mean the striving for the organic, visible unity and renewal of the Christian churches. I view these documents as ecumenical because all three of them, in my opinion, were born out of this striving.

They were the two wars of independence fought between the Boers and the British. It was especially the second of these wars, that from 1899 to 1902, which was to have a lasting influence on South African history. I wish to point out especially two effects which had such a lasting influence. The first is the reinforcement of the antagonism between Boer and Brit in South Africa - an antagonism which played a very important role for decades, and is still alive in certain Afrikaans circles today. This antagonism had its roots in the period of the British occupation of the Cape Colony as well as in the resentment the Dutch-Afrikaans colonists felt towards British missionaries such as John Philip. As such it was directly responsible for a great amount of the mistrust and misunderstanding between the Afrikaans and so-called English churches. So, for example, much of the lack of ecumenical communication, for instance in the Christian Council (which was the precursor of the South African Council of Churches), can ultimately be traced back to feelings rooted in this war and in the suspicion between Afrikaners and English-speaking South Africans. A second result of the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902 was the very close link between Afrikaans Reformed churches (especially the Dutch Reformed Church) and Afrikaner nationalism. The churches went to war with the Afrikaner people and identified fully with the nationalistic ideal of the Afrikaners.

The next important historical event of which we should take note is the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910. This event clearly showed Black South Africans that they were going to be excluded from the political development of South Africa, for the racial policy decided upon was not the relatively 'enlightened' policy of the Cape Colony, but the more explicitly racist policy of Natal and the two Boer Republics of the Free State and the Transvaal. In this event we find one of the causes of the founding of the African National Congress in 1912. It is well known that church people played a very important role in the first years of the ANC. So, for example, I have already pointed out the link between the Ntsikana Memorial Association and the ANC. There also arose therefore a close link between African Christians and the expression of African nationalism - as in the case of the Afrikaners.[2]

2 This remark must not be understood as saying that Black Theology is simply the flip side of the coin of White Apartheid Theology, and that Black liberation will therefore simply mean White repression. There are clear differences in the basic approaches of

At this stage Black people were excluded from political as well as ecclesiastical power, so that the link with African nationalism could not be so clearly expressed in the 'mainline' established churches.

During the next two or three decades the established churches (both Afrikaans and English) existed very comfortably as basically White-dominated institutions. Although the membership was increasingly Black, the leadership was completely White, and the churches therefore operated according to a White agenda. During these years the churches became more and more 'Servants of power' (Cochrane 1987), 'trapped in apartheid' (Villa-Vicencio 1988). As a result especially of the great depression of the early thirties, the Afrikaans churches became increasingly involved in the social, economic and political sphere on behalf of the Afrikaner people, who felt themselves at that stage excluded from economic and political power. Themes such as White poverty, workers' rights, etc., were therefore increasingly addressed by the Afrikaans churches. Some of the resolutions of that time sound very revolutionary. So, for example, a DRC commission of the early 1940s reported:

> City life is conditioned by capitalist exploitation. The powerful press, current public opinion, even social legislation, mostly side with capital; the labourer constantly has the worst of it. He needs a champion, a patron ... The church should be his father, his advocate; it should stand up for the rights of the oppressed; it should proclaim social justice ... the labourer is painfully aware of the obstacles put in his way by the establishment. He is no longer a human being; he is a digit, a cog in the big machine; his life, his views, his interests count for nothing; all that counts are his labour and his sweat. And then it appears to him as if law and order are always on the side of the propertied classes; he seeks in vain for justice and protection (quoted in Villa-Vicencio & De Gruchy 1985:67).

The tragedy of course is that the labourer spoken of here is only the *Afrikaans* labourer, and the oppressor only the *English* oppressor. Yet the close identification between Afrikaans church and Afrikaans social, political and economic aspirations is quite clear. Afrikaner nationalism became therefore in this period a Christian nationalist ideology, with

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these theologies (e.g. Black Theology is socialistic, White Theology capitalistic; Black Theology is liberatory, White Theology is more narrowly nationalistic, etc.). What I am saying is therefore that the Christian churches played an important (but not the same) role in the growth of political nationalism in South Africa.

close identification between faith and politics. This led in the 1940s and 1950s to a series of decisions in which the DRC requested the state to introduce apartheid legislation. So, for example, the Federal Missions Council of the DRC decided in 1950 that:

> There exists an inevitable link between one's own residential area, one's own language, national characteristics ['volksaard'] and tradition on the one hand, and a sense of vocation or religious destiny on the other ... We are also children of the Covenant and possess our own confession of faith, and these things are implicated (or prejudiced) if our cultural heritage or racial purity is threatened (quoted in Shenk 1983:139).

Since 1948 the DRC could of course address their petitions to a sympathetic government, for in that year the (Afrikaner) Nationalist Party had assumed power explicitly on an apartheid platform. Although one has to point out again that apartheid had its roots in the colonial era and therefore existed long before the Nationalists came to power, it is true that they made it into a specific and ordered policy which they aimed to enforce through legislation. The growing corpus of apartheid legislation sparked increased Black resistance, while the English churches (with the exception of some remarkable individuals) mainly made ineffectual noises against apartheid. This growing Black resistance was channelled by the ANC and PAC into non-violent campaigns, which led eventually to the massacre at Sharpeville in 1960 which galvanised world opinion, also the worldwide Christian community, into a new awareness of what was happening in South Africa. This was indeed a crisis of conscience for all Christians, and the WCC called for a consultation of all its member churches in South Africa. At that stage the DRC synods of the Cape and Transvaal were still members of the WCC, as well as the synod of the smaller Nederduitsche Hervormde Kerk. This consultation, which was attended by a small number of WCC office bearers, took place at Cottesloe in December 1960.

Before we turn to an evaluation of the Cottesloe report, I want to say something about the African Independent Churches. Since their beginning with the Thembu Church of Nehemiah Tile, these churches grew rapidly. The established churches took very little note of them, except to warn people against them, as they were mainly considered to be syncretistic sects which were to a greater or a lesser degree enemies of the gospel. The government regarded them with great suspicion be-

cause of the absence of White control in these churches. Suspicion turned into violent confrontation at Bulhoek (near Queenstown) in 1921, when troops were sent to evict the followers of Enoch Mgijima from land which they were 'illegally' occupying. For the Independent church members (as for Africans generally) the issue of the ownership of land was of paramount importance (I have dwelt on this in detail in chapter 2). It is important to point out again that for the Africans ownership of land had specific religious overtones. We have here therefore a classic case of failure in communication between White and Black. Whereas the government saw the issue only in terms of a certain law which was being wilfully transgressed by rebellious Blacks, for the Independent church members it was intimately interwoven with their culture and faith. When the military forces moved in to evict Mgijima's followers, a massacre ensued in which more than a hundred Black people were killed. This incident deepened the mutual suspicion between Independent churches on the one hand and the established churches and the government on the other. It also confirmed the lack of understanding and communication between the established churches and the Independent churches. Despite the obstacles in their way, however, the Independent churches kept growing rapidly, not only numerically, but also in their theology and self-understanding (cf. Sundkler 1961). By 1960 there were more than 2 000 of these churches with millions of members. Yet they were still at that stage not recognised as partners in the theological debate in South Africa, so that very little about them was generally known.

That was the situation when the shootings at Sharpeville led to the coming together of the churches for the Cottesloe consultation.

5.2 COTTESLOE 1960

I have already said something about the origins and background of the Cottesloe consultation above. Let me expand on that a bit. On 21 March 1960 a large group of Black people assembled around the police station at Sharpeville, one of the big Black townships on the Witwatersrand, near Vereeniging. This was the consequence of a defiance campaign organised by the PAC, and which was aimed specifically at a rejection of the pass system, in terms of which every adult Black person was required to carry a pass at all times. This crowd of Black

people had come to offer themselves for arrest, as they refused to bear passes. Inside the police station was a fairly small contingent of police. Accounts of how the shooting started, differ. What was established subsequently, though, was that more than sixty Black people were shot dead, mainly while they were running away from the police station. This event caused an immediate outcry overseas, while within South Africa a state of emergency was declared. The terrible consequences of South Africa's racial policies were brought very urgently to the world's attention, so that some reaction also by the worldwide Christian community became imperative. After long negotiations, the WCC convened a consultation of its member churches in South Africa to consider the whole situation. At that stage all the mainline English churches (apart from the Catholic Church) were members of the WCC, as well as the DRC synods of the Cape and Transvaal, and the Nederduitsche Hervormde Kerk (NHK). This consultation, the first of its kind in South Africa, took place at Cottesloe in Johannesburg.

The agenda for the consultation was set after long and serious negotiations between the South African churches and the WCC. The mistrust, especially between the Anglican Church and the DRC, caused great problems, and at times the consultation itself was in the balance. However, the obstacles were overcome and the consultation went ahead. The overarching theme of the agenda was the socio-political responsibility of the Christian churches in an apartheid society. The theme was addressed in various committees, and all the churches were asked to prepare memoranda beforehand for the consultation.

Durand (1961b:147-148) points out that mission was the pivotal issue at Cottesloe. More than any other ecclesiastical dimension, mission was *the* central dimension, especially because race problems find their focal point in the mission of the church. Cottesloe would therefore have far-reaching implications for mission. It would determine in what way and to what degree the church really exists as a *mission* church. In the light of this comment, it is necessary to ask what concept of mission operated at the consultation. In this respect, one of the committees defined mission thus:

> The Missionary Church is the Church sent to proclaim that Christ is Lord of all life, and to do this to the ends of the earth and to the end of time. In this mission, the

> Church in every land is in the front line of action; and resources from every member of the World Church should be available for the church in any land. The mission of the Church is exercised, not only through proclamation, but through its own life of fellowship, and through practical service. In this way, the Church will make known the Lordship of Christ in every realm of national, social and personal life (Hewson 1961:71).

This definition reflects the general definition of mission current in the ecumenical movement at that time, especially the influence of the great Dutch Missiologist Hoekendijk, as well as the influence of the Theology of the Apostolate (of which he was the most important proponent). The political mission of the church is seen in terms of social service and the proclamation of the Lordship of Christ. Unity in mission is implied, but not spelled out. There was really nothing revolutionary in Cottesloe's definition of the mission of the church. Neither was the definition contextual in today's terms; theologians were still operating with a concept of a 'universal theology'. Furthermore, this definition of mission should have been quite acceptable to Reformed (in other words mainly Afrikaans) Christians. To mention just one reason why it should have been quite acceptable: to say that the goal of mission is to 'proclaim that Christ is Lord of all life' is typically Reformed (Calvinist) language. It is hard to imagine therefore that the rejection of Cottesloe by the Afrikaans churches could have been caused by this definition of mission; the reason probably lay elsewhere.

With regard to the socio-political responsibility of the church, the final statement of the consultation read:

> It [the Church] is called to minister to human need in whatever circumstances and forms it appears, and to insist that all be done with justice. In its social witness the Church must take cognisance of all attitudes, forces, policies and laws which affect the life of a people; but the Church must proclaim that the final criterion of all social and political action is the principles of Scripture regarding the realisation of all men of a life worthy of their God-given vocation (Hewson 1961:73-74).

According to this statement, Cottesloe preferred to see the political task (or mission) of the churches in terms of social service, and then especially as the responsibility to see to the application by government of overarching principles (such as love, justice, etc.). These principles are to be applied in the group context ('a people') - a formulation which reflects especially the group thinking of the Afrikaans churches,

rather than the thinking centred on the rights of the individual, which was more characteristic of the English (liberal) churches. In this regard it is interesting to note that Cottesloe singled out 'Black intelligentsia' as a special group which had to be addressed by the churches in their socio-political responsibility. This can probably be ascribed to the growing disillusionment among Black intelligentsia with regard to the church, especially because of its failure to stem the rising tide of apartheid. It may also have been inspired by the desire, which was articulated much more clearly twenty years later, of the ruling class to create and co-opt a Black middle class as an ally in its struggle to retain power. There was only one instance in which Cottesloe went further than simply articulating broad principles and made explicit political recommendations. That was in the recommendation of the joint statement that there could be no objection in principle to the direct representation of Coloureds in parliament, and to the granting of some political rights to urban Blacks (Hewson 1961:75-76). In the light of the great discussion, even upheaval just a few years previously, when the Coloured people were removed from the common voters' role, this can indeed be considered a bold and explicit political statement. As I have indicated earlier, though, it was the exception.

Cottesloe was an ecumenical consultation, in other words the striving of at least some South African churches for unity and renewal was an important incentive for the consultation. On reading the report, it does indeed seem as if Cottesloe had fruitful results as far as church unity is concerned. The report states:

> ... a reconciliation between estranged members of different Christian churches [took place]. We met for consultation in goodwill, with a mind to reach agreements for a greater good of the whole; we found that in these conditions we were led to break down barriers and reach a new understanding of each other, a new vision of the task to which God is calling us as Christians for our country and our people in our time. Having seen this take place, we affirm anew our faith in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life (Hewson 1961:58).

Addressing explicitly the issue of Christian unity across the colour line, the report stated:

> No-one who believes in Jesus Christ may be excluded from any church on the grounds of his colour or race. The spiritual unity among all men who are in Christ must find visible expression in acts of common worship and witness, and in fellowship and consultation on matters of common concern (Hewson 1961:74).

This formulation places spiritual unity in the primary place and is vague and generalising about visible, organic unity. This was probably to be expected, as the exclusion of Blacks on the basis of their race was at that time still the general practice, especially (but not exclusively) in the Afrikaans Reformed churches.

The greater unity the report mentioned did not last very long. Indeed, Cottesloe eventually led to greater disunity and alienation among the South African churches (especially the Afrikaans-speaking and English-speaking churches). The underlying disunity came to light in the separate statements issued by the DRC and the NHK after the Cottesloe decisions had been reported in the press. The consultation had decided that where a church feels bound to criticise another church or church leader, it should take the initiative in seeking prior consultation before making any public statement. Widespread disquiet in Afrikaans church circles, especially with those decisions regarding race relations, compelled the NHK to make public their rejection of these decisions (rejection which they had clearly expressed at the consultation), which again induced some DRC delegates also to explain their reasons for giving qualified support to these decisions. This caused alienation, not only from the English churches, but also between the two Afrikaans churches. The debate about who should be held responsible for this break in communication is fairly irrelevant. Very soon the South African Prime Minister, Dr Verwoerd, joined the debate and his clear rejection of Cottesloe signalled the end of any significant support for the decisions in Afrikaner circles (cf. Lückhoff 1978; Steenkamp 1987:470-497). It seems fair to conclude therefore that Cottesloe eventually did not succeed in bringing the major South African churches any closer together. Indeed, they drifted further apart, not so much because of theological differences (there was actually a great degree of theological concurrence at Cottesloe), but primarily because of socio-political factors. The one clear ray of hope which came out of Cottesloe was the birth of the ideal of a Christian council of South African churches - an ideal which was first mentioned, interestingly enough, in the memorandum of the Transvaal synod of the DRC (Lückhoff 1978:65). The tragedy is that when this council was eventually formed, no synod of the DRC saw its way open to joining it.

How does one evaluate Cottesloe then from the perspective of the *missio politica oecumenica*? What should certainly be clear already from what I have said so far is that the conclusions reached at the consultation were in no way revolutionary either theologically or politically. Indeed, if one considers the political context, most of its decisions would probably have seemed weak and vacillating to Black Christians. It is also necessary to point out that most of the conclusions were based on the memoranda of the two DRC synods - which probably explains the innate conservatism, but also makes the eventual DRC rejection of Cottesloe that much more difficult to understand. Yet Cottesloe *was* eventually completely rejected by the Afrikaans churches as prescribing revolutionary solutions to South African society under the undue influence of 'liberal foreigners' (the WCC delegation). How is that to be explained?

One of the reasons may be the reaction of the Afrikaners to the crisis caused by Sharpeville. In the face of sharp and damning criticism from the whole world community, the Afrikaners retreated into the laager. In such a situation there is no room for dissenters - as the church leaders represented at Cottesloe were portrayed. When the Prime Minister, Dr Verwoerd, added his implicit condemnation of Cottesloe by stating that Cottesloe did not represent the real voice of the Afrikaans churches, its doom was sealed. The synods of all the Afrikaans churches rejected Cottesloe and a process of vilification started against those members of the DRC delegation (like, for instance, Beyers Naudé) who refused to reject the decisions reached by the consultation. For a generation to come the ghost of Cottesloe was always raised as soon as a DRC member or theologian proposed any change which could in any way be termed vaguely 'political' (in the sense of critical of the status quo). The historical mistrust between Afrikaans and English churches was strengthened, and official ecumenical contacts petered out. The DRC was confirmed in its role as guardian of the apartheidstatus quo, and in the very crucial years which lay ahead, it would make no innovative contribution to the theological debate about the *missio politica oecumenica* of the church in South Africa. The English churches did not really fare much better. They seemed to be impotent in the face of determined resistance to change in the White community. The failure of Cottesloe seemed to

confirm the accusation that they made ineffective noises about the serious socio-political situation in South Africa, but did nothing concrete to bring about change. Another serious flaw in the English churches shown up by Cottesloe was the fact that although the membership of these churches was mainly Black, nearly all positions of leadership were still in White hands. These churches could therefore not serve as effective mouthpieces to voice the real concern of Blacks about the worsening situation in the country. The only real ray of hope to come out of Cottesloe was the formation of the Christian Institute under the directorship of Beyers Naudé. This Institute would bring together White and Black Christians, and initiate original and innovative theological debate about political alternatives for the country. (A detailed account of the history and contribution of the CI can be found in Walshe 1983.)

As a result of Cottesloe a reductionist view of mission among South African Christians was confirmed. Mission was basically the evangelisation of the unreached, and was therefore mainly something which White missionaries (subject) did to Black 'non-Christians' (object). Furthermore, mission was supposed to deal with 'spiritual' matters only - socio-political and economic matters had to be left to the politicians. In this regard one can say that the Andrew Murray tradition had triumphed over the legacy of John Philip and especially of Bishop Colenso. The Black Christian voice was still very much obscured at Cottesloe; the heritage of Ntsikana, Tile and Soga was often kept alive rather parallel to, even outside, the church structures, especially the mission church structures, although it was alive in some Independent churches. Great contemporary Black Christian leaders such as Prof. Z. K. Matthews and Chief Albert Luthuli were prophets not yet honoured in the White-dominated South African churches. They had to make use of educational, political and other channels to make their voices heard. As mission was supposed to deal with 'spiritual' matters only (as I stated above), their involvement was deemed to fall outside the ambit of the church.

Partly as a result of this view of mission, the South African churches were woefully unprepared to deal with the difficult problems which were to face them in the next two decades. One of the serious shortcomings, which was confirmed by Cottesloe, was the disunity

among South African churches. Even the careful steps in the direction of greater socio-political involvement by the whole Christian community, even the careful drawing together of Christians to face together the challenges of South Africa, were unacceptable to nearly all White Afrikaans Christians and to many White English-speaking Christians. Whatever value one gives to the decisions taken by the delegates, the final result of the consultation was therefore negative when viewed from the perspective of the political and ecumenical mission of the church.

5.3 THE MESSAGE TO THE PEOPLE, 1968

After Sharpeville, Black resistance to the apartheid system grew, and as the resistance grew, so did government measures to suppress it. South Africa began living under strict security legislation, especially detention without trial. Apart from the thousands of people who were detained for shorter or longer periods, the most prominent leaders of the liberation movements who were still in the country were arrested and brought to trial in 1963 (the so-called Rivonia trial). Most of them received life sentences. As both the ANC and the PAC had been banned already in 1960, the liberation movements were increasingly driven underground and also started a campaign of armed resistance against the state. At the same time the government introduced further apartheid legislation to implement their blueprint. Apartheid was therefore forced onto the Black population by way of these new apartheid laws as well as through the strict security legislation. Alienation between Black and White, also between Black and White Christians, therefore increased. It is against this background that the Message to the People is to be evaluated.

I referred above to the founding of the Christian Institute (CI) as a result of Cottesloe. In 1968 the Christian Council of South Africa changed its name to the South African Council of Churches (SACC). These two organisations were to be instrumental in drawing up the Message. The Message had its roots in the Geneva Conference on Church and Society in 1966. Both Beyers Naudé (director of the CI) and Bill Burnett (secretary of the SACC) attended this conference. When they returned to South Africa, they organised regional conferences all over the country to consider the meaning of Geneva for

South Africa. As a result, a National Consultation on Church and Society was held in Johannesburg in February 1968. Here it was decided to appoint an ecumenical committee 'to provide a systematically formulated and theological critique of apartheid that would be irrefutable on biblical grounds. The Christian Institute co-operated with the Theological Commission of the South African Council of Churches ... in formulating "A Message to the People of South Africa"' (Balia 1988:51-52).

One of the important theological concepts utilised by the Message is that of reconciliation. In summing up and commenting on the Message, the drafters stated that 'for Christians the target must be reconciliation' (De Gruchy & De Villiers 1968:16). It seems therefore as if the drafters of the Message were of the opinion that the political problem of separation and injustice could be overcome by a Christian ideal of reconciliation. It must be said, though, that the Message did not have in mind reconciliation at any price. It stated clearly that this reconciliation 'must find social expression in justice' (De Gruchy & De Villiers 1968:17). How this must take place, though, and the problems inherent in calling for reconciliation in the divisive and unequal South African society, was not addressed (I will return to this problem in more detail when I discuss the Kairos Document). It seems indeed as if the Message also still operates with the idea that the socio-political dimension of the mission of the church existed in laying out a set of general ethical principles, and that it was up to the politicians to decide how these were to be practically implemented. The Message did get to grips more clearly than Cottesloe with practical political programmes, though. One of the drafters, Bishop Burnett, stated that the clear aim of the Message was to plan for the future 'on a basis of responsible, orderly and increased integration' - a clear practical political ideal (in De Gruchy & De Villiers 1968:19). How this was to be done, and how this related to the mission of the church, was however not addressed. The main impression left by the Message was thus again that of a general statement of opposition with very little emphasis on practical consequences and implications. I do not wish to give an overwhelmingly negative impression about the Message though. Clearly it was the product of privileged, mainly White theologians who did not as yet understand 'the Gospel as a call for the underprivileged and poor to take

their futures into their own hands ... Nevertheless the Message did delineate the social challenge to Christians at the basic level of Gospel insights' (Walshe 1983:62). I therefore agree with Walshe *(ibid.)* that the Message represents the first faint stirrings of a South African political and even liberatory theology. In this respect the Message was of great importance as it aided the process of conscientisation among a minority of Whites and some Blacks, and therefore laid foundations on which they could build and develop their theology in the turbulent years ahead.

The subject of the unity of the church was also discussed in the Message. As could be expected in the governing socio-political climate of that time, unity was treated especially in the context of racial separation keeping Christians apart. So, for example, it was stated that

> ... one of the signs that this [the new life in Christ] has happened is that we love the brethren. But, according to the Christian Gospel, our 'brethren' are not merely the members of our own race-group, nor are they the people with whom we may choose to associate. Our brother is the person whom God gives to us. To dissociate from our brother on the grounds of natural distinction is to despise God's gift and to reject Christ (in Thomas 1979:110).

That the search for unity is actually a dimension of our Christian mission was clearly not yet realised. The Message *did* clearly link our accepting Christ to our unity with our fellow believers, though - an insight which is quite revolutionary in a society where churches divided along racial lines were not only the norm, but where racial discrimination was actually theologically justified.

It seems clear to me that on specific points the Message went further than Cottesloe. It was, of course, a bit easier for the drafters of the Message, as they were articulating the views of a more homogeneous group than Cottesloe. The deeper implications of the Message for the structuring of South African society did not go unnoticed. There was quite a great reaction in the press and on the radio (TV did not yet exist in South Africa). Perhaps the clearest indication that people recognised some of the political implications of the Message can be deduced from the reaction of the South African Prime Minister at the time, Mr John Vorster. As Thomas (1979:9) describes it:

> In a speech he [Mr Vorster] issued a stern warning to clerics who wanted 'to do the kind of thing here in South Africa that Martin Luther King did in America ... to cut it out, cut it out I tell you ... for the cloak you carry will not protect you if you try to do this in South Africa'.

Even though one can perhaps characterise the socio-political dimensions of the Message as hesitant and not clear, it was certainly a step forward if one has to judge by this kind of reaction. I want to identify at least two areas in which I think the Message was indeed a step forward on previous attempts. Firstly, I want to point out that the Message described apartheid as a 'false offer of salvation'. This implies that apartheid is a religious heresy. Fourteen years before the WARC assembly at Ottawa did it, therefore, the Message already identified apartheid not simply as a political policy gone wrong, but as essentially a heresy. Secondly, I consider it a step forward and an important political statement that the Message was addressed not to the churches or to the government, but to the *people* of South Africa. Although one can argue that it was still primarily the *White* people that the drafters had in mind, the Message still differs from previous ecclesiastical statements in this regard. Addressing the document to the *people*, does, in my mind, recognise an important political principle, one that would be much more explicitly addressed by Kairos.

Eventually one has to say that the Message was still essentially a White initiative, but, as I have pointed out above, it did have a better grasp of the issues at stake. A direct consequence of the Message, which was indeed to have important practical and theoretical consequences for South African Christians, was the fact that the Message led to the initiation of the Study Project on Christianity in an Apartheid Society (Sprocas), 'a determined if still White-orchestrated effort to describe the South African situation in depth, analyse it and offer alternative policies to apartheid' (Walshe 1983:62 - cf. also Randall 1985:165-166). Sprocas resulted in the publication of more than twenty substantial reports and other books, various other papers, dossiers and study aids. As the programme developed, it also reflected more and more the concerns of Black Christians. In this respect it had a strong influence in turning the CI towards a stronger political praxis, and was also influential in the growth of Black Consciousness, both in the churches and in society at large. (The full story of Sprocas can be found in

Randall 1973: *A taste of power: the final Sprocas report*.) With the development of Sprocas, South African Christians achieved a much better integration of the political and ecumenical dimensions into their concepts of mission, although few people would probably have formulated it explicitly in mission terms. Still, these positive consequences of the Message for the *missio politica oecumenica* in South Africa have to be acknowledged. The greatest negative factor at this stage was probably the fact that this new awareness and praxis was limited to a small number of Black and White Christians. White Christians in general (Afrikaans as well as English-speaking) were living their lives of comfort and privilege and tended to view theologians and church leaders who articulated these views as troublesome 'political priests'. Black Christians were struggling because of disrupted organisations, and had not yet found their voice in organs such as the SACC - although especially young Black Christians were beginning to articulate their faith in organisations such as the University Christian Movement (UCM), the South African Students' Organisation (SASO), and through Black Theology. The inheritors of the Black pioneers had therefore not yet assumed their rightful place in the South African church. Even when all these factors are taken into account, the Message to the People must in my view still be regarded as a faint ray of hope for the future development of the political and ecumenical mission of the South African church.

5.4 THE KAIROS DOCUMENT, 1985

The years between 1968 and 1985 were turbulent and eventful. The first event to create a crisis for the South African churches was the institution of the Programme to Combat Racism (PCR) by the WCC in 1969. The first grants to organisations fighting racism were made in 1970. South African liberation movements (such as the ANC and the PAC) also received grants from the special fund. This created a great outcry in South Africa, especially in the White media. It was suggested that the church had now decided to support violence and 'terrorism' and the South African member churches of the WCC were pressed to explain their point of view in relation to this matter. Even the Prime Minister (Mr Vorster) entered the debate, basically suggesting that the South African churches should resign from the WCC in protest. The churches found themselves in a very difficult position, as most of their

White members basically agreed with at least some of the vituperation heaped upon the WCC. On the other hand their Black members still could not make themselves heard in the power structures of the churches, although it would seem as if they generally supported the PCR grants. Eventually the South African member churches decided to withhold their financial contributions to the WCC temporarily. This event placed the political stance of the churches, especially their stance in relation to violence and conscientious objection, firmly on the agenda. Decisions about political matters, especially the liberation struggle in South Africa, were no longer innocuous theoretical questions, but were very immediate practical matters, matters of rands and cents, of flesh and blood - as many of the Black South African Christians had relatives in the liberation movements. The whole question about the socio-political dimension of the mission of the church therefore presented itself with great urgency.

It was developments within Black South Africa in particular, though, which were to influence events decisively. Black youth, especially Black university students, took the lead in these events. In 1969 an all-Black students' organisation was formed, the South African Students' Organisation (SASO) under the leadership of Steve Biko and several other prominent Black youth leaders. Together with the University Christian Movement (UCM) it was responsible for the development of Black Consciousness which was destined to play a leading role in Black resistance to White power during the seventies. One of South Africa's leading Black Theologians, Allan Boesak, has defined Black Consciousness thus:

> *Black Consciousness* may be described as the awareness of black people that their humanity is constituted by their blackness. It means that black people are no longer ashamed that they are black, that they have a black history and a black culture distinct from the history and culture of white people. It means that blacks are determined to be judged no longer by, and to adhere no longer to white values. It is an attitude, a way of life. Viewed thus, Black Consciousness is an integral part of Black Power. But *Black Power* is also a clear critique of and a force for fundamental change in systems and patterns in society which oppress or which give rise to the oppression of black people. *Black Theology* is the reflection of black Christians on the situation in which they live and on their struggle for liberation (in De Gruchy 1986: 153).

I have used this fairly lengthy quotation in full because it so clearly illustrates why the development of Black Consciousness has everything to do with the mission of the church (understood as humanisation), and also because it spells out clearly the link between Black Consciousness and Black Theology. Black Consciousness served as a powerful impulse for the rise of a new Black self-assurance which inspired fundamental resistance to the apartheid state. It was quite clear that the government would not allow such a powerful and effective protest movement to go unchallenged. Several of the student leaders of SASO were therefore detained or placed under house arrest. Yet the Black universities in particular, which were created to further the government policy of apartheid, remained the focus of resistance to the system.

The resistance eventually spilled over also into Black schools. The standard of Black education had always been woefully low when compared to White education, and this had for a long time been a source of grievance in the Black community. The immediate cause of the unrest at the schools in the mid-seventies was, however, the decision of the government that Black students had to take certain subjects through the medium of Afrikaans. Apart from the psychological resistance to Afrikaans as the language of the oppressor, many teachers were not capable of presenting their subjects in Afrikaans. This served ultimately as the spark in the tinderbox of many other grievances, and on 16 June 1976 Soweto erupted in protest. According to student spokespersons, the protest started out as a non-violent march. However, the students were soon confronted by the police, who started shooting. As a result several students were killed. The students from their side retaliated and set fire to schools, beer-halls, actually to anything which could be regarded as symbolic of White power. The riots soon spread to other parts of South Africa, and for some weeks it seemed as if the country was sliding into chaos. Through the use of violent means, the security forces succeeded in restoring a semblance of 'order', though, and South Africa returned to an uneasy calm. Many young Blacks left the country to join the liberation movements in exile, while those who chose to remain behind organised themselves into various youth organisations to resist apartheid.

As these and other already existing organisations grew in popularity and effectiveness, the government was forced to act against them. A number of their leaders were therefore detained, among them the charismatic and influential Steve Biko. As a result of a series of bizarre 'accidents' and 'suicides' some of them died in detention. One of them was Biko. Although all kinds of tricks were employed to cover up the responsibility of the security police for his death, it soon became apparent that Biko had died as a result of torture and the refusal of adequate medical treatment. A spasm of revulsion shook the country when this became known, especially when the then Minister of Police said that Biko's death 'left him cold'. Stronger measures were obviously necessary to bring the unrest under control, and so in October 1977 seventeen organisations were banned (among them the CI and SASO) and a number of anti-apartheid activists were either detained or placed under house arrest. Again the government succeeded in restoring some semblance of 'control' over the situation, but it was like screwing down the lid on a boiling pot - the pressure was guaranteed to rise.

At the beginning of the eighties, the government unveiled its 'reform' programme. The centrepiece of this programme was a tricameral parliament with limited representation for Coloureds and Indians in their own separate chambers of parliament. Black Africans were left out in the cold - they would have to be satisfied with their ineffective 'urban councils' and the homelands. In 1983 the government received a 'yes' vote of 66 per cent from the White electorate in a referendum (the feeling of the Coloureds and Indians was not tested). Black leaders warned that the imposition of these sham 'reforms' would lead to strong Black opposition, and indeed the mass-based United Democratic Front (UDF) was launched as main internal organ of resistance to the government. The government went ahead, though, and introduced the tricameral parliament in 1984. As was predicted, Black resistance erupted, centring on the townships in the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging (PWV) area. The government countered with a limited state of emergency in 1985. Amidst the brutalities and repression taking place nearly every day, a group of pastors and theologians in Soweto came together to reflect on the Christian ministry in such a situation. Through a process of dicussion and consultation

with an ever widening group of Christians (both Black and White) a document took shape which was issued on 25 September 1985 as the *Kairos Document*. It elicited overwhelming reaction both inside and outside South Africa as a timely word of prophecy in the contemporary situation. It was of course also condemned by government and conservative Christians as a call to violence and labelled a Marxist, not a Christian document. In the light of the overwhelming reaction, and as a response to the worsening security situation in the country, the group of drafters and signatories (by now called the Kairos theologians) revised the document and published a second edition in September 1986. It is this second edition which I will discuss in this section. Before turning to the document itself, I consider it necessary to point out again the absolute situation of crisis in which it was conceived. It was born in a South Africa torn apart by violence and brutality, under a state of emergency, which made the dissemination of reliable information nearly impossible, with White soldiers in Black townships basically fighting a low-intensity civil war. Without taking into account this tumultuous background, Kairos cannot be properly evaluated.

Kairos basically consists of a critique of what it calls 'state theology' and 'church theology', and a chapter on a proposed prophetic theology for South Africa. In the section on state theology one comes across some of the arguments which have been used before by South African as well as foreign theologians to expose apartheid as a heresy. In at least two instances, though, Kairos goes further than other statements. In the first place it identifies the god of the South African state as an idol. After analysing the theological statement about God in the preamble to the South African constitution, Kairos concludes,

> This god is an idol. It is as mischievous, sinister and evil as any of the idols that the prophets of Israel had to contend with. Here we have a god who is historically on the side of the white settlers, who dispossesses black people of their land and who gives the major part of the land to his 'chosen people' (Kairos Document 1986:8).

This can be seen primarily as a theological statement, but it has a very important political dimension, for it is basically their worship of this god which enables the South African government to maintain an inhuman and oppressive political system. This statement therefore also serves to point out to what extent apartheid politics and apartheid theology are intertwined - they are servants of the same false god.

The second instance where Kairos goes further than earlier documents is in identifying the South African regime as tyrannical because it is an enemy to the common good of the populace. Because it is tyrannical, the regime is therefore illegitimate (Kairos Document 1986:22-24). It seems to me that Miguez Bonino is correct therefore in stating that Kairos goes further than most 'critical' and 'political' theologies of the West. It does so exactly because it is willing to assume an explicit political (ideological) commitment. Previous (Western) documents have been willing to criticise apartheid quite sharply, even to the extent of calling it a heresy,

> But then they seem to think that a political decision belongs to another discipline, possibly that of 'political ethics'. The implication of our Document is that such distinction is questionable both from a theological and from a pastoral point of view. Theologically, it seems to introduce between faith and obedience a wedge hardly justifiable in biblical terms. Pastorally, it leaves the 'believer' in the air, an easy prey to despair, indifference or passivity (Miguez Bonino in WCC-PCR 1985:56).

Although Kairos did not address the theme of unity explicitly, a strong witness to unity in Christ underlies the whole document. It is the unity of those who struggle in the name of the new person, Jesus of Nazareth, for the full humanity of all. It is at the same time a witness to international Christian unity by stressing and calling for the 'catholic solidarity of the church' (Green 1986:55). It is for this reason that one can say that Kairos confirms that one can no longer converse about the unity of Christians without engaging the struggle for human community worldwide (Hoedemaker in WCC-PCR 1985:52). To say the same thing from the perspective of division rather than unity, Briggs (in Logan 1988:84) pointed out that 'the church in South Africa is divided today because there are diverse and opposing communities of practice within it'. Unity can therefore only be restored if there is a unity of praxis, which, according to Kairos, must be a praxis of justice and liberation.

It is interesting and illuminating to note how the Kairos theologians themselves commented on the missionary dimension of the document. In the preface to the second edition they say:

> The document also had a mission dimension. Many of those who had abandoned the Church as an irrelevant institution that supports, justifies and legitimizes this cruel apartheid system began to feel that if the Church becomes the Church as ex-

> pounded by the Kairos document then they would go back to the Church again. Even those who would consider themselves to be 'non-Christians' in the conventional sense began to say that if this is Christianity they could become Christians (Kairos Document 1986:ii).

What immediately strikes one is that the Kairos theologians are working here with a reductionist view of mission - mission understood only as evangelisation, mission as understood by Murray and Cottesloe. From my definition of mission, and what I have said so far about Kairos, it will be clear that I think that the Kairos theologians are either far too modest here, or they are operating with a definition of mission determined by the entanglement of mission and colonialism. Kairos has a much deeper missionary dimension. In its call for humanisation and liberation, in its witness to the unity of Christians, Kairos is addressing a serious missionary challenge to the churches in South Africa. Torrance (1986:42) puts it well when he says:

> The document is significant in that it is an attempt to speak a *theological* word in the name of the Gospel - in the belief that it is God's concern to give to all their humanity in Christ. We have too often divorced evangelisation from humanisation.

Although the remark in the Preface to the 1986 edition seems to confirm this divorce, this is not what Kairos is actually saying, and this is also not how Kairos was understood, especially by young Black people. Their enthusiastic response reflects the fact that for them Kairos brought together the Good News as both evangelisation and humanisation. When seen in this wider dimension, I would indeed agree that Kairos has a strong evangelistic appeal. This is so because Kairos calls it readers to 'a conversion which is demanded by the serious sociopolitical situation in South Africa'. This call to conversion is directed at the *church*, because 'the responses of the church thus far have been totally inadequate'. This call can be compared to the call by the Old Testament prophets for the ongoing conversion of the people of God. 'This call for the conversion of the *church* is of utmost missiological significance, since the conversion of "outsiders" to Christian faith is severely obstructed by an unconverted and compromised church' (Kritzinger 1988b:137).

To conclude, then: Kairos must not only be understood against the background of the protests spreading from the Vaal Triangle, worsening race relations and the states of emergency. Kairos must also be un-

derstood against the background of the total failure of the South African churches, *especially* the so-called 'multi-racial' churches, to understand and accommodate Black aspirations to justice and liberty. In the words of Walshe (1983:88), the seventies made obvious

> ... the weakness of past Christian witness against injustice within church structures, and the churches' all too obvious unwillingness to confront the state on matters of public policy. There had been no serious efforts by the multi-racial churches to overcome the ethnic divisions of parish life, and their repeated declarations of principle [such as Cottesloe and the Message to the People] were now seen by black activists to be pathetically ineffective.

Kairos can therefore be regarded as the clearest and most forceful statement yet on the *missio politica oecumenica* of the church to come out of South Africa. It is the clearest reflection yet of the voice of Black South African Christians, addressing the issues on *their* agenda. In this regard a very important, unique aspect of Kairos has to be noted. This is the fact that for the first time members of African Independent Churches co-operated in the drawing up of an ecumenical theological statement in South Africa. The descendants of Nehemiah Tile were beginning to take their rightful place in the South African Christian community. Perhaps their voice is still very muted - yet it is there. For all these reasons Kairos is a completely contextual message, born out of the anguish of the birthpangs of a new, just and free society in South Africa, a society in which (hopefully) people would have the liberty to become what they were meant to be in Christ. But exactly because it is so specifically contextual, it is also thoroughly ecumenical - meant to address the whole body of Christ in the world. In order for Kairos not to fall victim to ideological captivity, it must be open to hear the response of Christian sisters and brothers worldwide. It is only if such an honest and open interaction takes place that the full meaning of Kairos for the mission and the unity of the church of Jesus Christ in South Africa will become clear.

With the Kairos Document, Christian history in South Africa can be said to have come full circle since the time of its introduction in the era of colonialism. For in its rejection of the god of State Theology, a god who legitimises oppressive power, in Green's words (1986:52) the god who is 'a cosmic projection of colonial will, the deification of White settler power', it finally rejects the entanglement between mission and colonialism in South Africa.

5.5 CONCLUSION

The aim of my historical approach was to see what kind of foundations some Christian pioneers laid, and in what way the South African church made use of those foundations. Having completed the historical part, I therefore now wish to draw a few conclusions.

All three White pioneers worked within the framework of the Constantinian dispensation in the relationship between church and state, specifically as it was expressed in the entanglement between mission and colonialism. Murray, being born in South Africa, was of course not a colonial missionary in precisely the same sense as Philip and Colenso. Still, as I tried to point out, he basically held the Constantinian position. He therefore claimed neutrality in political matters and wanted all energy to be directed at evangelisation. Yet, as I pointed out, his ministry was intensely political and supportive of the status quo (the consolidation of White dominance, albeit in the form of a British authority). As I pointed out, Murray's pietism helped open the way for Afrikaner civil religion and eventually the policy of apartheid. Murray's *missio politica oecumenica* (although he would not have called it that) was therefore expressed in a closed ideology which, despite its emphasis on evangelisation and salvation, for many resulted not in humanisation, but oppression.

Philip accepted fully the presuppositions of the British colonial missionary enterprise, and although he criticised parts of it later on, his critique never went to the root cause: the inherent relationship between colonialism, capitalism and racism. Indeed, as I pointed out, Philip was a supporter of Adam Smith and regarded positively the missionary influence in promoting capitalism. In his criticism of the growing racism in the Cape Colony, Philip irritated both the colonial authorities as well as the Dutch-Afrikaans and English colonists. In today's terms, Philip would probably have been regarded as a troublesome 'political priest' and his actions might have called down upon him a warning like that of Prime Minister Vorster to the compilers of the Message to the People. As far as the *missio politica oecumenica* is concerned, I therefore came to an ambivalent conclusion about Philip. His struggle for racial justice was based on philanthropy rather than on a desire for humanisation. This was probably because he did not (did not want to?) realise the dehumanising nature of colonialism.

In his early days in Natal, Bishop Colenso also acted according to the presuppositions of British colonialism. In becoming more estranged from the White colonists, while at the same time discovering more fully the reality of the lives and culture of the Zulu, Colenso became increasingly aware of the harsh realities of colonial life for Black South Africans. He seemed to have concluded that the Zulu would never reattain their full humanity under colonial domination. Although he nowhere articulated a *missio politica oecumenica*, Colenso's life, his sermons and his writings point the way to a liberating, humanising Christian mission. His is therefore a tradition which can fruitfully be reclaimed and reinterpreted by South African Christians.

Ntsikana is unique, both in the history of how he became a Christian and in his ministry. Coming directly from the African Traditional Religion of his people, he simply assumed the same holism also for the Christian religion. It seems never to have occurred to him, therefore, to separate his new faith from either his culture or his politics. Obviously Ntsikana was not an infallible saint, yet it seems to me that the time has come to reclaim Ntsikana's tradition for the whole South African church, especially in its implications for the relationship with Traditional African Religion and a Christianity which was largely untouched by the colonial missionary tradition. As the credibility of Christian mission is often in doubt among Black South Africans, a redefinition of mission as *missio politica oecumenica* in the tradition of Ntsikana may be a fruitful approach.

Tiyo Soga and Nehemiah Tile can be regarded as complementary in their missionary contribution. To my mind, both contributed in a foundational manner towards the origin and growth of what later became known as Black Consciousness, which was to play an important role in African nationalism and Black politics. Their understanding of the *missio politica oecumenica*, which can be gathered from their actions rather than from their words, apparently was that political involvement was a natural and central dimension of their mission, although they chose to exercise their mission in different ecclesiological contexts. Their approach has never really been forgotten in South Africa, but it has been repressed and marginalised by White control over the mission churches (Soga) and by the disdainful ignorance of the African Independent Churches by those same mission churches. As Black

Christians articulate their own position more and more (e.g. in the Kairos Document), the continuities with early Black Christian pioneers become clearer and clearer.

The last remark brings me to the goal of this paragraph: to find out in what way the South African Christian community has developed the historical foundations. At Cottesloe, I said above, it was basically still the White tradition which was reflected, and from within that tradition it was specifically the tradition of Murray and Philip that was dominant. Mission was largely to be understood as evangelisation, and the 'political' protest which was heard was in the liberal English tradition of Philip. Mostly it addressed symptoms, while the structural causes (dispossession of land, capitalism, etc.) were not dealt with. Although Cottesloe therefore might have (and indeed did) sound revolutionary to some White South Africans, it fell far short of addressing the real issues Black South Africans were concerned about. Cottesloe was the most representative ecumenical gathering (in terms of the official participation by churches) to have taken place up till that time, but because of its bias in favour of White concerns, cannot serve as a model for our *missio politica oecumenica* in South Africa today. A few prophets such as Beyers Naudé (I am limiting myself only to the White community here), realised it and attempted to find a way outside the church structures.

The *Message to the People* was still dominated by White theological thinking, and was basically still in the (typically Reformed and Lutheran) confessional mould. Still, as I pointed out above, it did contain in my opinion some seeds of a liberatory approach. This means that it did transcend the former liberal approach here and there and was moving more in the direction of a radical prophetic approach. I consider the Message to stand more in Colenso's tradition therefore - although obviously I am not claiming that the compilers were consciously making use of Colenso's theology. The political and ecumenical concerns of Black South African Christians were heard only in mediated form, in other words, as they were articulated by White theologians and ministers. As late as 1968, therefore, more than a century after the first Black South African had been ordained a minister, the spiritual descendants of Ntsikana, Soga and Tile were not allowed a direct voice in the councils of the church in South Africa. Per-

haps it is for this reason that the Message, despite its liberatory seeds, did not make a lasting impact.

As I have already stated, with the Kairos Document the South African church can be said to have come full circle. At last the strictures of the colonial past were broken. Kairos reflects the influence of the theology of the Black pioneers, as well as the concern for humanisation, freedom and justice reflected in the mission theology of Colenso. I wish to emphasise again that I am not claiming that the compilers of Kairos *consciously* set out to develop a document reflecting the theology of Ntsikana, Soga, Tile and Colenso. What I *am* saying, is that there are certain similarities in the political and ecumenical concerns of the early pioneers mentioned, and those of Kairos.

If I claim that in the latest ecumenical documents especially the thinking of the Black pioneers and Colenso is reflected, I do not imply that the influence of Murray and Philip can be ignored. There are still many White Christians in South Africa, especially in the English-speaking churches, who share Philip's liberal Christian ideals. Andrew Murray is the spiritual father of many Christians in South Africa, both Afrikaans-speaking and English-speaking, both Black and White. In line with Murray's pietism, they are fervent supporters of mission, especially mission understood as evangelisation. Mostly they claim to be apolitical, thus tacitly supporting the status quo. The thinking of all the Christian pioneers I studied is therefore reflected in the *missio politica oecumenica* of the church in South Africa. The trend in the important ecumenical documents I studied, though, seems to be more in line with the thinking of Soga, Tile, Ntsikana and Colenso.

6 *SOME FUTURE PERSPECTIVES*

On the basis of this very brief historical and theological analysis, I now want to indicate some future perspectives, some themes which (to my mind) the South African church will have to engage in its *missio politica oecumenica*.

6.1 DECOLONISATION AND MISSION

I have tried to indicate the intertwinenment between colonialism and mission. This entanglement had an adverse effect on mission in general, and specifically on mission in its political and ecumenical dimensions. Unfortunately, as far as mission in South Africa is concerned, the entanglement with colonialism is not a problem which belongs to the past. The problem still exists, because in fact a colonial situation still exists in South Africa. Although colonialism in its classical Western form can be said to have ended with the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910, since then colonialism continued to exist in a special form. This special form has to do with the fact that colonisers and colonised make their home in the same geographical area - something which was not the case in classical colonialism. However, the typical social, political and economic relationships between coloniser and colonised continued to exist, so that I feel myself warranted to state that a colonial situation in fact still exists. As Kritzinger (1990:59) rightly points out, 'White colonial consciousness was created and is sustained by the material circumstances of economic and political power of White people over Black people' (my translation). The implication is clear: unless these material circumstances change, the colonial consciousness will continue to exist. Some of these circumstances are the following:

- The ownership of land: During colonial times, the land of the indigenous Black majority was dispossessed, either through war or through treaties. With the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910, the status quo was maintained, and since then the acquisition of land was mainly regulated by the Land Acts of 1913 and

1937, as well as the Group Areas Act. These historical circumstances led to a situation in which Black South Africans (74 per cent of the population) had free access to only 13 per cent of the land, whereas White people (26 per cent of the population) had free access to 87 per cent of the land. The government has announced its intention to scrap all these laws during 1991, which will mean that all South Africans will have legal access to land. Because of the economic realities of South Africa, however, especially the fact that the lack of land made acquisition of capital very difficult, the repeal of these Acts, though laudable in itself, will have very little material influence on land ownership. As long as a minority can thus hold on to land which was originally acquired through colonial conquest, they make indigenous people into foreigners in their own land (a typical feature of colonialism). This state of affairs supports my contention that a situation of internal colonialism still exists.

- Indirect rule: Eighty years after the formation of the Union, indigenous African people generally still do not rule themselves, but are ruled by bodies imposed on them by the White power structures. It is true that some 'co-operative' Blacks have been co-opted into these bodies, but the real power lies in the hands of the White power structures (as was clearly illustrated by the failed coup in Bophuthatswana and the successful coup in the Ciskei). This system of government is also typical of a colonial system and therefore further confirms the claim that a colonial situation still exists in South Africa. The fact that the government and the ANC have started talks has so far not substantially altered this fact. Indeed, the government insists quite strongly that Black city councils (widely regarded as co-opted bodies) will not be abolished. Unless this power-structure changes considerably, the policy of indirect rule will also continue to bolster the colonial consciousness.

- The fact that White privileges in South Africa were guaranteed by the existence of a White power structure which was jealously guarded over. This was (despite some contradictions) similar to the power and privileges which the erstwhile White colonial bloc appropriated for itself while denying them to the original Black inhabitants. The Separate Amenities Act, which provided the legal

framework for this situation, has now been abolished. As is the case in the previous two points, the scrapping of the legal framework has not yet changed the material circumstances. White local authorities have found various ways in which to safeguard White privileges, or at least to share them only with the richest Blacks.[1]

It comes as no surprise therefore that Black South Africans experience their situation as one of colonialist oppression. In the words of Gwala (quoted in Kritzinger):

> The white minority is colonialist in character no matter how violently it seeks to prove its permanence. If whites want permanence on this continent, they shall first have to decolonize us.

If what I have said here about the continued existence of colonialism in South Africa is accepted, then the very important task of decolonisation in both state and church is still ahead of us. It seems as if this reality was indeed realised by the National Conference of Churches which took place at Rustenburg in November 1990. In one of the paragraphs in which the churches' guilt is confessed, White participants confess their 'colonial arrogance toward black culture', and take this confession as point of departure for a Christian ministry of justice (Rustenburg Declaration 2.6). What we need is even more comprehensive than this, though: we need the 'decolonising [of] theology in South Africa' (cf. Kritzinger 1989). As far as the *missio politica oecumenica* of the Christian community in South Africa is concerned, two important areas need urgent attention. In the first place, mission which is political and ecumenical is also thoroughly historical (as I tried to point out above). We are therefore urgently in need of a demythologising of White history, especially in regard to Whites' position *vis-à-vis* Black South Africans. In this respect Miller has pointed out how the Christian missionary can act as an agent of secularisation (Miller 1973). With secularisation I understand a prophetic critique of the idols a specific group of people erected for themselves to sacralise their historical position of privilege over against other people. Various authors (e.g. Bosch 1984; Butler, Elphick & Welsh 1987) have pointed out how

1 I cannot argue the case fully for the existence of internal colonialism of a special kind in South Africa. For a more extensive treatment, see *Africa Perspective* 1983 and Kritzinger 1989.

a mythological understanding of Afrikaner history, in terms specifically of the intervention of God in favour of the Afrikaner, has come to dominate Afrikaner self-understanding since the end of the nineteenth century. To mention one concrete and important example: the Battle of Blood River between the Afrikaner pioneers (Voortrekkers) and the Zulu army in 1838. Thompson points out how a whole mythology grew around this event especially since 1881. As a result, Afrikaners regard themselves as the Covenant people, God's chosen ones. This justifies their privileged position over against Black South Africans (Thompson 1985:144-188). This understanding of the event must be demythologised, the idolatrous nature unmasked, in other words it must be secularised.

Can this be regarded as part of our missionary responsibility? I believe so, for the decolonisation of history will serve to unmask its mythological idols and to liberate both White and Black participants in this history to become more fully human. In order to bring this about, we need a rewriting of the mission history of Southern Africa. Such a rewriting will have to take as point of departure the stories of the colonised-and-christianised people themselves. In order to understand this story better, we need to pay greater attention to the contributions of pioneers such as Ntsikana, Tile and others who are still living in the communal memory of Black Christians in their struggle for full freedom and humanity. In order to fulfil the political and ecumenical dimensions of its mission in South Africa and the world today, the Christian community here will have to be made aware of the slanted picture of Christianity in South Africa, brought about by the entanglement of mission and colonialism. New Christian role models will have to be found, especially in the White, but also in the Black community.

My reference to (amongst others) Ntsikana and Tile implies that a tradition of anti-colonial theology already exists in South Africa. As the histories of, for example, Tile and Colenso indicate, it was very difficult to give form and content to this anti-colonial tendency within the mainline churches. As Kritzinger (1989:6) points out, though, 'during the twentieth century it [anti-colonial tendency] spread to all the "mainline" denominations, mainly as a result of the steady politicisation of the black community through the activities of the African National Congress (ANC) and later also the Pan Africanist Congress

(PAC).' This process of conscientisation found theological expression in the growth and development of Black Theology since the late sixties and early seventies. Some Black Theologians[2] have already addressed the issue of the decolonisation of the Christian faith in South Africa. So, for example, Mosala writes:

> The task now facing a black theology of liberation is to enable black people to use the Bible to get the land back and to get the land back without losing the Bible (in Kritzinger 1989:7).

Decolonising the mission of the church in South Africa, tracing anew the roots of its growth, finding new role models to inspire and lead *all* Christians, are therefore not entirely new tasks. In some respects people have been involved in these tasks for more than a century. It is only in the recent past, however, that South African Christians have become more widely aware of their contributions, and have started to appreciate them. This is also not a 'missionary' task in the traditional sense of the word, in other words a task which takes place somewhere on the margins of the 'church', which concerns only a little isolated group of 'enthusiasts', and which deals mainly with 'evangelisation'. It is rather a task which is central to the life, being and continued existence of the Christian community in South Africa. It therefore faces *all* Christians and concerns not only the missiological dimension of theology, but *all* of it.

Let me, in conclusion, point out two important items on the agenda for the decolonisation of mission.

6.1.1 Decolonising the mind

Steve Biko once wrote that

> ... the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed. If one is free at heart, no man-made chains can bind one to servitude, but if one's mind is so manipulated and controlled by the oppressor as to make the oppressed believe that he is a liability to the white man, then there will be nothing the oppressed can do to scare his powerful masters (in Kritzinger 1989:8).

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2 When using the term 'Black Theologian' I am not referring simply to a specific skin pigmentation. I am rather referring to theologians who have consciously opted for a specific approach to the study of theology, an approach which is characterised by taking its point of departure in a liberationist and Black Consciousness perspective.

The decolonisation of mission will therefore have to start with the decolonisation of the mind. It is indeed both the Black and the White mind that must be decolonised. The racism and economic exploitation which were an integral part of the process of colonialism (see chapter 2) resulted in a very destructive self-image being imposed on Black people. This self-image has resulted in an impotent passivity in the face of misery and oppression. It also makes it impossible for Black South Africans to regard themselves as *subjects* of their own history and not merely as *objects*. In the words of Tutu:

> Black Theology has ... a burning and evangelistic zeal necessary to convert the black man out of the stupor of his subservience and obsequiousness to acceptance of the thrilling but demanding responsibility of full human personhood (in Kritzinger 1989:8).

In accordance with its humanising aim, mission has a very important conscientising and empowering function to fulfil here. This must definitely not be understood in some patronising or paternalistic way; no, mission has more to learn than to teach. To fulfil this mission, Christians will have to struggle *with* the poor, oppressed and colonised ones, not perform acts of charity *for* them. Not performing acts for them, but rather struggling with them, is very important. Through their own actions, they develop 'a new sense of power, a new capacity to take responsibility for shaping society'. It aids conscientisation, as 'conscientization comes through the struggle for, and exercise of, power' (Dickinson 1983:153,152). This further implies that the leadership of the poor, oppressed and colonised in the struggle is accepted - something which does not come naturally to Christians who often have a strong sense of their own vocation and thus expect to be followed, rather than to be led.

Equally important is the mission of decolonising the White mind. For more than three centuries, most Whites in South Africa regarded themselves primarily as Europeans. 'For Europeans only' meant for Whites only. In maintaining this strong link with Europe, White South Africans confirmed their own position as foreign colonisers in the country. Part and parcel of this Europeanism was the enjoyment of all the privileges set apart for the colonisers only (free access to land, capital, and the right to govern, etc.). White children were and are taught

that the history of South Africa and its people basically started with the arrival of the first White colonists. This colonial position confirmed the distance between Black and White, but, even more seriously, it served to create and perpetuate in the mind of (most) Whites the idea that the colonised Black people were and are less than human. From what I have said so far, it is clear what an important task conscientising and converting the White mind poses for Christian mission. The conversion I speak of here must not be taken to mean some spiritual process only. Kritzinger (1989:11) points out that

> ... since the colonial consciousness of white superiority flows from the material conditions of economic and political power over black people, there is not much hope of widespread change in white attitudes until black people begin to exercise power.

'Conversion' means therefore also practical devotion to the transformation of the remaining colonial structures in South Africa. Only by removing the structures which perpetuate for Whites the possibility of a colonial existence in South Africa, will it become possible to decolonise White South African minds on an appreciable scale.[3]

6.1.2 Decolonisation and social change

Colonialism seems to inculcate the belief that only the colonisers can be *subjects* of history and social change. As such it is quite natural that colonists claim for themselves the right to determine the socio-historical, economic and religious agenda (to name but a few fields). In South Africa this meant in practice that Whites have always set the agenda. This can be illustrated from the content of history books, the curricula of theological seminaries, etc. In the past the (mainly) White leadership of the mainline churches in South Africa were often accused of doing just that, namely controlling the agenda. Indeed, one can argue that the secession of many Independent churches was a rejection of the White, colonial agenda. In the documents that I have studied here, it is only the Kairos Document that can be said to give pride of place to the Black agenda. We are therefore still waiting as South African Christians for the church as a whole in our country to adopt a Black agenda. Mission will have an important catalytic role to

3 I will have more to say regarding White conversion when I address the theme of re-evangelisation below.

play in the process, especially in two areas: (i) As facilitator of intercultural communication, mission will have an important *translating* role to fulfil. This translating role should not be understood in some neutral way. It must rather be aimed very specifically at *conscientisation* - at creating an awareness of each other's situation, providing the opportunities and the means for reliable information to draw the two worlds in South Africa closer together and begin to provide at least the possibility of communication. (ii) Mission in its function of reading the signs of the times, pointing to God at work in the lives of human beings and in nature, can make an important contribution in setting the priorities of the agenda for us all.

Let me conclude this section with a quotation from Kritzinger (1989:19):

> The colonial stereotype of mission as something which heroic white people do to (or amongst) black people needs to be finally buried. Black Christians have already taken the initiative to preach the Gospel (in the way that they have discovered it for themselves) to black and white people in South Africa. White theologians can only be stripped of their colonial pretense of being 'experts on Christianity in Africa' by exposing themselves to the critique of black theologians and African Independent Churches. A whole new missiology (and indeed a whole new theology) needs to be written by assimilating the creative impulses emanating from these two black theological initiatives.

I have indicated in chapter 2 that colonialism introduced a set of new social relations into South Africa (racism), but also a new economic system (capitalism). The rise of a class of landless, extremely poor Africans, can be attributed directly to colonialist economics (Bruwer 1988; also De Santa Ana 1979:xv-xvi). In this section I have mainly dealt with the social consequences of colonialism. In the next section I now wish to deal with mission's relationship to the poor as a consequence of colonialism.

6.2 MISSION AND THE POOR

Some years ago Christians pointed out that a new relationship was imperative between the poor and the church. Theologians expressed this relationship by indicating that the church needs to make *a preferential option for the poor*. This expression has become somewhat of a cliché, but the need it indicated is more urgent than ever in South Africa, and,

indeed, in the world. There are various reasons why the South African church (and indeed many other churches elsewhere) became a middle-class church rather than a church of the poor. It was brought here by colonial missionaries - and both colonialism and mission were thoroughly middle-class phenomena in the capitalist system (as I pointed out above). When missionaries started their work, they attempted to gain as their first converts the leaders and opinion-makers among African peoples, as they needed the leaders' permission to evangelise, and as they, from their perspective, linked Christianity and political power. Whatever the reason, the fact remains though that these people could easily be integrated into the developing middle class. Christian mission in Africa spread very much in conjunction with education, to such an extent that in some African languages the words for 'Christian' and 'student' are the same. This education enabled (Christian) Africans to enter the middle class created by colonialism (teachers, clerks, nurses, etc.). Many more can be mentioned, but I think these are enough to give an indication of some of the historical and economic reasons why the church, also in South Africa, is such a middle-class institution. Today, though, the middle class still represents only a minority of the South African population; the vast majority of our people are peasants and labourers. And as Raymond Fung pointed out so eloquently at the Melbourne meeting of the CWME in 1980, a middle-class church in a sea of peasants and labourers makes no sense. There is therefore a pressing pragmatic and sociological reason why the church must make this option for the poor.

But the problem goes even further: there is also a pressing *theological* reason why this must be done. As one result of the entanglement between mission and colonialism, the new Christian communities in South Africa came to be identified with the rich and/or powerful. The strong gospel emphases on God's option for the poor, his promise of justice for the oppressed, and healing for the sick, which can be so rich in meaning especially in a new Christian community suffering from poverty, sickness and oppression, came to be spiritualised in the colonial setting. The colonial missionaries could not be too concrete in condemning an injust social, economic and political system, as they depended to a large extent on that system. This inevitably led to a dualistic, spiritualised understanding of the gospel, both among colon-

isers and the colonised. This misunderstanding can lead people dangerously astray, comforting the comfortable and pacifying the poor and oppressed with all kinds of 'spiritual' promises. But more and more over the past years Christians have come to the realisation that such a spiritualised, dualistic understanding of the gospel is not correct. For, as Gutiérrez (1983:18) says:

> Love and its antithesis, sin, are historical realities. They are lived in concrete circumstances. Hence it is that the Bible speaks of liberation and justice as opposed to slavery and the humiliation of the poor.

A spiritualised, dualistic understanding of the gospel is therefore a dangerous temptation which can easily become prejudicial to the Christian community. Indeed, there is a strong case to be made that Western powers deliberately fostered such an understanding of the gospel in order to subjugate the colonial people that much more easily. Be that as it may, the fact remains that the middle-class church needs the poor to unfold the full meaning of the historical reality of liberation.

If the poor are to do that, we will have to read history through their eyes. I have mentioned above that colonial history has been written by the colonisers. History in South Africa has therefore been written (in Gutiérrez's words) 'by a white hand'. This is of great importance for Christian mission, for as I understand Christian mission, God is at work in history, indeed, mission means discerning where God is at work and joining him there. If one (privileged) group of Christians therefore has the authority to write South African history, it gains a stranglehold over the understanding of the gospel and of mission. There is still another reason why it is of the utmost importance to read history through the eyes of the poor. The Christian community has, basically as a result of a number of disasters, rediscovered in our century the importance of understanding God not in the first place as almighty and omniscient, but as the weak and suffering God. In the words of Bonhoeffer (quoted in Gutiérrez 1983:180):

> God lets himself be pushed out of the world and on to the cross. He is weak and powerless in the world, and that is precisely the way, the only way, in which he is with us and helps us. Matthew 8:17 makes it quite clear that Christ helps us, not by virtue of his omnipotence, but by virtue of his weakness and suffering.

Of course, the poor never lost their own history completely; they kept part of it alive in oral tradition, in songs and parables and plays. But because they were segregated from the colonisers both by language and through political, social and economic barriers, very few of the powerful were aware of this history. It is our missionary task now to help as far as we can in the recovery of that history, in recovering the memory of the scourged Christ of Africa (Gutiérrez 1983:21); it will be our task to listen very carefully to the interpretation of the gospel and the meaning of mission in the light of that history; and it will be our privilege to join the poor in our task of being catalysts of liberation in our land. When this happens, it seems to me we will also be able to fill the evangelising dimension of the gospel with a new, compelling content in a world which regards evangelising as irrelevant or with a jaded or a hostile eye. The true stumbling block of the gospel in our South African situation will then be revealed in the place of the false stumbling blocks (race, class, a code of morality, etc.) which have been erected over the years by a rich, middle-class church. In other words, reading the gospel through the eyes of the poor will hopefully enable the Christian community to restore the weak, crucified Christ as the foundation of our liberation. In this process, 'the cross rips the mask from the face of all political idolatry, [depriving] the powers that be of the justification "from above" they thought was their refuge' (Gutiérrez 1983:184). This serves to illustrate once again what a thoroughly *missionary* task this preferential option for the poor entails.

Is this a totally unrealistic expectation? Is it not asking far too much of comfortable, rich and powerful Christians to expect that they should renounce all that and look at reality through the eyes of the poor? Perhaps not, for, in Villa-Vicencio's words (1988:41),

> Deep within their common [Christian] memory lies a restlessness which disturbs their complacency and obliges them to recall a theological obligation to live justly, to show mercy and humbly to submit to the declared will of God as made known in the scriptures. From within this memory emerges a will that requires the church to show a special concern for widows, orphans, those who are in distress, prisoners, the poor and the oppressed - the marginalised people in any society. It is this that has constituted a disturbing reality in even the most domesticated and self-satisfied churches in history, making for resistance amid conformity.

I would agree with this hopeful view, provided the barriers which divide South Africa so successfully into Black and White worlds, rich and

poor worlds, are breached. The dramatic announcement by the State President on 2 February 1990, and the events which followed, set this process in motion. But as I have pointed out in 6.1 above, the material circumstances which confirm the existence of Black and White worlds, rich and poor worlds, have not yet changed. They will only be changed by conscious and direct action and in this action Christian mission may play an important role, not in a patronising, prescriptive way, but as a servant of the poor, translating and communicating between the different worlds.

It is, however, not only the colonised and the poor who call for the special attention of the Christian mission. There is a third, very important group.

6.3 MISSION AND THE LIBERATION OF WOMEN

I pointed out at the beginning of chapter 3 the absence of recognition of the role of women in Christian mission in South Africa. Everything that I have written since confirms the patriarchal domination of the wielders of power in the Christian community in South Africa, also the power to write history (cf. Landman 1984:16; Ackermann 1990a:11). Some observers may at this stage protest that my opinion is too negative and does not give credit for the wide recognition that women such as, for example, Botie of Magwero indeed enjoyed and still enjoy. It is indeed true that some women were honoured, but they were honoured exactly in terms of the hagiographical stereotypes that a patriarchal, male-dominated society and church ascribe to them. In the same way that White church leaders for so long set the agenda for the South African church and its involvement in the struggle against racism and for Black liberation, 'male domination of religious institutions militates against women having the space to express their concerns in terms of praxis' (Ackermann 1990a:2).

A question that needs to be addressed at this stage is the following: Granted that women have been oppressed in a patriarchal church, does that necessarily imply that the issue of the liberation of women forms part of the *missio politica oecumenica*? In terms of my understanding of mission as humanisation (described fully in chapter 1), I have no doubt that women's liberation does indeed belong fully on the

agenda of mission in South Africa. As long as the full personhood of women is stunted and warped by oppression and injustice, as long as sex is a factor dividing the Christian community into 'first-class' and 'second-class' members (e.g. in determining who can be ordained), a *missio politica oecumenica* which does not address this issue is patently incomplete and insincere. The oppression of women (both Black and White), the injustices inherent in their situation, have been well documented (cf. Ackermann 1990a:119-133). And the divisiveness of sexual discrimination within the church is illustrated by every meeting of (nearly exclusively male) church leaders - whereas very often women predominate in meetings of parishes and congregations.

The Christian community in South Africa therefore needs to address the liberation of women as a priority item on the agenda of its political and ecumenical mission.[4] At least some of the dimensions of what it will mean in practice for the Christian community to decolonise, to opt for the poor and to work towards the liberation of women, will be spelled out in my next section on re-evangelisation.

6.4 MISSION AND RE-EVANGELISATION

I think it is fair to say on the basis of this study that the Christian *missio politica oecumenica* in South Africa has fallen far short of its goal. In some respects the mission was distorted already before it came to South Africa; in other respects it was precisely the South African context which caused the distortion, and in some instances the mission was genuinely misunderstood. Whatever may have been the reason, and whoever may have been responsible, it failed in important respects and therefore leaves us now with the important task of re-evangelisation. Re-evangelisation implies, first of all, a process of *conscientisation*, of becoming aware and of making others aware of the injustice and oppression caused by a system which often prided itself on being 'Christian', and of the good news that God in Jesus totally rejects such injustice and oppression. Then it implies *empowerment*, the courage to be fully human, to overcome the inhumanity of being either oppressor or oppressed. This power springs not from the usual human power

4 For an excellent study of liberating Christian praxis in South Africa from a feminist point of view, see Ackermann 1990a.

structures, such as a powerful military or economic system, but from the Spirit who enabled Jesus to overcome every inhuman power, even that of death. And finally re-evangelisation implies *liberation*, the freedom to be fully human, demonstrated for example in the exodus events and in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. This must not be taken to mean the freedom to be human only in an individualistic way - it means especially the freedom to be human in and with a community. The struggle for freedom is therefore also, in some cases primarily, a struggle against structures. A final comment: from what I have said here, it should be clear that re-evangelisation is not the 'task' of a select body of 'clergy'. It is in the first place the responsibility of the poor and oppressed who have 'heard' the good news of Jesus, and who now work with others for their liberation. It seems clear from what I have said that the missionary message of the gospel in its political and ecumenical dimensions needs to be re-interpreted by the total Christian community in South Africa, in such a way that people's idols can be unmasked and they can appropriate and experience the glorious liberation of the children of God in every dimension of their lives. I think one can best deal with this subject by differentiating between the re-evangelisation of the White church, that of the Black church, and that of the patriarchal church.

6.4.1 Re-evangelising the White church

It will be very difficult for most White South Africans to accept that they need re-evangelisation. They may ask: 'Are we not heirs to centuries of Christian tradition? Did we not introduce Christianity to this dark, heathen continent? Do we not attend church regularly, do we not speak in tongues, do we not give generously for missions?' These (and many similar) questions do not necessarily arise out of arrogance, bigotry or racism. To a very large extent they illustrate the demonic success of apartheid in creating a separate world for Whites, indeed, maintaining the colonial structures of privilege and power. Any information which entered this world was carefully ideologically screened so as to confirm the myth of White benevolence, power and privilege. In this process White Christianity often proved to be a valuable ally in maintaining the (colonialist) status quo. So, for example, 'our boys on the border' were fighting until the other day to maintain 'Western Christian civilisation'. Furthermore, the worldwide Reform-

ed community had to point out to the biggest all-White church in the country, the DRC, that its support of the policy and practice of apartheid constituted a heresy. One cannot simply argue that such occurrences and viewpoints belong to the past, that now we are on our way to a new South Africa, and that therefore these things can be forgotten. The DRC has still not clearly and unconditionally rejected apartheid in all its forms. And while the government announced its intention to abolish the fundamental laws which keep the colonialist apartheid structure in place (the Land Acts, the Group Areas Act, and the Population Registration Act), the material circumstances created by these acts still exist. Where such a colonial situation still exists, where the majority of the South African people are still struggling to attain full political, social and economic rights, the need for re-evangelisation undoubtedly exists. Though, as I have stated above, White South Africans may resist the notion that this is indeed the case, the reality of our daily lives proves that the need does exist.

I stated above that I understand re-evangelisation to be concerned especially with conscientisation, empowerment and liberation, with unmasking the idols in White people's lives and setting the people free to be as human as Jesus of Nazareth showed us that we can be. If this is to be achieved, at least three important areas of their lives need to be addressed.

- *Humanisation:* White South Africans need to be made aware how the centuries of oppression of Black South Africans has led not only to the dehumanisation of Black people, but also to the dehumanisation of Whites. To create, in the course of three centuries, a sophisticated, but totally soulless system such as the system of apartheid, to define and treat human beings simply as units of labour, to refuse to share in Christian fellowship with other human beings (as the majority of White South Africans did, and a large number still do), cannot but warp extensively what is left of one's humanity. White South Africans need to be made aware of this serious shortcoming. But it is only Black South Africans who can actually lead them along the way to recover their humanity, for it is a (for the Whites) new humanity they have to recover: their *African* humanity. Many White South Africans share a crisis of personal identity. For a long time they regarded themselves as Euro-

peans, but they aren't really at home in Europe any longer, and European nations in any case rejected their White South African counterparts more and more. Yet many also cannot regard themselves as Africans, for to them Africans are despised and dehumanised people. That is why Kritzinger (1988a:320) says:

> From this situation of alienation and uncertainty, white people need to be evangelised and converted into an African community life, not conceived of in some static or romanticised way, but as a communal existence where people live for the sake of others. This 'homecoming' in Africa will be a slow and even painful process ... but this is an essential part of the church's mission if it is to minister to this fundamental human need of whites.

It means therefore that the colonialist identity will finally have to be laid to rest, as Black and White South Africans struggle together to discover what mission as humanisation means in their African context.

° *The idols of power and wealth:* If White South Africans are to be re-evangelised so that they can recover the right image of humanity, it is as important that they be re-evangelised to recover the right image of God. (The two images are of course indissolubly connected.) In order to achieve this, it seems to me there are especially two idols that have to be unmasked. They are the idols of power and wealth. Because there was such a close entanglement between colonialism and Christian mission, the God of the Christian mission was identified with the colonial conquests. Colonialists therefore tended to see their conquests not simply as the victory of better arms or strategy, but as something God-given (cf. the Voortrekker interpretation of the Battle of Blood River). This is a very dangerous tendency, for it is very easy to equate everything the rich and powerful achieve with the will of God (cf. Kritzinger 1990:60-61). It comes as no surprise, therefore, that White South Africans interpreted their position of power as a God-given right, and that ministers and chaplains provided the 'theological' justification for it. Political, economic and military power thus came to be (as it were) expressions of the being of God. It is this interpretation of reality which made (and makes) it possible to claim that White power is an essential precondition for the survival of Christianity in South Africa. This blasphemous idolatry has to be unmasked and White

South Africans have to be re-evangelised in the name of God the servant, God the despised, God the crucified. *This* God they will probably only find in the community of their Black fellow-believers.

- *Participation in the struggle:* White South Africans have to be re-evangelised so that they may become active participants in the struggle for justice and freedom in South Africa.

> Humanisation does not mean becoming human in some abstract or static sense. The humanisation of white people, just as the humanisation of black people, means being mobilised for the liberation struggle (Kritzinger 1988a:207).

Re-evangelisation here will have to deal especially with two aspects. Most White South Africans are convinced that they live in a free country. They therefore do not see the necessity of engaging in a liberation struggle. It is a very important dimension of Christian mission to des-troy the walls the White community built around themselves in order to maintain the illusion of freedom and justice. Having enlightened them on the real state of affairs, mission is still left with the task of convincing them to participate in the struggle. This will probably only be possible by convincing them that freedom and humanity are indivisible. As long as Black South Africans are not free, White freedom is a dangerous illusion. As long as Black South Africans are not treated justly, White South Africans cannot walk humbly with God. Of course this does not mean that they (Whites) must be convinced to do this for selfish reasons. No, it means that their idolatrous misunderstanding that they can continue their service of God despite their involvement in a diabolical system, is exploded.

6.4.2 Re-evangelising the Black church

Let me now turn to re-evangelisation in the Black community. I believe that for social, political and theological reasons the primary responsibility for Black re-evangelisation lies with Black Christians and especially Black theologians themselves (cf. Kritzinger 1988a:171-172). According to my understanding of the *missio politica oecumenica*, however, contextual theologies (such as Black Theology and a yet to be fully articulated theology of White liberation) need to be in dialogue with each other to help prevent ideological captivity and to maintain the

catholicity of the ecumene. For this reason I dare to reflect also on Black re-evangelisation. It seems to me that Black re-evangelisation will have to deal with the following important areas:

(a) Western culture invaded Africa in a two-pronged assault in the form of colonialism and Christian mission. Because of this close alliance, mission became co-responsible for the destructive impact of Western culture on African life. The impact was particularly severe in the area of the Africans' sense of humanity and self-worth. Every dimension of the 'superior' Western culture (technical, spiritual, intellectual, etc.) seemed to testify that Africans were inferior human beings. This inferiority was reinforced by the racist structures created by the colonists (also in the churches), giving rise to a sense of powerlessness, despair, and even self-hatred. Several Black theologians therefore refer to the need that Black Theology will assist in radically changing Black people, as it were, converting them out of their passivity and subservience to empowerment and liberation (cf. Kritzinger 1988a:173).

Through re-evangelisation, Black South Africans need to become aware of the reasons for this self-image, need to become aware to what extent this has been imposed on them through colonialism, and need to become aware how a new humanity becomes possible for us all through the Man of Nazareth. It seems to me that the discovery of self-acceptance, based on a positive anthropology, is very important here, because the anthropology which was introduced to South Africa by the missionaries and the Dutch Reformed Church (and later by other churches) conveyed basically a very pessimistic view of humanity, proceeding from the assumption that human beings are mainly capable of evil. This cultural, political and religious conditioning of centuries has to be combatted, and through its *missio politica oecumenica* the Christian community in South Africa has to be a servant of the recovery by all South Africans of their infinite worth in Christ. For in the words of Boesak (in Kritzinger 1988a:174):

> To ask blacks to love themselves is to ask them to hate oppression, dehumanization, and the cultivation of a slave mentality. It is to ask them to know that they are of infinite worth before God, that they have a precious human personality worthy of manifestation. It is to ask them to withstand any effort to make them believe the opposite.

(b) In the light of my understanding of re-evangelisation, it seems to me that it also means presenting the Christian message as an *empowering* gospel, not a *subduing* gospel. In the study of the intertwinement of mission and colonialism, as well as in the study of Philip and other missionaries, it became abundantly clear to what extent the mission of the church in South Africa was harnessed for the task of colonial subjugation. Later on Afrikaner nationalism also employed a subduing gospel in confirming White hegemony in South Africa. This continued subjugation in the long run breeds what the National Committee of Negro Churchmen in the USA once called 'a race of beggars'. It is the more objectionable because it is the 'Christian' message which is employed to achieve this. In the light of all this, it is the duty of the Christian community through re-evangelisation to aid the recovery of the age-old Christian tradition that the story of Jesus of Nazareth has served as a motivating force for people to overcome inhuman situations.

> What makes Black Theology an evangelistic *missionary* theology is the fact that it does not leave black people in their beggarly powerlessness, but calls on them to be empowered by the Spirit and to take the courage to become human subjects, even while the oppressive social structures are still in force around them (Kritzinger 1988a:179).

It seems to me that what will be very necessary in this process will be the discovery that the gospel does not empower only to change *people*, but that it empowers the Christian community specifically to change oppressive *structures*. It is quite possible, indeed to be expected, that the oppressor will allow an empowering understanding of the gospel to be disseminated, as long as the empowering is strictly limited to individuals. It is the collective empowerment, the empowerment to overturn structures, that provides the real challenge and which therefore has to be suppressed. In other words, it is in this context that it is urgently necessary to remember that mission is both *political* and *ecumenical*, that it is indissolubly linked to structures, and that the resources of the whole Christian community are necessary for it to prevail.

(c) What I have said above about re-evangelisation among Black South Africans implies that re-evangelisation must take place in terms of their African heritage. According to African writers, their world-view had been characterised by a very high view of the value of each human being. African anthropology generally therefore has a much

more positive view of the human person than that held by the missionaries. In the same way, African Traditional Religion provided a holistic, integrated view of life, and served as the source of power for every aspect of daily existence. Christian mission, as well as the whole Western way of life, tended to estrange Africans from their African heritage. Re-evangelisation will therefore mean a recovery and re-evaluation of this heritage in the light of a humanising and empowering gospel.

6.4.3 Re-evangelising the patriarchal church

The patriarchal church is both Black and White, and has showed itself to be very reluctant to accept the need for women's liberation in church or state. So, for example, even the Kairos Document still failed to address the crucial issue of the oppression of women in South Africa. In Landman's words (1984:24), 'In South Africa sexism is alive and well - and even more sly than racism. Some men who are known for their anti-racist sentiments and activities, will flee when feminist issues are introduced into the conversation.' Even worse than fleeing from the issue, though, is the fact that many Christians and churches do not even make the connection between racist oppression and sexist oppression. Ackermann (1990a:230) is correct therefore that churches 'which have recently been voluble in their opposition to apartheid and their demand for human rights, justice and peace, are often undemocratic and hierarchical in their structures and discriminate against women'. Re-evangelisation, with its functions of conscientisation, empowerment and liberation, is therefore undoubtedly necessary. Only a minority of South African Christians seem to be aware that sexually exclusive language is used as a matter of course in worship services, statements, etc., and that this use of language confirms the thoroughly patriarchal nature of the South African church. We do not only need to switch to non-sexist, inclusive language, though - we have to restructure completely our religious symbols and models. As Landman (1984: 11-13) points out, the long patriarchal history of the church has led to the 'androgynizing' of religious thought and language, so that 'God is only known to humanity as a man' (Daly, as quoted in Landman 1984: 11). As long as being male is therefore widely understood as somehow being a bit more divine than being female, women cannot achieve/are not allowed to achieve their full stature as human beings in Christ.

Breaking down the false patriarchal consciousness and replacing it with a new *human* consciousness, according to which people are not ascribed characteristics or attributes according to their sex but rather according to their humanity, is an important dimension of re-evangelisation.

As far as the empowering dimension of re-evangelisation is concerned, the concept of *sisterhood* may be employed. Sisterhood here is taken to indicate 'women bonding together for social, political and psychological aims' (Ackermann 1990a:227). Given the huge differences in the material circumstances of rich and poor women, Black and White women, the question arises whether such bonding is possible. Hooks (quoted in Ackermann 1990a:228) indicates that it is, provided that 'rather than bond on the basis of a shared victimization or in response to a false sense of a common enemy, we [women] can bond on the basis of our political commitment to a feminist movement that aims to end sexist oppression'

In the light of my understanding of Christian mission, sexist oppression will only fully end if women have the freedom to attain and express their full humanity in Jesus of Nazareth, he who made possible this 'new way of being-in-the-world'(Ackermann 1990a:231). This can therefore be the ideal of bonding together in the sisterhood of the faith, working towards the liberation of all women and men. Does this imply that there is no role for men? Certainly not. For a long time men were comfortably settled in the structures and practices of the patriarchal church, and most certainly they cannot now claim that the re-evangelisation of this church is the responsibility of women only. Most certainly women will have to set the agenda, as they have suffered the pain of oppression. For men, therefore, the first deed that is necessary is most probably the whole-hearted acceptance of the political commitment of a feminist movement aimed to end sexist oppression in the name of Christ. The second is working sincerely for relationships between women and men which are worthy of his example.

A final point needs to be considered: I have dealt here with the re-evangelisation of the church or the Christian community. Does this not mean that Christian mission becomes completely introverted, inward-looking? And is mission not precisely characterised by its extroversion, by its being outward-looking? Does Christian mission not in this way

abandon the world? I think the answer to all these questions is negative. In the first place, as was clear from my definition of mission and my analysis of mission throughout, I do not operate with a very sharp dividing line between church or Christian community and world. Christians have no other existence than an existence in, and as part of, the world. People are therefore not evangelised in some way separate from the world, but in and for the world. Christians therefore do not withdraw from the world to be re-evangelised; on the contrary, they can only be re-evangelised if they are sharply aware of their world. In the second place the answers are negative because the re-evangelisation of the Christian community is essential for the restoration of the credibility of Christian mission in South Africa. It should be clear from the previous chapters to what extent and for what reasons Christian mission has lost its credibility. If therefore the Christian community concentrates on rebuilding itself, rectifying injustice within its own life, listening to the poor and oppressed to recover the authenticity of its message, relating to its context to become truly relevant - only then can it begin to incarnate among all the people of South Africa the gospel of the Man from Nazareth.

It is clear from what I have said so far that I am not satisfied with the traditional role of the Western church, which is by and large the role which was transplanted to South Africa. I am convinced that the church, especially in its mission, must play a completely different role. In Liberation Theology this role of the church is expressed by referring to the church as a site of struggle. In the next section I will try to explain what this means for the *missio politica oecumenica* in South Africa.

6.5 THE CHURCH AS A SITE OF STRUGGLE

If the Christian mission in South Africa is to become truly political and ecumenical, we will need a clear vision of the church as a site of struggle.[5] I use the term *site* here not to indicate a physical locality, but to

5 Much of what I say in this section is based on a lecture delivered by Chris Langeveld at a workshop on 'A liberating ministry to whites', arranged by the ICT at Lumko in Germiston in June 1989. The lecture is not available in published form, so that my writing here is based on my own notes. It may therefore differ from what Langeveld said, as my notes obviously reflect my own interpretation.

indicate a common set of social practices which brings people together (working, playing, studying, praying, etc.). With this characterisation I wish to say that the church is to be regarded as a possible ally in the struggle for liberation. Before the church can become an ally, though, the social practices in the church have to be restructured and re-organised so that their orientation can be towards humanisation. In a sense all the lines flow together in this paragraph. Mission as decolonisation, mission as empowerment of the poor, mission as re-evangelisation - taken together they mean reclaiming the church, restructuring and re-organising its social practices, turning it into a site of struggle. To put it very simply, therefore: we have to struggle to make the social practices of the church (which obviously depend on its understanding of the Christian gospel) into what they should be - hence the church as a site of struggle.

In order to determine the value of the church as an agent of change, we have to be very honest and realistic about both the limits and the potential of the church. Since the beginning of the Constantinian dispensation in the fourth century, the church has basically been politically and socially conservative. As far as the period covered in this study is concerned, the entanglement between mission and colonialism, as well as the easy co-option of the church in support of the White status quo, illustrates the innate conservativeness of the church. Yet this does not mean that the church therefore has to be written off. Throughout history the church always contained a prophetic minority who rejected and struggled against the conservative nature of the church (e.g. Colenso, Tile, the Kairos Document). To put it in other words: there seem to be two processes at work in the church: a dominant one (striving to retain the status quo), and a subordinate one (striving to bring about change - cf. Villa-Vicencio 1988). In order to fulfil the *missio politica oecumenica* in South Africa, this prophetic dimension, this subordinate process, must be mobilised to reclaim the church as an agent for change.

Before one embarks on such a process, one needs to consider whether the church is really worth all that trouble. Is there any realistic possibility that the church can become an ally for change? According to my point of view, it is indeed worthwhile trying to reclaim the church. This is so because the church is primarily a site of ideological

social practices. The church is not a political site in the way that the state is, or an economic site in the way a factory is. The church deals with ideas, beliefs, culture, faith and prayer. Therefore the nature of the church as a site of struggle means that it will be a site of ideological struggle, in terms of my definition of ideology and its relation to the *missio politica oecumenica*, a very important site of struggle. In relation to this ideological struggle, the church therefore fills an important function in society as one of the sources of the production of meaning. Meaning can empower people for the struggle for justice, or it can obscure that struggle. If the church fulfils its role to empower people, it assists them to interact meaningfully and consistently with other sites of struggle in the community (e.g. labour unions). A word of caution, though: this kind of production of meaning, namely empowerment, is not something which will come about in a haphazard way. On the contrary, it requires organisation, strategy, education and mobilisation. Furthermore, it is not simply the producing of isolated ideas; the production of meaning as empowerment takes place in community, where an adult critical faculty can be given free reign because of a shared sense of belonging. It should be clear, therefore, that the production of meaning which will empower people to struggle for freedom and justice will of necessity be a long-term project. It is aimed not simply at the attaining of some short-term political goals, no matter how desirable these may be. Once the church has been turned into a site of struggle, it should remain so - even after 'secular' liberation has taken place - in order that, with other sites of struggle, it can keep alive the ideals of humanity, freedom and justice. It should also be clear that defining the church in these terms means that the Christian community is not simply another political party or pressure group, a weak imitation of a liberation movement or a labour union. As one of the sources of the production of meaning, meaning especially in terms of religious social practices, the church has an important and unique role. I am therefore convinced that reclaiming the church as a site of struggle is integral to the *missio politica oecumenica*.

So far in this chapter I have written much about a struggle, about conscientisation and secularisation, about political involvement. Is this the only task of the Christian mission? After all, Christian mission is part of the Christian life, which is supposed to be a life in the Spirit. Can all this not be achieved by secular organisations without any

reference to Christ and the Spirit? In what way does spirituality enter into consideration at all? To this question I now turn my attention.

6.6 A SPIRITUALITY OF LIBERATION

I most certainly maintain the spiritual dimension of Christian mission. This I do not simply to forestall the kind of questions I asked above. I maintain spirituality because liberation and the struggle for liberation is deeply spiritual, as anyone who has witnessed the faith of the poor will confirm. There are two conditions, though. In the first place *spiritual* must not be understood in terms of the old dualism between spirit and flesh, so that to be spiritual means withdrawal from the world, ascetic rejection of the created. The way I understand it, true spiritual life is only attainable by way of historical mediation - the transcendent, in other words, is not directly, immediately (that is, without mediation) accessible. In our context in South Africa the historical mediators are the poor and the oppressed. Only after we have made a preferential option for the poor, only in communion with them, does a true spirituality of liberation become attainable (Sobrino 1988:2-4). True spirituality therefore exists not in withdrawing from people and their historical processes such as politics - this results in alienation, not holiness. True spirituality grapples intensively with the historical, for it means 'keeping faith with reality' (p. 18). In the second place, *spiritual* must be understood in communal terms, not in terms of individualistic holiness. Experiencing the true holiness of Christ, getting to know the length and the breadth, the height and the depth of his love, is a historical experience of shared living, not some personalistic rapture of the senses.

Spirituality, understood thus, has an important part to play in South Africa in our struggle to be liberated from the idols created by colonialism, racism and capitalism. For if our lives come to be controlled by that which is *not* God, in other words by idols, we are *not* spiritual (Gutiérrez 1984:58). To put it very concretely: Christians who have given themselves (actively or passively) to the false god identified in Kairos, despite their spirituality expressed in Bible study, prayer, etc., are essentially *not* spiritual, for the service of that god led to dehumanisation and oppression, not to full humanity and liberty. On the other hand, Christians who give themselves to the God of Jesus

Christ, the God who wants us to have abundant life, also abundant political life, are acting essentially spiritually despite their apparent secularism. For true spirituality is 'a dynamism that leads to life' (Gutiérrez 1984:64).

Speaking about the spirituality of liberation, therefore, implies that the meaning of liberation is not exhausted by its social, political and economic dimensions. The praxis of Jesus of Nazareth infuses these dimensions with something more - not some intrinsic 'holiness' that Christians exclusively possess and dispose of, but the greater hope and love, justice, freedom and peace which Jesus made immanent and freely gives to those who join him in setting the captives free, proclaiming good news to the poor, and restoring sight to the blind. Liberation, therefore, provides the historical material which can be 'inspired' by Christian spirituality - a spirituality which, divorced from historical (in-history) liberation, becomes stagnant introversion (cf. Sobrino 1988: 26-27).

6.7 CONCLUSION

One of the accusations most often made against proponents of an explicit political role for the Christian community is that such political ideals are utopian. Christians, it is said, must be hard-nosed realists who can live with the reality that 'we will always have the poor with us'. Freedom, justice, harmonious race relations - those are ideals which will only be fulfilled in heaven. Here on earth we have to be satisfied with the imperfect, broken reality of human sinfulness. The best role the church can play in such a situation is to bring people to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. If any socio-political improvements follow, they are a bonus.

I have pleaded for a completely different understanding of the role of the Christian community. I am quite willing to be accused of utopianism. Why should one not, in the light of the story of Jesus of Nazareth, harbour utopian ideals? What can be more utopian than praying, like he taught us to do: 'Your will be done on earth *as it is in heaven*'? If the Christian community had listened with greater care to the so-called utopianists, might Western society (the 'Christian West') not perhaps have displayed less inhumanity, injustice and oppression?

It must be clearly stated, though, that I use *utopia* in a specific sense, namely that of *critical idealism*. I use *idealism* neither in the Platonian sense, nor as the opposite to the Marxist concept of materialism. With *idealism* I mean something attainable, something more human, to which we are called by the story of Jesus of Nazareth, a story which inspires us to work and pray for the establishment of God's kingdom here and now, but which also reminds us that this kingdom eventually will be established by God's revolutionary intervention on behalf of the poor and those denied justice, and against the inhuman and idolatrous powers of evil. It is a *critical* idealism, though, because it is critical of any social system which is presented as the best that is attainable despite the fact that the poor and the oppressed are denied justice and life. Because it is critical idealism, therefore, it refuses to acquiesce, but keeps on being driven by the Spirit. This does not imply an element of hypocritical self-righteousness, though, because this utopianism is also, at all times, *self*-critical. Let us be bold enough then to articulate and to strive for our utopian ideals. For 'only in the utopian ideal do we glimpse, in the distance, the fulfilling reconciliations of all the disparate elements of historical liberations' (Sobrino 1988:28). The meaning of what I am trying to say here for the *missio politica oecumenica* in our day is expressed well in the call of a great South African to the people of South Africa:

> We must continue to be tormented by the ideal [in human and structural relations]. Its possibility must be there for peoples to attempt to put it into practice, to begin over and over again, wherever in the world it has never been tried, or has failed ... Without the will to tramp towards that possibility, no relations of whites, of the West, with the West's formerly subject peoples can ever be free of the past, because the past, for them, was the jungle of Western capitalism, not the light the missionaries thought they brought with them (Gordimer 1988:237).

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