

# The Ecumenical Struggle in South Africa: The Role of Ecumenical Movements and Liberation Organisations from 1966

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## Abstract

In contemporary South Africa, it would be true to say that there is no longer any urgency with regard to organic union as an aim of ecumenism. This marks a significant reversal of the pre-1994 situation where political and other motives stimulated the impulse. This is not only a local situation, for ecumenism has taken on a different character globally. Former alignments have weakened, and emerging alignments challenge former assumptions regarding ecumenism—and are no less political than formerly within the Pentecostal bloc, which has ousted the SACC from its former place of privilege in the government's affections. This is not to say that nothing has been happening on the ecumenical scene. There has been significant activity which is ongoing and offers hope for the future of cooperation. This article includes material up to the present and explores these recent activities of the twenty-first century.

**Keywords:** Black Consciousness Movement; Black Theology; Church Unity Commission; Federal Theological Seminary of Southern Africa; Kairos; National Interfaith Leaders' Council; Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference; South African Council of Churches; Study Project on Christianity in Apartheid Society

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## **Introduction**

History tends to emphasise the role of South African ecumenism in the period following the inauguration of legislated apartheid, because it naturally brought the churches to a stage where co-operation became an imperative. However, we forget that it had a number of precursors, both formal and informal, including the General Missionary Conference of South Africa (GMCSA) (1904–1936), the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC) and the Christian Council of South Africa (CCSA) (1936–1968). These originated in response to the needs and currents in society in their time (Duncan and Egan 2015). The South African ecumenical movement is also indebted to apartheid-era para-movements such as the Black Consciousness Movement, Black Theology, the Church Unity Commission, the Federal Theological Seminary of Southern Africa, and the Study Project on Christianity in Apartheid Society (Spro-cas). In addition, more recent ecumenical developments in the Pentecostal bloc (including the charismatic and evangelical movements) are discussed, including the role of the National Interfaith Leaders' Council (NILC). There has also been activity in the South African Reformed tradition with two church unions and ongoing union negotiations.

Today, many South African churches demonstrate their commitment to ecumenism through membership of a number of regional, continental and international bodies such as the All Africa Council of Churches (AACC), the Association of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar, the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). However, for the Christian in the pew, this is very far removed from their daily lived Christian experience. Even at national level, such as at the level of the SACC, a disjuncture arose in the period post-1994.

In this article, the terms “ecumenical struggle” and “ecumenical movements” emphasise that there is an ongoing process which is neither simple nor straightforward. It requires great persistence and tenacity as it takes place in the context where most of the protagonists affirm their ecumenical credentials and desire for closer relationships, but do not always consistently apply the same energy to achieving the ecumenical goal of church unity or even closer cooperation. For our purpose, ecumenical refers only to the Christian community in South Africa. We are very aware of the wider meanings and connotations of the term “ecumenical.” The term “liberation movements” refers here to ecclesiastical and para-ecclesiastical bodies in South Africa which have set their sights on contributing to the joint aims of total human liberation through various forms of reflection and action.

## **South African Council of Churches (SACC)**

The Christian Council of South Africa (CCSA) (1936–1968) adopted a new constitution and changed its name to the South African Council of Churches in 1968 as a result of various factors and changes in ecumenical emphasis towards church unity. These factors include the success of the Nationalist party in 1948, the rise of neo-liberalism, the

emergence of a post-missionary generation of church leaders, the rise of black leadership in churches to replace the dominant white leadership, and the breach between the churches of European origin (CEOs) and the Dutch Reformed family at the WCC sponsored Cottesloe Consultation in 1961. Times and circumstances were changing rapidly, and this required different responses.

In 1966, the World Council of Churches' (WCC) Conference on Church and Society prepared for the introduction of the "Programme to Combat Racism" (PCR) (1970). This became "a most contentious and traumatic event for its South African member churches" (De Gruchy and De Gruchy 2005, 114) and a source of direct confrontation within many denominations because it laid bare the issue of racism with its core outcome of violence.

But earlier in 1968, the CCSA had issued a "Message to the People of South Africa" which provided justification for its involvement in racial affairs within the South African context, particularly "the whole basis of 'apartheid' and racial discrimination both within the church and the nation" (De Gruchy and De Villiers 1968, 9). It was a contextual attempt to discuss universal issues related to the creation of a just world and in what manner it might be achieved. This led to "a new phase in the saga of growing conflict with the state" (De Gruchy and De Gruchy 2005, 115) as it resulted in open conflict with the state with regard to apartheid as "an ideological substitute for the gospel" (De Gruchy and De Gruchy 2005, 118). The problem was that two sources (church and state) were both appealing to the same source for justification, i.e. scripture. This caused an acute hermeneutical dilemma for the churches and their members as well as for theologians.

From the 1970s there was significant growth in development and community projects, and black participation in church and community projects. It was in 1970 that the WCC's "Programme to Combat Racism" made its decision "to give financial aid to antiracist liberation movements fighting in southern Africa against white minority governments" (De Gruchy and De Gruchy 2005, 126) for humanitarian purposes. This was affirmed by the churches with the exception of grants from the Special Fund awards to liberation movements. The Nationalist Government hardened its attitude towards ecumenical bodies, e.g. SACC and WCC. By this time, the racial situation in South Africa was deteriorating and the black armed struggle was gaining momentum throughout southern Africa. The situation polarised relations between the WCC and Prime Minister, John Vorster, leading to the failure of a proposed consultation on the PCR.

Petersen (2001, 124–125) reflects on the racial tensions inherent in this issue:

Quite clearly, if the church had responded to this Programme in terms of the feelings of the bulk of its members, the WCC would have had its full support ...

On almost every other issue of consequence, the official position that most of the English speaking churches adopted reflected the moderation, and hence the interests, of the white middle class. Black interests, in consequence had to take second place.

This was a constant tension for CEOs as they all had substantial black memberships and the racial issue was never far from the surface in any debate.

In retrospect, John de Gruchy (2005, 133) claimed: “It was nothing short of a miracle that the churches did not fall apart at the seams.” The issue of membership of the WCC became crucial for black Christians in terms of fellowship and commitment. Time for change was running out; it was a *kairos*. By 1972, the SACC had a majority of blacks in its executive, thus producing “structural indigenisation” and autonomy. And from this period, we note the development of Black Consciousness (BC) and Black Theology (BT).

## **The Spro-cas Reports**

Another means by which popular opinion was mobilised, was achieved in conjunction with the SACC and the Christian Institute (CI) with the CI taking the lead. The “Study Project on Christianity in Apartheid Society” (Spro-cas), formed in 1969, produced valuable reports on various aspects of South African society: *Anatomy of Apartheid* (1970), *South Africa’s Minorities* (1971), *Directions of Change in South African Politics* (1971), *Some Implications of Inequality* (1971), *Towards Social Change* (1971), *Law, Justice and Society* (1972), *Power, Privilege and Poverty* (1972), *South Africa’s Political Alternatives* (1973), and was instrumental in the establishment of a black community programme (Mangcu 2012, 155–156). The NGK opposed the inclusion of a Roman Catholic on the board of the CCSA and did all they could to prevent interdenominational cooperation. However, as in many periods of oppression, what united groups like the CCSA and Spro-cas, which were the subject of the government’s Schibusch Commission (a parliamentary commission established in 1972 by the South African government to investigate anti-apartheid civil society organisations), was that they all had their source in the liberal side of modern society and had been critical of the fundamentals and consequences of the contemporary apartheid outlook.

## **What of the African Initiated Churches (AICs)?**

The AIC bloc of the South African church scene was formed as part of the search for African selfhood beginning in the late nineteenth century. Its approach to ecumenism began with the formation of the African Independent Churches Association in 1965. This began through co-operation with the Christian Institute (CI), largely on the initiative of Beyers Naude, and came to include the CCSA (Ryan 1990, 102–103). As time progressed, it has become pro-ecumenical in its involvement with other denominations.

## **The Origin and Growth of Black Consciousness and Black Theology**

The context for the emergence of Black Consciousness (BC) and Black Theology (BT) was the aftermath of the Sharpeville massacre in 1960, the subsequent banning of the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan-African Congress (PAC), and the imprisonment of their leaders. During the 1960s a paradoxical situation arose. Within the country the only voices of opposition came from white-dominated organisations: the parliamentary and “gradualist” Progressive Party (in effect one for much of the 1960s MP, Helen Suzman), the extra-parliamentary Liberal Party (forced to dissolve itself in 1968), the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) and progressive sections of the churches, notably the Catholic and Anglican student federations. The latter organisations were closely linked to NUSAS: indeed, from the 1940s until the late 1960s, the National Catholic Federation of Students (NCFS) held joint annual conferences with NUSAS, with Catholic students playing important roles within NUSAS itself. This proved to be something of a double-edged sword: when black students withdrew from NUSAS after 1968 to form the South African Students’ Organisation (SASO), black Catholic campus affiliates withdrew from NCFS as well, later forming a national Catholic Students Association (CASA).

As the intellectual (and political) *avant-garde* of South African Catholicism, and deeply influenced and encouraged by the more open spirit of Vatican II, NCFS supported the call by the CEOs to create an ecumenical student movement in the 1960s. When the University Christian Movement (UCM) was founded in 1966, it included Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians, Lutherans and Catholics. Its leadership included the Methodist Rhodes University theologian Basil Moore and the former national chaplain of NCFS, Fr. Colin Collins. It incorporated seminarians from various churches—including young friars from the Dominican order’s study centre in Stellenbosch. The significance of this for ecumenism cannot be underestimated: for the first time, a section of the Catholic Church in South Africa was a full and active member of an ecumenical body. This strongly ecumenical movement was largely informal.

Inevitably, such a move was fraught with controversy. Liturgies at UCM conferences were ecumenical and highly experimental. For many Catholics experimental liturgy in the wake of the reform of Vatican II was normal and not yet subject to Roman disapproval and final crackdown; the fact that the liturgies (including sometimes Eucharists) were ecumenical was for the Roman Catholic hierarchy, at least, a step too far. Similarly, the Protestant parent bodies were uneasy with the often highly secularised and often deeply sexual tone of worship in UCM. UCM reflected in its worship the radical theology of the 1960s (notably Harvey Cox’s *Secular City* (1965) and John AT Robinson’s *Honest to God* (1963) and echoed too New Left politics and the sexual revolution. While UCM chaplains (Collins, Moore, Anglican priest John Davies, the Jesuit George Edmondstone et al.) tried to defend such innovation, the respective church leaderships were deeply opposed to it, eventually removing support for UCM. This lack of support led to its inevitable demise.

Similarly, black students, already uneasy with NUSAS, felt at times marginalised within UCM. Radical theology and the sexual revolution were simply not what interested them; while New Left ideas from Europe strongly propagated in UCM publications like its magazine *One For the Road*—produced initially from the Dominican House of Studies in Stellenbosch—it should be noted were interesting, they did not speak clearly enough to their South African reality. What they did value, however, was the sense of equality they felt in UCM, although not felt in the same way in NUSAS or NCFS.

Significantly, it was at a 1968 UCM conference in Stutterheim, Eastern Cape, that Steve Biko and a group of black students (who had moved there from a deeply fraught NUSAS conference at Rhodes) conceived the idea of SASO. Similarly, the ideas that would later be called Black Consciousness (BC) and its offshoot Black Theology (BT) were conceived within the UCM, possibly as a response to New Left thought. In a parallel way, a radicalised NCFS in the mid-1970s would, through its national chaplain, the Dominican Albert Nolan, and its short-lived publication *Katutura* (which was banned by the state), import Latin American liberation theology to South Africa (Egan 1990, 72–78), which would—synthesised with black theology—become the ecumenical Contextual Theology of the 1980s that would have a major impact on church and state alike.

Before it was disbanded in 1972, the University Christian Movement was influential in the development of BC and BT, which came to be a theological expression of BC in a relationship of mutual dependence and influence where political and theological/spiritual issues were debated, especially on the campuses of Fort Hare University and the Federal Theological Seminary of Southern Africa (Fedsem). This was the context for the emergence of BC as a re-emergent philosophical response to racism and apartheid. Steve Biko's thinking (2004) provides a bridge from Black Consciousness into Black Theology. In addition, he had a particular interest in the formation of theology students, including those at Fedsem, for they were “seen as destined to play a collaborative role in the apartheid state and its Bantustans” (Buthelezi 1991, 112). The other side of the coin is that as potential leaders in the communities they would be called to serve; theological students could be significant interlocutors of a BC and BT perspective.

BC “takes cognisance of the deliberateness of God’s plan in creating black people black” (Biko 2004, 53). Further, it is a web of “attitudes, belief systems, cultural and political values” (Maphai 1994, 131). For Biko (2004, 49):

Black consciousness is in essence the realisation by the black man of the need to rally together with his brothers around the cause of their oppression—the blackness of their skin—and to operate as a group in order to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude.

“Black” meant oppressed (Wilson 1991, 24), so BC implied a universalising tendency which defied the parameters imposed by apartheid. A helpful definition of terms is offered by Boesak (1976, 1), which demonstrates their integral relationship:

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 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 order to accept Christ as authentic, Biko had to reject the institutional church and what it stood for, but not Christ himself. The resolution of this dilemma for Biko was Black Theology because it offered a practical theology of hope. “At the heart of ‘Black Theology’ is the perception that Jesus belonged historically in a situation of oppression” (Stubbs 2004, 240) and the resolution was found in total liberation of body, mind and spirit. Thus the core of his belief about hatred was based in the spirit of forgiveness which aimed at “the liberation not only of the oppressed but also of the oppressor,” and presupposes not only that the oppressor can be brought to a state of repentance for what he has done, but also that at that moment he is embraced, and so liberated by the forgiveness extended to him by the oppressed (Stubbs 2004, 242; cf. Volf 1996).

Biko offered an alternative vision of the church in South Africa. Dwight Hopkins (1991, 196) has mapped out its parameters; a black God must speak to the black church; the nature of God’s relationship to the creation of a new humanity where God created blacks; Jesus needs to be radically represented as a “militant fighter who dedicated his life to defending the interests of his ‘father’s temple’” (Hopkins 1991, 198); this leads to the existential question: What does it mean to be human?; and finally, the question must be considered: Who does theology? Black theology was discontinuous with that of the institutional church; it was a challenge to what the *Kairos Document* (1985) would later describe as “State Theology” and “Church Theology.”

Therefore, “[i]t is the duty of all black priests and ministers of religion to save Christianity by adopting Black Theology’s approach and thereby once more uniting the black man with his God” (Biko 2004, 104), i.e. “It seeks to relate God and Christ once more to the black man and his daily problems and does not claim to be a theology of absolutes ... It seeks to bring back God to the black man and to the truth and reality of his situation” (Biko 2004, 104). Biko constantly talks about an “absence of abundant life” (Biko 2004, 122), a sense of insecurity which is part of “a feeling of incompleteness” (Biko 2004, 124). This God had to be restored to black people for the

missionaries had denied the black person and his God and offered in return their own conception of divinity.

What is clear is that “South African Black Theology drew heavily from Biko’s Black Consciousness philosophy” (Vellem 2007, 3). “In its defining moments, therefore, it is imperative to grasp the fact that Black Theology harnessed Black Consciousness philosophy to define a particular consciousness that could be used to liberate black masses from their inferiority complex” (Vellem 2007, 4). “Biko himself reflected on theological issues and he was commonly seen among theological students. It is safe to infer that his consciousness and spirituality ... are two sides of the same coin” (Vellem 2007, 288–289).

With regard to the main themes of BT, first, the search for an authentic black humanity arose out of BC where it was a fundamental issue. Blackness was a God-given gift to many human beings, so BT served to affirm true black identity and liberate black people from their negative self-perception. It is a theology of hope (at this time Jurgen Moltman was promoting his own *Theology of Hope* [1965], a theology of liberation within the European context). This was in contradistinction to missionary Christianity, which denied the value of an African identity. Second, it is a relevant theology in the face of oppression. BT begins within the context of oppression and seeks to understand that context.

Third, Black Theology (e.g. Goba 1980, 23–35) establishes liberation as the hermeneutical motif which begins in the mind as a starting point before dealing with the context of oppression. This is not to be treated just as one emphasis in theology but is “rather an endeavour to sharpen the idea of liberation as a legitimate aspect of the theological debate as a whole” (Dwane 1981, 30). Fourth, Jesus is the agent of liberation (Luke 4:18–19). To identify with black oppression, he comes as a black Messiah to establish the Kingdom of God in black society, for God has “provided the solution in Jesus Christ.” The redemption of that black context involves a rejection of the source of oppression, i.e. white Western racist culture.

BC was conceived in a context where the unity of all people was aimed at, white as well as black, as it envisioned a time when all would be united through the development to the full potential of all. It was truly ecumenical as race did not recognise denominational boundaries, so it was a fruitful source for BT, which constituted a rejection of abstract Western theology and positively emphasised a theology of humanity in Christ. Such theology challenged the integrity of apartheid theology, which was based on racial superiority as the root of racism versus the imposed disunity of DRC separatist theology. Such unity could be achieved through all race groups tasking responsibility for achieving “life in all its fullness.” BT emphasised the natural unity of all God’s creation. It was not particularly welcomed in the churches, even black churches, and it constituted a threat to those CEOs which were dominated by white people who perpetuated control of finance and leadership positions (see Bax 1997 and Mukuku 2008). In the DRCs and

CEOs, there was a perception of BT being aligned to liberation theology, and even within the black churches most ministers who had been nurtured and trained in Western theology, were suspicious of it. This had an alienating rather than a unifying effect, so its outcome was contra-ecumenical.

BC originated in a secular context and was ecumenical in a broader sense than was designated ecumenical by the institutional church. It was an influence on the development of BT and on a whole generation of students, theological and other. It provided a serious challenge to the heart of white racism in all DRC and CEOs.

### **The Federal Theological Seminary of Southern Africa (Fedsem)**

Fedsem was formed in 1963 as the result of the coming together of the Anglican, Methodist, Congregational and Presbyterian (Bantu [later Reformed], Tsonga [later Evangelical], Presbyterian Church of Africa [PCA] and Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa) churches. This had its origin in the International Missionary Council (IMC) meeting at Tambaram, 1938 (IMC 1938, 83) and a subsequent report commissioned by the IMC (Goodall and Nielsen 1954), along with financial support from a number of sources, including the Theological Education Fund of the WCC. The “white” churches within this group established a divinity faculty at Rhodes University in 1947 for their white students, signalling their “commitment” to apartheid in the year before an apartheid government came to power. Throughout its history (1963–1993), Fedsem reflected all of the opportunities and challenges of the ecumenical movement in South Africa and demonstrated all the potential of authentic ecumenism. Its closure in 1993 was an ecumenical tragedy, *inter alia* as the result of the opening of universities to black students and the decline of the ecumenical spirit as apartheid came to an end. However, without any significant results, it challenged the commitment of the constituent churches to ecumenism (Denis and Duncan 2011, 280–281), as each denomination made its own arrangements for theological education without due consultation with its former partners. Notwithstanding this, it was the most successful experiment in ecumenism during the twentieth century, despite being a locus of theological education primarily for black candidates for the ministry, evidenced not least in the parishes where several former Fedsem students ministered together.

One of the distinctive characteristics of a Fedsem theological education was the different kind of ministers it produced in comparison with their politically compliant predecessors. This can be attested to in the experience of one of the Fedsem partners, the EPCSA:

The difference in the theological and ministerial understanding of the relationship between the apartheid state and the church was reinforced by the emergence in the 1970s and early 1980s of a new generation of EPCSA ministers, whose theological and social experiences were quite different from those of earlier generations ... Those trained at Fedsem were more radical due to the influence of the BCM [Black Consciousness Movement], which was strongly opposed to the apartheid system. The influence of the

South African Student Association (SASO) the UDF [United Democratic Front] had a strong social and political outlook of the Fedsem students. (Halala et al. 2015, 123–124)

This discourse was largely replicated in the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa.

In contrast, ecumenism within the “white” community was better demonstrated through rather passive participation in the Church Unity Commission.

## **The Church Unity Commission**

The Church Unity Commission (CUC) was formed in 1968 as the result of an informal discussion among church leaders held in the previous year (Wing 1990, 1), and was originally an attempt to bring structural unity to the churches of British and Swiss origin in South Africa (i.e. the Fedsem churches). The Roman Catholic and Lutheran churches were given observer status. This was seen, at least by many, as the institutional aspect of ecumenism which complemented the more socially oriented work of the SACC. In 1972 a basis and plan of union were prepared and by 1974 a “Declaration of Intention to Seek Union” was agreed by the participating churches. Yet, a reaction set in against union and a consultation was called on the theme “Spirituality and Union” (Wing 1990, 4). Throughout, a critical issue was ministry and discussions centred on the role of the episcopate (see Duncan 2011, 19–38). The subsequent approach of covenanting arose out of a consultation held in Grahamstown in 1978. A first draft of a covenant with a theological justification was prepared (Carmichael 1979, 13–27). This went through a further two drafts but to no avail, as South Africa’s priorities were focused on the struggle against apartheid as she experienced successive states of emergency.

The adoption of the “Declaration of Intention” led to the formation of a number of united congregations involving two or more member denominations. In recent years most enquiries regarding the formation of united congregations have come from rural areas where declining white populations and spiralling costs make denominational congregations an unaffordable luxury.

Over the years “the emphasis in the work of the CUC has shifted from seeking agreement on doctrinal and ecclesiastical issues to the promotion of [sic] in mission” (CUC 2006). In 1982, mutual acceptance of members was achieved and in 1995 mutual acceptance of ministers was accepted. Throughout its history, organic unity has been frustrated by the issue of the ministry of oversight (i.e. bishops). It has never been able to achieve a significant degree of racial integration: “... black members could not be inspired at all, as the whole process seemed irrelevant to their existential dilemma” (Wing 1983, 4).

The CUC has had a chequered history as commitment to unity rose and waned. While significant gains were made in recognition of ministries, opening the Eucharistic table,

preparing a joint baptismal certificate, women's work and the formation of united congregations, the move towards organic unity has failed and the CUC exists as a form of the "living dead"—having achieved no tangible results in terms of its original aims and objectives. One of its greatest weaknesses has been its inability in the context of apartheid and beyond to attract significant black participation (Wing 1990, 11–13). The mission of the churches was more concerned with the struggle against apartheid, which forged a significant sense of unity in the face of structural violence; this was vital. By comparison, the SACC had a more significant achievement through instruments such as its Dependents' Conference. Yet, this mission was never wholeheartedly supported by the CUC's member churches who found talking and making statements against apartheid easier than acting against it in authentic support of their black fellow members. In 1987, Anglican overseas "Partners in Mission" commented: "Apartheid is too strong to be dismantled by a divided church" (quoted in Wing 1990, 14). Structural unity was viewed in South Africa by many as neither necessary nor important at this time (Wing 1990, 11); hence lack of support for the cause. The Commission, which never had a high profile, now, in tune with the un-ecumenical spirit of the times, has a lower profile than during the apartheid era. However, the churches still tend to duplicate programmes and to act independently (Cragg 2002, 3). There has been a lack of consultation and cooperation at national and regional level. In this respect, women have taken the lead. Perhaps the most significant achievement of the CUC was its decision in 1996 to "recognise each other's ministry, thus making it possible for non-Anglicans to preside at the Eucharist in Anglican parishes and vice-versa" (De Gruchy 1997, 160), although this has not been a contentious issue in the other CUC denominations.

Local ecumenism is of critical importance. Since the threat posed by apartheid receded with the onset of democracy, there has been a retreat into denominationalism. It is no longer clear what role the CUC has to play in future regarding the absence of a desire for organic union.

## **Grassroots Ecumenism: The Activities of Movements within the Roman Catholic Church**

While the Catholic Church remained outside the SACC, maintaining observer status within the organisation until the early 1990s, and while the official discourse of SACBC remained fairly nonpartisan in tone until at least the mid-1980s, organisations within the Catholic Church (and a number of prominent Catholics) operated what was in effect a kind of deep ecumenism that included not only non-Catholics but also in some cases non-Christians and secular activists. In many cases, Catholic organisations provided action spaces for activists to function under the relative protection of a global religious network. Just as an organisation like the SACC provided jobs and resources for members of the new internal resistance movements of the 1980s (indeed, even "cover" for members of the ANC underground), so too did the SACBC at a variety of levels. The SACBC Justice and Peace Commission, for example, was a conduit for overseas funding to groups like the End Conscription Campaign (ECC)—while officially being

a funder of ECC, it happened that foreign-donated funds for the SACBC's "peace and war" project were vastly more than the project could spend. Yet spend the funds it did—supporting the ECC. It was not a case of fraud, however, but was done with full knowledge of the SACBC Justice and Peace Commission and the foreign donors, who might otherwise have found it difficult to channel funds to ECC (personal communication with a member of the SACBC Justice and Peace Commission).

On another level, Catholic lay organisations were founded—or re-founded—to serve the struggle against apartheid, most notably the Young Christian Workers (YCW) and Young Christian Students (YCS). While both were officially movements within (and under the spiritual guidance and protection of) the Catholic Church, complete with ordained and lay chaplains, both were deeply ecumenical (including many non-Catholics, non-Christians and even the non-religious), politically radical (strongly Marxist) and often fiercely independent of the Catholic hierarchy (Van Kessel 2009, 2).

Founded as a left-wing Catholic alternative to communist trade unions in 1920s Belgium, and having had a presence in South Africa from the 1930s, by the 1960s the YCW was a multiracial and ecumenical movement for Christian workers. The re-emergence and rise of the YCW in the late 1960s and early 1970s coincided with the resurgence of black trade unionism in Natal and the East Rand (cf. Friedman 1987). A group of older YCW members created a programme called the Urban Training Project (UTP) to help form trade union leaders (Lowry 1999), just as middle-class NCFs students helped strengthen the NUSAS Wages Commission (Egan 1990, 69). UTP was never an SACBC affiliate, however, and had to draw on funding and moral support from a variety of religious organisations, including the Anglican Church (Lowry 1999; Van Kessel 2009). Many of its trainees went on to leadership roles in the new black unions.

The YCW took a different course, partly influenced by the launch of the schools and universities-based Young Christian Students (YCS) in the mid-1970s under the guidance of Catholic student chaplain, Albert Nolan. Nolan and many of his fellow Dominicans worked closely with the YCS and YCW, the latter augmented by a small core of mainly diocesan clergy (some of whom—like Gerard de Fleuriot and Jean-Marie Dumortier—had YCW experience in Mauritius, France and Belgium). Building upon a methodology of See-Judge-Act (examine the situation ["see"]; analyse it in light of liberation theology and Marxist theory ["judge"]; and then organise a campaign ["act"]), the YCW adopted a programme of "revolutionary change, anti-capitalism and vision of a classless (and by implication colour-blind) society" (Van Kessel 2009, 7). Marxism was central to YCW thinking—no matter what the SACBC felt!—and even its religious celebrations took on a revolutionary tone. One former YCW activist recalled a May Day/St Joseph the Worker liturgy that included singing the *Internationale* and Marxist-Leninist discussions (Van Kessel 2009, 13).

Similarly, the YCS operated within the same framework, though its discourse included substantially more liberation theology. Here too, though the SACBC were by no means

implacably opposed to liberation theology, the YCS vision of the 1980s was strongly aligned with a democratic socialist “people’s church” ecclesiology (cf. YCS n.d.) which made the “prophetic theology” of the *Kairos Document* (1985) that made even bishops like Denis Hurley uneasy, seem positively bourgeois. Another central source for the YCS and YCW was Albert Nolan’s book *Jesus Before Christianity* (Nolan 1976); it had been written at the time of the YCS’s foundation in the 1970s, had been inspired by Nolan meeting Gustavo Gutierrez and by the need felt in NCFS for an appropriate theology to inspire NCFS’s attempts to radicalise itself and respond to the challenge posed by Black Theology.

Neither the YCS nor YCW, however, became prominent movements in the South African struggle, though their members were directly involved in creating unions, organising strikes and building grassroots community organisations. This was partly because both were self-defined formation groups that trained cadres for the wider struggle. Among them could be found activists like Trevor Manuel (later a leader of the UDF and subsequent South African Minister of Finance) and COSAS leader, Shepi Mati. In addition, the YCW made it a kind of policy for much of its history not to affiliate with anyone: the YCW was wary of populist movements like the UDF or ANC-supporting trade unions that seemed to them to subordinate labour interests to the “national democratic struggle” (Van Kessel 2009, 2, 10). If anything, the YCW (and to a lesser extent YCS) tended to organise itself semi-clandestinely, adopting Communist Party-style cell structures.

Unsurprisingly, both the YCW and YCS experienced serious state repression from the mid-1970s onward. Homes of YCW members were firebombed; YCW and YCS members were regularly detained by the security forces; Eric and Jean Tyacke, who had helped revive the YCW and create the UTP, were under banning orders from 1976–1981. For religious members of the movements, detention without trial could have an unexpected effect. The late Roddy Mzwandile Nunes, commenting on his 1978 arrest under the Terrorism Act, recalled:

I was held in gaol for just over a month; all that time in solitary confinement. My family was not allowed to visit me nor were they told where I was being held. In that period, the only reading matter that I was allowed was the Bible. I ... read it from cover to cover in the first 3 weeks of my detention. Reading the writings of the prophets I discovered that I was not the first man of faith to have similar experiences ... I found a lot of strength from praying Psalm 35: “The prayer of a virtuous man under oppression,” I read it every day ... I would not be able to continue [in YCW] if I had not the support of my belief that God was with us and that justice will eventually triumph. (in Dumortier et al. 1983, 40)

To their credit, the SACBC was especially supportive of detainees, not simply those from within Catholic movements but anyone who was detained for struggling against apartheid. Throwing previous caution to the wind, the church in collaboration with other

religious organisations and secular groups alike, persistently denounced state repression. Even as they expressed reservations about aspects of the *Kairos Document*, the SACBC put church properties at the disposal of secular activist organisations, hid activists in convents, and chose to overlook official Roman disapproval of clergy and religious persons holding office in political movements.

The clergy who served as chaplains in the YCS and YCW found themselves in situations where not only did they themselves have to support activists of varied or no beliefs pastorally, but that such involvement changed many of their beliefs. While their contemporaries in middle-class parishes could, if they wanted to, avoid politics, they found themselves becoming activists. One YCW chaplain, Jean-Marie Dumortier, saw the YCW as “part of this huge and historical movement which originates in our Saviour and leads humanity to its achievement in God” (Dumortier et al. 1983, 136). Echoing Vatican II’s notion that priests and laity alike had a duty to engage in a common mission, including solidarity with workers, he felt gratitude for the opportunity:

I thank the YCW for having given me that life, that joy; the joy of sharing the “joys and sorrows, hopes and struggles” of so many young workers, not being a worker myself; the joy of sharing the same commitment to justice and of experiencing the same feelings of mutual trust, solidarity and hope that it entails; the joy of discerning anew, together, the power of the Spirit operating through us among the workers, the joy of praying for that Kingdom to come, of celebrating our God, hand in hand, as brothers, as comrades. (Dumortier et al. 1983, 137)

Comradeship in the YCW and YCS also meant sharing the political views of its members. Chaplains in the movements like Dumortier, Chris Langefeld and Albert Nolan also came to endorse the political vision of the activists whose lives and struggles they shared. Nolan, for example, while in hiding during the 1986 state of emergency, wrote another book, *God in South Africa* (Nolan 1988), which many have read as a theological apologia for the struggle of the 1980s. Be that as it may, it is undoubtedly a wholehearted endorsement of the “Colonialism of a Special Type” analysis of modern South Africa as proposed by the ANC and SACP.

The cases of the YCW and YCS illustrate how far a kind of grassroots ecumenism was practised within the South African Catholic Church during the 1970s and 1980s. This was an all-inclusive ecumenism that literally put the organs of the church at the disposal of the struggle, including and often protecting activists of all or no faith in the process. For some in these organisations, it revitalised their faith, giving them new insights into God and ministry, relativising dogma in the name of the Kingdom which was often over-simplistically identified as the end of apartheid. In the process, many secular activists, including Marxists, came to see religion and Christianity in a less negative light.

## **The Kairos Document and the “Kairos Moment” for South African Ecumenism**

Produced in 1985, the *Kairos Document* is an epochal text for both the church’s struggle against apartheid and for the ecumenical movement. In many respects, it is the culmination of a decades-long struggle against apartheid by the churches. It also reflects the real ecumenical divisions in South Africa. Again, it was an informal instrument in the sense that it did not emerge officially from denominations.

Originating from within ministers’ fraternals in Soweto, the text went through a series of drafts and redrafting with the assistance of the Institute for Contextual Theology in Johannesburg. Circulated to clergy and theologians outside Soweto, it was reworked to give it a national tone. Theologians and pastors were then invited as individuals to be its signatories. Launched with an initial 150-plus signatories, it rapidly became the most famous—and controversial—text in the history of Christianity in South Africa.

The *Kairos Document* was published in the midst of mounting civil disobedience and political protest that had already led to a partial state of emergency in 1985, and would lead to a national state of emergency from 1986 to 1990, but would end with the unbanning of liberation movements and the process leading to democracy in 1994. It proclaimed boldly that “the time had come” (Kairos Theologians 1986, 1) that this was the moment of crisis and opportunity for the South African church to take a resolute stand against apartheid and help to bring the system to its knees. To do this, the church had to look at itself and the rival theologies that the church universal proclaimed about the situation.

The first theology, adhered to by some churches but mainly emanating from the state propaganda machine, was “State Theology.” Essentially a misreading of Romans 13:1–7, it regarded state authority as divinely mandated and therefore to be obeyed. This the *Kairos Document* dismissed as a typical misuse of scripture by a tyrannical state—indeed, the whole theology of obedience was, in the context of South Africa, satanic, idolatrous and blasphemous.

“Church Theology,” the second kind and one the *Kairos Document* claimed was adhered to by the churches, was a theology of compromise with evil rooted in the notion of reconciliation. Reconciliation in the context of the 1980s struggle was an unacceptable compromise that at worst tried to reconcile impossible moral opposites, good with evil. No reconciliation, no forgiveness and no negotiations were possible, the *Kairos Document* declared, without first repentance—including the church’s repentance for centuries of compromise with evil.

The third theology, the theology of the *Kairos Document* and those who were really committed to change, was “Prophetic Theology.” This was a theology of denunciation and resistance—denunciation of apartheid in all its forms and empty promises, and

unrelenting resistance to it by Christians. Churches and parishes should become centres of resistance, putting all their considerable resources in the struggle and using whatever and all means at their disposal to join in the national liberation process.

Though endorsed by the SACC, it was not equally received by all SACC member churches. Some, like the Congregational Church, welcomed it. Other churches expressed grave misgivings about aspects of its theology. The state and their supporters within the churches quickly denounced it as communist-inspired incitement to an ANC-led violent revolution.

The Catholic Church, though broadly sympathetic, rapidly issued its own response. In a statement issued two months after the launch of the *Kairos Document*, the Administrative Board noted that it came:

... at any appropriate time in the crisis through which we are passing, an appropriate time too for the Catholic Church in South Africa as we work on the formulation of our pastoral plan and as the project of Christians for Justice and Peace in which we are involved with other churches begins to take shape. (SACBC 1985, 6)

However, it felt that the *Kairos Document* was at times unfair to the churches' contribution to the struggle and that its theology was at times faulty. It objected to the suggestion that the churches were simplistically wedded to nonviolence (which, in light of a SACBC report was probably true, cf. TAC 1985) or even that the churches accepted the state's political terminology uncritically. They also felt that the *Kairos Document* completely misread the churches' understanding of reconciliation. In practice, however, the *Kairos Document* (written and signed as it was by a number of Catholic priests, sisters and theologians) was widely accepted within Catholic justice and peace circles, including the grassroots ecumenical groups under the protection of the Bishops Conference.

Indeed, one might see the *Kairos Document* as the culmination of the work and influence of the ecumenical struggle-oriented Christian movements within South Africa. Given the breadth of its authorship and signatories, it was perhaps the broadest ecumenical statement from the religious community up till 1985. Though the ICT produced subsequent texts like the *Road to Damascus* (ICT 1989) that included more signatories (including some like Desmond Tutu who felt unwilling to sign the *Kairos Document*), neither the *Road to Damascus* nor its sequels had the same dramatic, almost visceral impact. The *Kairos Document* was the voice of an unashamedly partisan, grassroots ecumenism, seen neither before nor since in South African history.

## **More Recent Developments**

The new democratic Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (hereafter Constitution) transformed South Africa into a secular pluralist society marked by "multi-religious tolerance and respect" (Smit 2009, 403). With regard to denominations,

this was generally accepted along with support for the Constitution. The early response was: “In general the official churches show a spirit of cooperation towards the present government rather than one of prophetic distance on any issue” (Smit 2009, 404). The need for a public voice for the churches was met by the government-initiated National Religious Leaders Forum and the Moral Regeneration Movement.

At several points during the twentieth century, there have been attempts to unite the Presbyterian and Congregational churches. The United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA) was formed in 1967 as the result of the coming together of the Congregational Union of South Africa, the Bantu Congregational Church and the churches of the London Missionary Society. The Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa, the Bantu Presbyterian Church and the Tsonga Presbyterian church were also in union negotiations, which came to nothing. From time to time the PCSA and the UCCSA were in negotiations, but these failed in 1984 (De Gruchy 1997, 159).

In 1982, the Dutch Reformed Church (NGK) and the Nederduits Hervormde Kerk (NHK) were excluded from the WARC on the grounds of their support for apartheid (Hendriksson 2013, 366–370). This rupture is presently being healed. In 1994, the NGSK and the NGKA (the black and coloured five mission churches) united to form the United Reformed Church in South Africa (URCSA). This union has only been partially successful. In 1999, the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (formerly Bantu Presbyterian Church) and the Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa came together to form the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (UPCSA). Like the URCSA, this union has suffered from its own internal issues and lives under the threat of secession. There are ongoing talks between the Afrikaans-speaking churches of the Reformed tradition. These have been hampered by a number of issues, including the status of the Belhar Confession (1982) in a united church.

In 2015 talks between the UPCSA and the UCCSA were restarted with the aim of strengthening our cooperation and exploring the possibility of a union of the two churches (UPCSA *Let's Journey Together* [LJT] 4/2015). The impetus for this initiative was the mutual experience gained through the existence of a number of united congregations leading to a desire for closer union throughout the two denominations. By 2017, the UCCSA and the UPCSA had reached the point where they were ready to “sign a covenant to journey together towards the union of the two churches” (UPCSA General Secretary to All Ministers 2017). In 2018, progress was reported and the following was agreed:

5. The General Assembly urges the ministers, leadership and membership in the UPCSA to
  - a. promote continuously and positively the unity of the two denominations; and
  - b. promote united work and activities between the UPCSA and the UCCSA at all the

levels and by all the structures. (UPCSA 2018, 461)

This offers hope of further organic union in southern Africa and it is hoped that the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa may join the process at some point.

With regard to the situation in the SACC in the post-apartheid period: “It rapidly receded from public and church consciousness once the battle against apartheid had been won ... [thereafter] All attention became focused on the political parties moving into the seats of power ... the SACC ... became just one more ‘do-gooding’ organisation among many non-governmental agencies” (Thomas 2002, 232). Yet, a SACC parliamentary officer was appointed to liaise with the government in its work of reconciliation.

South Africa is no longer a “Christian” nation (if it ever was); the new Constitution no longer begins with “In humble submission to Almighty God ...” The SACC has struggled to find an appropriate niche since the demise of apartheid. It no longer has a distinctive *raison d’etre*, and severe financial restraints constantly threaten its continued existence. Other parts of the world have more pressing needs according to overseas donor organisations, which had already been transferring their financial support through government agencies in the democratic era. Further, the charismatic and Pentecostal churches have usurped the traditional role of the SACC. In contemporary South Africa, it would be true to say that there is no longer any urgency with regard to union and ecumenism (Thomas 2002, 233).

However, alternative alignments have developed which threaten the integrity of the ecumenical movement, particularly its mainline church paradigm as expressed by the SACC. In the forefront of these is the emergence of the Pentecostal, charismatic and evangelical alignment.

### **South African Council of Churches (SACC) in a Democracy**

The role and impact of the South African Council of Churches have altered enormously since 1994: “The 1980s were dominated by the ecumenism of struggle in which the South African Council of Churches ... played the major role” (Cragg 2002, 3). After being in the vanguard of the struggle against apartheid for which it received substantial moral and financial support internationally, which was transferred to government agencies with the advent of democracy, the situation changed rapidly. It was credited with adopting the policy of “critical solidarity” with the government. However, Vellem (2013, 178) credits Charles Villa-Vicencio’s *Theology of Reconstruction* (1992) with this fabrication which in turn allegedly led to a move towards “critical distance” through “critical engagement.” This publication was a theological attempt to maintain a “white” hegemonic theology in the South African context (Smit 2009, 405). It failed as the result of its adoption of and a commitment to a paradigm from an East European context. It failed to understand that the very conditions that birthed Black Theology had not been

addressed. Yet, the one area which appears to have been suppressed is the contribution of Black Theology to ongoing church life. Liberation remains a global ecumenical challenge, and a black liberation theology may still offer an alternative to “the Constantinian model of the church” as a “religion of empire” (Vellem 2013, 182).

### **The Pentecostal Bloc**

The Pentecostal Bloc has often been designated as racist, and “officially they claimed to be a-political” (Thomas 2002, xxv). However, such churches today court the ANC government and have been lauded by President Zuma for their “support programmes for orphans and children living in the streets” (West 2010, 114). Has it been forgotten that the South African Council of Churches (SACC) did sterling work during the years of apartheid that contributed to the downfall of the apartheid regime? As a result of the stance adopted by the SACC towards the government, which expressed less solidarity with its policies, the Pentecostals have deployed themselves as an ecumenical alternative to the South African Council of Churches and even invited the state president to address the International Pentecost Church at Easter 2009 (West 2010, 116). This harkens back to 1985 when PW Botha was invited to address the Easter assembly of the (a-political?) Zion Christian Church, the largest AIC in South Africa, at Moriah in Limpopo Province. However, all was not as positive for President Botha, for: “... new tensions were building as a growing number of Zionists were politicised by the turmoil of the townships, the surge of the liberation movement and by their membership in trade unions” (Walshe 1995, 110).

Pentecostal churches in South Africa are representative of the rise of a global phenomenon. Yong (2014, 67) suggests that this is due to charismatic renewal’s affinity for indigenous religious traditions; it participates in a “primal spirituality” which addresses the vacuum in contemporary spirituality (Cox 1996, 81). And it does this in South Africa both within the black and white contexts—and often across these contexts. Yong expresses it as a process of “opening up windows into transcendence similar to what has been claimed by indigenous religions for millennia” (Yong 2014, 68):

... there is no denying that the adaptability and flexibility of renewalism is meeting the spiritual needs of non-Westerners on their own less-rationalised terms ... there is also no denying that there is a very rich and vibrant pneumatological cosmology operative among renewalists that enables inculturation in non-Western idioms and allows for integration of indigenous beliefs and practices with Christian faith. (Yong 2014, 305)

In the 1970s and 1980s, neo-Pentecostal churches, such as the Rhema Church and the Durban Christian Centre experienced rapid growth, partly on the basis of their “dispensationalist ... theology” (Jones 1990, 109). Ray McCauley, the founder of the Rhema Church in 1979, emerged as one of the country’s most opportunistic white neo-Pentecostal leaders, becoming president in 1985 of the newly created International Fellowship of Christian Churches, South Africa’s largest association of charismatic and

neo-Pentecostal churches. The Pentecostal churches are often allied with the prosperity gospel and “pastor-preneurship” (Jones 1990, 109).

However, the recent alignment of Pentecostal churches with the ANC government has become an issue of integrity:

What has happened to the alliance of conservative churches with a direct line to the President? Rhema and the rest were so vocal about “moral” issues such as gay marriage and abortion. But when it comes to polygamy, promiscuity and adultery in high places, all we get is a deafening silence. (Seward 2010, 115–116)

President Zuma and Pastor McCauley have their conservative morality and unorthodox private lives in common. The one on his second divorce and the other on his seventh (?) marriage. Rhema’s pastor Sifiso comments:

We are not an ordinary church. “The president comes to us to ask for advice,” he says proudly. “We are very influential and very active on social issues.” Those issues include abortion, the death penalty and gay marriages, he explains in a diplomatically roundabout fashion. The extent of Rhema’s influence is worrying an increasing number of South African liberals, who are concerned that the evangelical outfit is intent on overturning some of the more progressive aspects of the country’s constitution. (Liston 2015)

Conradie (2013, 15) points to a perpetuating historical problem here: “The difficulty is that Christian leaders have always been deeply involved in South African politics (whether in the former National party or the ANC) so that a switch in roles from church leader to politician calls for some finesse.”

### **National Interfaith Leaders’ Council (NILC)**

As SACC policy was deigned to represent “critical engagement” it earned the disapprobation of the ANC, which then found a more compliant partner in the Pentecostal churches, especially Rhema, under the leadership of Ray McCauley.

The SACC was not involved in the recent formation of the National Interfaith Leaders’ Council (NILC) in 2009 under McCauley’s chairmanship. It claimed to have problems with the founding document of the NILC. According to the government, the NILC is a mass-based group of religious leaders from across the country, which reflects all the major faiths practised in South Africa (SACC 2014, 1). This is symptomatic of “the political marginalisation of the SACC” (Conradie 2013, 16).

The strongest indication of Mr McCauley’s status in South Africa’s new order was his appointment to head up the newly created National Interfaith Leaders’ Council (NILC), a body meant to advise and aid the government on the delivery of social services—among other things.

The leadership of the NILC, which abruptly displaced South Africa's Council of Churches, saw the former strongman [McCauley] dubbed the "high priest of South Africa." (Liston 2015)

However, if lack of integrity is an issue within the Pentecostal bloc, those from the CEOs should interrogate their own actions and decisions, for there is also the problem of a lack of consistency in a theological stance, which is not allowed to stand in the way of the moral religion trajectory since 1994, where a choice was made to "downplay the national priority for decent work and focusing instead on narrower moral dilemmas such as abortion and same-sex marriage" (West 2009, 116). The SACC has struggled with problems which emanate largely from their financial issues, and their integrity has been seriously compromised. It has been accused of "political irrelevance and ideological differences" (Sosibo 2012).

However, the SACC has "felt it was being punished for its refusal to become a formal ally of the ruling party, its failed attempt to intervene over former president Thabo Mbeki's 'recall' last year and its failure to endorse the ANC before this year's elections" (Mataboge 2009).

### **The Non-Church Movement**

There is also an increasing constituency of people who believe but who are disenchanted with the institutional church. An example is the main Dutch Reformed churches, which earlier promoted an apartheid theology and are now attempting to justify a democratically-based theology in a constituency which has not made the psychological/spiritual adjustment. In addition, a number of other reasons are cited as:

The challenge of secularism in some contexts, the tensions between public AND private forms of devotion in a politically volatile climate, the connection between liturgy and life, the ordination of women and the role of women in leadership positions, issues around homosexuality that often tend to tear congregations and churches apart, issues around indigenisation and cultural authenticity, and the ecological reformation of Christian worship amidst the rapid growth of churches proclaiming the prosperity gospel. (Conradie 2013, 30)

This has led to disillusionment and confusion within the church as an institution, and many have retreated into a personal faith or ever smaller non-aligned communities of believers (cf. Uchimura Kanzō's non-church movement in Japan) (Shibuya and Shin 2013, 129–135). There is a danger here, however, that where:

A major feature of the church scene today is the growing preoccupation of churches and denominations with their own identity, the search by each for a secure plot on which to build their designer-house in what they think is their distinctive and unique architecture of the spirit. (Clements 2013, 198)

The response of disengagement appears to be nondenominational rather than ecumenical. This presents a particular challenge for theological education.

## **Is there New Hope for Theological Education?**

Twenty-three years after the closure of Fedsem in 1993, the CUC took an initiative to bring the unfinished Fedsem saga to a close and attempt to resolve the unfinished business of the Seminary, the Rhodes faculty and the expropriation from its first site adjacent to the University of Fort Hare. The lack of resolution regarding all of these matters had contributed to the poor state of ecumenism among the CEOs since 1993:

In different fora the issue of ecumenical education keeps raising itself. Although there are expressions of co-operation, the prevailing sentiment that keeps presenting itself is that the partners involved in FEDSEM and Rhodes have not concluded that relationship in a satisfactory manner. The considerable contribution to the church has not been analysed or celebrated at all. The deep sense of betrayal that accompanied the closure of the institutions has not been analysed or fully processed. The integrity of the entire ecumenical witness is called into question by the way in which we closed this chapter of our relationship. To try and entertain further engagement is bedevilled by ambivalent memories and it is thought that the time has come for us to understand and analyse the relationships of the journey as well as heal memories that sour any future engagement. (CUC 2015, 1)

Events were held at the three venues and opportunities were given for the expression of concerns and for a way forward. Subsequently, the CUC confirmed the establishment of its Theological Education sub-committee in order that it might take matters forward and bring forward ideas for future ecumenical theological education. This discussion is wide-reaching. Kritzinger (2018, 1) posed the question in terms of interrogating the term “ecumenical theological education” and its current appropriateness, while acknowledging the ecumenical tradition out of which it emerged:

... whether there is a unique niche for “mainline” churches, despite their decreasing numbers and relative influence, a role that no other Christian churches or groups would want to play, in continuity with the prophetic traditions of SACC, ICT, Black Theology project, Kairos Document, Evangelical Witness, etc. If there is such a “niche” how do we develop, shape, train new leaders for this tradition? (Kritzinger 2018, 1)

What is particularly gratifying is the openness which has led to the inclusion of the Lutheran, Dutch Reformed and Roman Catholic churches, while there is ongoing discussion regarding the inclusion of African Initiated and Pentecostal churches because of the difficulty in knowing who to approach for representation.

## **Conclusion**

While there appears to be little that is positive in the South African church scene, it is important not to underestimate faithfulness within this deeply committed Christian

country, which is still coming to terms with the onset of democracy and healing of the wounds of apartheid in all sections of the community. The situation is dynamic as South African Christianity operates within a fluid context of relations with the state as well as among its constituent denominations. Despite repeated calls to the churches to call the government to account, there is a heavy price to be paid for doing so. The “mainline” churches are either stagnant or declining in terms of numbers while the African Initiated and Pentecostal churches are expanding rapidly. To counter this, Vellem (2013, 182) recommends a “religion of creation” grounded in a Black Theology of Liberation based on inclusivity, justice, solidarity and the integrity of creation—the shalom of God. There is a great need for the development of an ecumenical vision to which CEOs, AICs and Pentecostals churches can commit themselves to (hopefully with other faith expressions) in order to offer a common vision of a truly rainbow nation.

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