**The World Council of Churches Programme to Combat Racism: A South African response changes in global mission policy**

***Abstract***

*The introduction of the Special Fund of the Programme to Combat Racism (PCR) by the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1970 was a natural expression of international opposition to racism. It also indicated a change in global mission policy from mission as a traditional evangelical activity to the emerging paradigm of mission as God’s activity in the world. Though focussed in Africa and South Africa, in particular, the controversial PCR drew the ire of the apartheid government and many white members of Churches of European origin (CEO), gaining support mainly from black church members and churches. This article attempts to analyse the origin, process and outcome of this heavily contested programme in one particular white dominated CEO, the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa, spearheaded by its Ecumenical Relations Committee, which came to radically different conclusions from the majority of the church membership regarding the nature, purpose and function of the church.*

***Keywords:***

*Church and Nation (C&N) Committee, Churches of European origin (CEO), Ecumenical Relations Committee, Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa, Programme to Combat Racism (PCR), World Council of Churches (WCC)*

**Introduction**

‘This radical secularisation of the idea of Christian mission reached its apogee at the Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches at Uppsala in July 1968’ (Stanley 2018:209). This was evidence of a significant move away from ‘the restrictive and limited definition of mission as the proclamation of the saving word of Christ’s redemption’ (Goodall 1968:xvii, 38). There was a clear transition in approaches to mission and was consistent with the views of David Bosch (2011:377-532):

In the traditional “mission fields” the position of western mission agencies and missionaries has undergone a fundamental revision (Bosch 2011:373).

In the course of this [20th] century the missionary enterprise and the missionary idea have undergone profound modifications (Bosch 2011:374).

It would be strange if the present period of uncertainty did not also throw up candidates which propagate either a convulsive clinging to the past or an even more extreme “conservative” backlash (such as some current manifestations of fundamentalism), or, contrarily, a kind of “clean slate” approach … (Bosch 2011:375)

Bosch’s (2011:523-533) holistic conception of ‘Mission in many modes’ is consistent with a definition of mission as participation in God’s mission of reconciliation in which humans are called to participate. While Bosch’s view on mission was holistic, it was strongly focussed on social justice and this is evidenced on the actions of the World Council of Churches (WCC).

**World Council of Churches and its Programme to Combat Racism**

The World Council of Churches Programme to Combat Racism (PCR) was launched in 1969 as the result of a mandate given at its Fourth Assembly in Uppsala, Sweden in 1968. By this time the WCC had a long history of focusing on issues of race, rooted both in its work with mission churches and its involvement with resistance to totalitarianism in Europe from the 1930s. These areas of concern would become extremely controversial, not least direct humanitarian support to liberation movements.

The Uppsala meeting of the WCC went beyond being controversial to being divisive. This arose out of the decision to establish a Programme to Combat Racism with a Special Fund, to offer, *inter alia*, humanitarian aid to liberation movements. as the result of a recognition ‘that the urgent issues of racial justice raised by the civil rights movement in the United States were now being applied on a global stage’ (Stanley 2018:211). These were the contemporary ‘religious’ issues which militated against Jesus’ purpose that people have life in all its fullness (John 10:10). The conservatives opposed this and accused the WCC of bowing ‘to the political pressure of the secular and anticolonial age’ (Stanley 2018:210).

South African, Z. K. Matthews, and Mozambican, Eduardo Mondlane (who was assassinated a few days after receiving his invitation to attend) were to be leading participants at a consultation held by the WCC in Mindolo, Zambia in 1964 (Villa-Vicencio 1987:241), and it was this seminar, attended by African National Congress (ANC) leader Oliver Tambo and anti-apartheid activist Bishop Trevor Huddleston, that launched the PCR although it had been the subject of discussion at a consultation at Notting Hill, London in 1969 and was part of a wider struggle to eliminate racism globally (de Gruchy 1979:128).

The Notting Hill consultation led to the formation of a plan of action which included the following points:

Point 4 committed the World Council to establish a unit ‘to deal with the eradication of racism’.

Point 6 made specific reference to southern Africa.

Point 7 declared ‘That all else failing, the Church and churches support resistance movements, including revolutions. which aimed at the elimination of political or economic tyranny, which makes racism possible (Welch 2001:878 in Stanley 2018:245)

The South African Council of Churches (SACC) objected to the Special fund of the PCR on the grounds that it allowed for the possible use of violence to achieve its purpose. The Executive Committee of the WCC agreed in 1970: ‘to give financial aid to antiracist liberation movements fighting in southern Africa against white minority governments’ (de Gruchy 1979:129). Grants were awarded to liberation movements in Namibia, South Africa, Angola, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Despite the fact that it was made clear that the grants were not to be used for violent purposes, they attracted a great deal of negative criticism even in the northern hemisphere where it was believed that ‘the WCC had departed from Christian orthodoxy and finally succumbed to secularism and the use of violence.

The grants were awarded on the basis of the WCC accepting the integrity of the recipients who were not required to account for the use of the funds (Villa-Vicencio 1988:110). This caused a furore in South Africa because no notice had been given of such a decision (Villa-Vicencio 1987:241) which was unjust. It became a public relations nightmare. De Gruchy (1979:130) commented aptly: ‘The fact that the financial grants made by the WCC were for “humanitarian purposes consonant with the aims and policies” of the world body was lost on the South African public’ which from this time perceived the WCC as a ‘terrorist organisation’ rather than a Christian body. Although the SACC supported the other work of the PCR (de Gruchy & de Gruchy 2005:127), it rejected violence, and it became almost impossible to dislodge the view to the contrary (de Gruchy & de Gruchy 2005:127). Those who were opposed to the PCR made much of the situation while a statement from the WCC made it clear that: ‘As always our support is to be seen as a sign of solidarity which should be clearly distinguished from *identification* with a movement’ (Potter 1978). Villa-Vicencio (1988:111) added ‘… if the church ministers to those who take up arms in defense of the existing order, it can do no less in relation to those who resort to arms in their struggle for justice’ for**:**

… institutionalised violence, however, disguised by legislation and custom, is ultimately intrinsically more evil than revolutionary violence. If for no other reason, this is because the latter is an attempt to destroy existing evil while the former is designed to entrench it, and ultimately because institutionalised violence always precedes and precipitates revolutionary violence (Villa-V icencio 1987:251).

The South African public (church members included) tended to follow the anti-WCC propaganda of the government and media which facilitated the individualism of religion and evasion of political responsibility Villa-Vicencio (1988:112). With regard to the responses of the CEOs, all continued to second ministers to be South African National Defence Force (SANDF) chaplains. They were: ‘Captive to the dominant ideas of the dominant class and trapped within a theology of moderation and submission to the existing order’ (Villa-Vicencio 1988:115).

From 1970, the Programme made grants to liberation movements globally though the majority were made to the African continent (Thomas 2002:29). The WCC Central Committee argued that the struggle against racism was ‘not against flesh and blood. It is against the principalities, against the powers of evil, against the deeply entrenched demonic forces of racial prejudice … Ours is a task of exorcism’ (AJ van der Bent 1980 in Thomas 2002:211). This demonstrates a clear missionary intent; it caused an international uproar particularly from churches of European origin (CEOs) in Africa. The churches stood between the apartheid government and their own members (Thomas 2002:212). To the contrary, black African churches strongly supported the campaign due to their growing influence with the CEOs (de Gruchy 1997:164). They considered this to be a part of their mission of service including sacrifice. However, their support was often tempered by their dependence on financial support from their white patrons which significantly moderated the possibility and power of a truly prophetic leadership (Petersen 2001:124)

The issue which caused the eruption of opposition was the interpretation of the word ‘humanitarian. Four aspects are recognised:

1. having concern for or helping to improve the welfare and happiness of people.

2. pertaining to the saving of human lives or to the alleviation of suffering: a humanitarian crisis.

3. pertaining to ethical or theological humanitarianism.

4. a person actively engaged in promoting human welfare and social reforms, as a philanthropist (*The Free Dictionary* 2014).

However, none of these addressed the problems which arose in this regard which was the use of violence in pursuit of humanitarian ideals. This became the focus of a lengthy and acrimonious debate on a number of fronts internationally. For example:

According to Rachel Tingle, between 1979 and 1991 the PCR gave a total of $9,749,500 to such groups.

 In 1970, *Reader's Digest* suggested that the PCR was contributing to fourteen groups involved in revolutionary guerrilla activities, some of which were Communist in ideology and receiving arms from the Soviet Union.

 In 1977 "The Fraudulent Gospel" was published in the USA and Britain and carried a graphic photo on the front cover of 27 Black Rhodesians it said were "massacred by WCC-financed terrorists in Eastern Rhodesia in December 1976".

 Donating $85,000 to the Patriotic Front of Zimbabwe (ZANU) in 1978, months after the group shot down an airliner, killing 38 of the 56 passengers on board. Members are reported to have killed 10 survivors (this was denied by the Front).

This caused much controversy in the past among member churches. A *Time Magazine* article had the title "Going Beyond Charity: Should Christian cash be given to terrorists?”. Further examination of WCC's political programme appeared in *Amsterdam to Nairobi - The World Council of Churches and the Third World* by Ernest W. Lefever (Alchetron 2018).

None of the above mentioned were sources of integrity. They were all right wing aligned organisations which supported apartheid. Few of them took account of the fact that South Africa was a white controlled country where structural violence was the norm (de Gruchy 1979:130; de Gruchy & de Gruchy 2005:127).). The entire matter placed the South African churches in a problematic situation regarding revolutionary action to bring about change. The use of violence was the critical issue in regard to the award of grants from the Special Fund to liberation movements which employed violence as a *modus operandi.* The controversy became localised within South Africa and the Prime Minister made threats against member churches of the WCC. These threats made by Vorster were attested to by an elder who was present when they were made. In Parliament, Vorster stated:

I made an appeal to member churches to come to their senses … If they do not decide to dissociate themselves from this organisation I would be neglecting my duty as the head of the Government if I did not take action against them, if I allowed money to be collected in South Africa for transmission to that organisation, if I allowed churches which are members of the World Council of Churches, and wish to remain members, to send representatives to that body … (Hansard, 15 September 1970, PCSA 1970:77)

The WCC resolution had placed South African CEOs in an unenviable situation by a lack of consideration for the internal dynamics of existing and witnessing in an apartheid state without sufficient consultation. The Prime Minister responded by terminating the transfer of overseas grants to SACC member churches who in the meantime agreed on a number of points:

1. All decided to retain their membership in the World Council.
2. All criticised the World Council for the implicit support of violence by making their grants to the liberation movements.
3. All strongly criticised racism in South Africa.
4. All desired consultation with the WCC.
5. Most decided not to send any funds to the WCC as a sign of protest (de Gruchy 1979:132).

A proposed consultation involving the government, WCC and SACC proved to be abortive due to government intransigence relative to the agenda and government travel and visa restrictions (de Gruchy 1979:133-4). The grants continued to be paid, thus maintaining the debate. The matter tested the resolve of the churches, their commitment to the struggle and the need for action in light of the rapidly deteriorating situation (de Gruchy 1979:136-8). As a member of the WCC, the PCSA also came under threat. It is interesting to consider the missionary implications of churches beyond southern Africa and the more immediate concerns of those within southern Africa. It was a matter of the differentials in the risks involved

**The Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa (PCSA) and the PCR**

The Church and Nation (C&N) Committee of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa could be described as the conscience of the church regarding its relationship with the state. The relationship between church and state or ‘church and nation’ as the PCSA named one of its committees with a remit to consider matters of political significance to the church which were often controversial in terms of trying to fulfil God’s mission to the world. It was of the nature of the PCSA to involve itself in supposedly secular concerns. They did this by stimulating debate in a rational manner which was vital in South Africa where often issues quickly took on an emotional character.

For example, in 1983, the Moderator referred to concern about some of the Assembly’s resolutions on socio-political issues and indicated that certain of the ministers and Sessions considering dissociating from the Church had indicated that a major reason for their decision lay in this particular area (PCSA 1983:8).

This committee sees its task as relating to the temporal issues of our time to Christ’s Gospel and helping the Church to confess him in the socio-political area of life. Despite weaknesses of the Church we cannot dodge the tough issues, for the Church is only strengthened by her confession of her Lord and not by an anxious attention to her own life (PCSA 1983:20).

Put more simply a few years later:

Look at the context of our life in South Africa; open your hearts to the struggles, suffering and fears; shine the light of the gospel upon this; then come and tell us what you make of it and what we should be doing about it (PCSA 1987:41).

This missionary impulse was based on the theological premise that:

God has created and redeemed a human world which is one integrated whole, and in which there is no division between the sacred and the secular. Thus the total life of the people of South Africa has been open to our concern, and we have been aware that Jesus Christ seeks to be Lord and Saviour of all that takes place here (PCSA 1987:41).

Criteria for selecting subjects for review:

1. the mandate help to promote non-violence given by the 1980 Assembly,
2. matters brought to our attention by individuals, congregations or other committees of the Church or referred by the Assembly,
3. the extent to which the issue affects members of the PCSA,
4. whether the Church can do anything in the matter beyond merely expressing opinions (PCSA 1983:20).

While most of the matters taken under review by the C&N Committee related to internal policies of the governments of South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe (the PCSA being a transnational church), there was one particular issue which added an international dimension to the concerns of the denomination - The World Council of Churches Programme to Combat Racism (PCR). As much as this was a matter which affected members of the PCSA, it was not raised under the remit of the C&N Committee although it certainly met the criteria for C&N attention. The C&N Committee had a busy agenda at this time including the response to the SACC document *Message to the people of South Africa* (see de Gruchy & de Villiers 1968). It arose in the agenda of the Ecumenical Relations Committee (ERC) whose remit was to promote relations with churches directly, globally and with international church bodies such as the WCC.:

1. relationships with other Reformed Churches;
2. consideration of material received from ecumenical bodies and other Churches;
3. responses to issues raised by such bodies, including the SACC;
4. transmission of Assembly concerns to other bodies (PCSA 1983:93).

 This was because the PCR was a matter of international ecumenical concern, having its origin in the domain of ecumenical affairs through the major global ecumenical instrument, the WCC. These two committees worked together from time to time (PCSA 1982:234). This also meant that it was a matter of missionary concern for the PCSA and other South African churches. The link between mission and ecumenism has long been made. Saayman (1984:2) affirmed the ‘interconnectedness of unity and mission in the heart of the gospel’. Further, Marty (1964:102-3) claimed ‘Unity produces mission produces unity produces mission’. Members of both committees were deeply involved in the subsequent discussions and decisions relating to the attitude adopted towards the impact of the PCR in South Africa and beyond.

As the struggle against apartheid intensified, international institutions became involved, including church bodies. In 1970 the World Council of Churches (WCC’s) Programme to Combat Racism made grants of $20 000 through its Special Fund to 19 organisations, including SWAPO South West Africa People’s Organisation (SWAPO), the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan Africanist congress (PAC) for the purpose of promoting peaceful change. Bax (2013:151) commented:

This incensed the Government and the media and caused a general outcry among whites in South Africa. Prime Minister B.J. Vorster put heavy pressure on the South African member Churches of the WCC to resign from the WCC. He threatened action if they did not at least dissociate themselves from the WCC or tried to transmit money to it or to send representatives to any of its conferences. The General Assembly of the PCSA, meeting in Cape Town, was the first national synod of these Churches to meet. It thus felt the main brunt of this pressure, and its response was likely to influence the other member Churches. As a result, ‘all eyes were on the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa’ (De Gruchy 1979:132; cf. de Gruchy & de Gruchy 2005:123–124).

An initiative was taken by Rev Sid Smuts to defuse the situation and Vorster invited him with several ministers to lunch at his Cape Town Residence Pityana (1994:90). Smuts was joined by the Moderator, Rev A Paterson, Rev E Pons, Clerk of Assembly and Rev H Munro, Junior Clerk. Bax (2103:151) mentions that the perceived atmosphere was one of ‘chumminess’. This is strange since Bax was not present to make this judgment and does not reference his source. What is not clear is what any of the participants hoped to achieve. For Vorster, it was important that the PCSA adopt a negative approach towards the WCC with a further hope that this might be replicated in the decisions of the other CEOs. But did the attendees actually expect Vorster to change his views as the result of meeting representatives of the smallest of the CEOs? This was a vain hope in light of the threats Vorster had already made.

Bax’s account of this rather unfortunate affair leaves a number of questions unanswered. Why would Vorster invite PCSA ministers to lunch the day before an important debate that centred on the relationship between church and state as well as an international ecclesiastical matter when Vorster had clearly declared his views which were not on the table for debate? Why did the ministers accept the invitation when they were predominantly against the involvement of the church in political affairs? It is inconceivable that the matter of the WCC was not discussed in depth. And by what authority could Vorster seek to influence church decisions when he himself told church ministers to keep to their religious calling and not interfere in politics? Was he not doing the same? Is it in the nature of and in the best interests of the church and its faith to be colluding with power? In the nature of things, ministers who were opposed to Vorster’s views would never have accepted an invitation to lunch with him. Were they so deluded in thinking that they could change his mind? None of these questions have ever been satisfactorily investigated or answered in a manner that made clear the position of the membership of the denomination.

The next day, the first to address the Assembly on the issue was Harold Munro. He made a forceful speech to persuade it to take the PCSA out of the WCC (Bax 2013:151) and proposed that Assembly:

1. Views with concern the increased tensions arising from the reported decisions of the World Council of Churches to support nationalist movements to the extent of R143,000 in southern Africa and elsewhere;
2. having, as a member body of the World Council of Churches examined the facts of the disputed decision, dissents from that decision on the ground that it is generally no part of the Christian task to align the church with nationalist forces of any race;
3. warns its own members against those misunderstandings and omissions of compassion which would identify this church with white or black nationalisms; and
4. strongly urges that
5. such funds of the World Council of Churches be applied strictly for the relief of hardship;
6. such funds be administered wherever possible by local Christian Councils, rather than by bodies professing no responsibility to the Lord Jesus Christ;

and further, makes the above provisions, or similar acceptable alternatives, a condition of the Assembly’s subscription to the World Council. (PCSA 1970:16).

This notice of motion was defeated by 75 votes to 57. Proposal (c) might have been more closely examined by Munro in terms of his proposal (b) since he had not been diligent enough here in that he had not understood that there was no intention to allocate funds to ‘subversive organisations’ (PCSA 1970:18). Rev C Jongeleen moved a similar notice of motion based on the lack of consultation by the WCC regarding grants (PCSA 1970:18).

Rev JB Hawkridge submitted a notice of motion which expressed concern regarding the tensions which had arisen from the WCC decision to make grants, dissented from that decision, warned PCSA members against misrepresentations regarding the grants matter and that funds made available be restricted to relief of hardship and administered locally; all of this to be required before any further contributions be made to the WCC (PCSA 1970:61). This motion was carried following minor amendment.

Rev D Bax then moved a lengthy notice of motion ‘at least for tactical purposes’ (Bax 2013:152): (1) that Assembly reject violence in any form be it that of the apartheid government or ‘guerilla organisations in South Africa’ (PCSA 1970:18). (2) that WCC representatives be invited to South Africa to ‘discuss the motives and theology behind their decision’ in order that the PCSA view be expressed (PCSA 1970:18). (3) that the Assembly protest against Prime Minister’s attack on two ministers (rev Robert Mercer, Anglican and Rev B Naude, DRC) who had made it clear that they did not support the WCC. (4), that the Assembly protests against the Prime Minister’s ‘threats against the Christian Churches in South Africa’ It boldly reminded Vorster:

that its only Lord and Master is Jesus Christ, that it may not serve other masters, and that its task is not necessarily to support the politics of the Government in power but to be faithful to the Gospel of its Lord and to seek justice for the afflicted and liberty for those who are oppressed. (Bax 2013:152; *PCSA Proceedings* 1970: 18).

The Assembly adopted sections (1) and (2) (with amendment). It was agreed to pass from the matter regarding section (3). Section (4) was agreed with significant dissent recorded. (PCSA 1970:63).

The outcome, after an emotional debate the Assembly dissented from the WCC decision and from guerrilla violence, and in protest also suspended its membership fees (Bax 2013:151). Yet, the PCSA General Assembly did express dissent ‘at least as much from the violence inherent in the policies of the Government’ and, in an attempt to let the case for the other side be heard, urged the SACC to invite the WCC leaders to South Africa to discuss their point of view with Church leaders. It also hit out against all Vorster’s threats and against his blatant public misrepresentation of the views that Beyers Naudé and an Anglican priest, Robert Mercer, had expressed on violence in South Africa.

Ultimately, it was decided to retain membership of the WCC. All in all this was a reasonable outcome, appropriate to the result of a rational debate though Bax (2013:152 referred to it as ‘dramatic, at times angry’. What is strange is that during the entire debate there was no reference to the meeting with the Prime Minister. The *Proceedings* of the Assembly are silent and had there been mention of such a significant meeting, that fact would certainly have been recorded. So was this a secret meeting and why was its purpose suppressed? Since all of the participants have died in the meantime, we will probably never know.

A year later it was reported that the proposed meeting with the WCC had not taken place. The General Secretary of the WCC enunciated several problematic issues in this regard. He raised the possibility of a consultation to be held outside South Africa which could be held ‘without interference’ (PCSA 1971:205), or a meeting in Europe if PCSA representatives were travelling. Visa problems were also raised.

Another attempt was made in 1981 to terminate membership of the WCC. It was rejected (PCSA 1981:192). Further, contrary to the wishes of those who wished to terminate membership of the WCC, the General Assembly resolved that: ’whenever there is a meeting of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches this Church should be represented’ (PCSA 1981:204). The purpose was to ensure that correct information flows to the unit so that critical statements on South Africa are based on fact (PCSA 1982:149).

In 1982, a notice of motion came before the General Assembly in the following terms:

While recognising that the WCC has done and is doing much commendable work in certain areas, the Assembly resolves that, beginning in 1983, it makes an annual contribution to a project, decided upon by Assembly, that would reflect something of this church’s desire to heal some of the wounds caused by some of the apparent misuse of the WCC’s ‘Special Fund to Combat Racism’ (PCSA 1982:246).

Of note here is that the Assembly had already decided in favour of making the grant. A proposal followed and was agreed that the matter be passed from. Subsequently, it was decided to make no grant to the WCC for that year.

In 1983, the General Secretary summed up the feelings of many in South Africa, including the PCSA in his report on the WCC meeting in Vancouver:

The mere mention of the subject – WCC – causes a reaction amongst South Africans. The nature of that reaction will vary from individual to individual. Those who have already reacted negatively might as well not read further … (PCSA 1983:186).

**Discussion**

Of all the CEOs, The PCSA was the denomination which came closest to leaving the WCC. In 1971, its Executive Commission voted in favour of withdrawal. However, only the General Assembly had the power to do this, and so the move was *ultra vires.* This blocked any attempt to bypass the General Assembly or take hasty or unconsidered action.

The WCC’s PCR caused much consternation in South African CEOs and raised serious issues concerning the relationship of church and state in terms of the mission of the Church as ongoing progress in the process towards the reconciliation of all of God’s creatures. The state policy of apartheid was a direct source of division in the South African community and an afront to God’s desire to realise that all are ‘one person in Christ Jesus’ (Gal 3:28) and God’s wish ‘that they may be one’ (John 17:11). Monitoring the use of donations from the Special Fund was an issue which raised concerns. This has been a long-term concern in mission church relationships and has caused deep hurt in the context of trust and mutual respect between churches? Historically, donor bodies, committed to the generally accepted policy of partnership in mission, have exercised strict control over grants in aid (see Duncan 2008) demonstrating lack of trust in their receiving partners.

The challenge of the PCR was to eliminate racism in society and that implied that serious change was required. However, the Presbyterians were not prepared to face the fundamental issues involved in the PCR challenge. Here we face the conflict between a considered rational approach to the matter compared with an emotionally charged response. Much of the South African response went beyond the rational and preferred to dwell on issues of fear and threats to security, authentic or otherwise. This was linked to white PCSA members being satisfied with the *status quo* which ensured the maintenance of their privileged lifestyle? In this case the possibility of drastic change was threatening and destabilising of them. The inherent use of violence used against black South Africans was no less of a threat and was inimical to the concept of a society in which solidarity as reconciliation was the vision. The mission would, therefore never be achieved through violence.

One thing became clear from the issue is that there was serious conflict within the CEOs and also within the PCSA. It is difficult to understand how Christians could devalue others, including Christians, on the basis of race. The problem was at least in part, due to either the churches’ promotion of racism or their silence regarding it. Hence, the churches were, *inter alia,* responsible for the absence of a spirit of reconciliation. The churches and many of their members appeared to be more influenced by their political views than their Christian values. Perhaps it is fallen human nature which leads to a greater reliance on political conviction and its benefits than religious faith with its commitment to justice and peace. This indicates that there was much work of mission and evangelism required within the churches as well as beyond them in the wider community.

Those who were considered to be communists, that is anyone who disagreed with the government, were viewed as being supported by an international church body. This indicated a failure to discern the change in the nature of mission in the global context. Some argued that it was not the role of the WCC to prescribe methods to be employed in eradicating racism in countries where racism was inherently endemic, yet there was no evidence of prescribed approaches, just possibilities. Apartheid as a divisive social policy militated against participation in a shared goal of mission as the climax and culmination of the kingdom of God. In this process:

The ecumenical commitment … has to do with the powerful learning to trust not in violence but in justice for legitimate authority. The cautious support for those resorting to violence as a means of resisting oppression is an affirmation of the God-given right to be free. … (Villa-Vicencio 1987:250).

A serious lacuna in thinking arose when the violence of the oppressor was accepted as the norm: ‘if the church ministers to those who take up arms in defence of the existing order, it can do no less in relation to those who resort to arms in their struggle for justice (Villa-Vicencio 1988:111).

Villa-Vicencio (1988:115) sums up the conundrum within the English-speaking church community within South Africa when he refers to the:

‘glaring contradiction within the response of the English-speaking churches. Captive to the dominant ideas of the dominant class and trapped within a theology of moderation and submission to the existing order, they have at best submitted to those within and without their own ranks who contended that it is not their ‘proper function’ to show solidarity with those who suffer if they resort to an armed struggle, not to lend theological recognition to those whose goal it is to ‘combat racism’ in a manner in which their Christian consciences may dictate.

… institutionalised violence, however, disguised by legislation and custom, is ultimately intrinsically more evil than revolutionary violence. If for no other reason, this is because the latter is an attempt to destroy existing evil while the former is designed to entrench it, and ultimately because institutionalised violence always precedes and precipitates revolutionary violence (V-V 1987:251).

Yet, all of this militated against an authentic missionary Christianity which is a faith that is *en route* towards the kingdom. It is *in transit* towards the future and so we are invited ‘to think from the perspective of the end time, to take responsibility for the future’ (Copeland 1999:40). As we can see from history, apartheid was a transitory movement, unlike Christianity with its reliance on God’s future action in creating a household or community of responsibility and freedom in cooperation with God and in solidarity with one another. So we may agree with Phan (1995:222) that ‘salvation is not conceived in otherworldly or ahistorical terms but rather conjugates humanity and the cosmos in future terms’. Salvation is the end of the process which emerges from a ’commitment to participate in God’s liberating actions in mending the creation by working in solidarity with communities of faith and struggle’ (Russell 1994).

**Conclusion**

It is clear that the PCSA found itself in an unenviable situation regarding the establishment of the Special Fund of the Programme to Combat Racism by the World Council of Churches in 1970. This exposed the existence of latent prejudices throughout the denomination and produced a crisis with the inherent possibilities of threat and hope. In the ensuing debate existing prejudices became polarised and the possibility of reconciliation with peace through justice was substituted by ongoing alienation within the PCSA.

**References**

Bax, D., 2013, ‘The struggle for justice between 1960 and 1990 and the witness of the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa’, in R. Vosloo & M-A. Plaatjies van Huffel (eds.), *Reformed churches in South Africa and the struggle for justice: Remembering 1960–1990*, pp. 143–170, SUN Press, Stellenbosch.

Copeland MS 1999. ‘Journeying to the household of God: The eschatological implicati9ns in the theology of Letty Mandeville Russell’, in MS Farley & S Jones (ed.) *Liberating eschatology: Essays in honor of Letty M Russell.* Louisville, Kentucky:Westminster.

De Gruchy JW 1979. *The church struggle in South Africa.* Cape Town: David Philip.

De Gruchy JW 1997. ‘Grappling with a colonial heritage: The English-speaking churches under Imperialism and apartheid’ in R Elphick & R Davenport (ed.) *Christianity in South Africa: A political, social and cultural history.* Cape Town: David Philip.

De Gruchy JW & de Gruchy S 2005. *The church struggle in South Africa: 25th anniversary edition.* Minneapolis: Fortress.

De Gruchy JW & de Villiers WB 1968. *The Message in perspective: A book about Message to the people of South Africa.* Braamfontein: SACC.

Duncan GA 2008. *Partnership in mission: A critical historical evaluation of the relationship between ‘older’ and ‘younger’ churches with special reference to the Church of Scotland.* Saarbrücken, Germany: VDM Verlag Dr Müller.

Duncan, G.A., 2017, ‘To deconstruct or how to deconstruct?: A Presbyterian perspective, 1960–1990’, *HTS Teologiese Studies/ Theological Studies* 73(1), a4595. https://doi.org/ 10.4102/hts.v73i1.4595

Marty ME 1964. *Church unity and church mission.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Petersen R 2001. Experiences of apartheid … ‘in the English speaking’ churches, in JW Hofmeyr, CJS Lombaard, & PJ Maritz (ed.) *1948 + 50 years, Theology, apartheid and church: past, present and future.* Pretoria: IMER.

Phan P 1995. ‘woman and the last things: A feminist eschatology’, in AO’H Graff (ed.) *In the embrace of God: Feminist approaches to theological anthropology.* Maryknoll: Orbis.

Pityana B 1994. ‘The voices of the South African Churches’ in P Webb (ed), *A long struggle. The involvement of the World Council of Churches, in South Africa.* Geneva, WCC.

Potter P 1978. Letter to Netherlands Reformed church, 2 November in Villa-Vicencio 1987:242.

Presbyterian Church of South(ern) Africa 1970, 1971, 1980, 1981, 1982,1983. *Papers and Proceedings of General Assembly.* Johannesburg: PCSA*.*

Programme to Combat Racism 2018. <https://alchetron.com/Programme-to-Combat-Racism> Updated on Jul 04, 2018 (accessed 27 December 2022).

Pro Veritate 1970. 9(6), October.

Russell LM 1994. ‘Methodology in Liberation/Feminist theologies: A theological spiral of Action/reflection’. Unpublished course materials.

Saayman WA 1984. *Unity and mission: A study of the concept of unity in ecumenical discussions since 1961 and its influence on the world mission of the church.* Pretoria: UNISA Press.

Stanley B 2018. *Christianity in the Twentieth Century: A world history.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

*The Free dictionary* 2014. <https://uk.search.yahoo.com/search?fr=mcafee&type=E210GB885G0&p=humanitarian> (accessed 22 December 2022).

Thomas D 2002*. Christ divided: Liberalism, ecumenism and race in South Africa.* Pretoria: UNISA.

Van der Bent AJ 1980. World Council of Churches' statements and actions on racism, 1948-1979. Geneva: Programme to Combat Racism, World Council of Churches.

Villa-Vicencio C 1987. *Theology and Violence: The South African debate.* Johannesburg: Scotaville.

Villa-Vicencio C 1988. *Trapped in apartheid: A socio-theological history of the English-speaking churches.* Cape town: David Philip.

Welch CE 2001. ‘Mobilizing morality: The World Council of Churches and its Programme to Combat Racism, 1969-1994’, *Human Rights Quarterly,* 23(4)

World Council of Churches Programme to Combat Racism nd. https://www.jstor.org/site/struggles-for-freedom/southern-africa/world-council-of-churches-programme-to-combat-racism/ (accessed 27 December 2022)