The World Council of Churches Programme to Combat Racism

A South African response to changes in global mission policy

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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 on 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 members of the black church. This article employed a qualitative litera-ture method to analyse the origin, process, and outcome of this heavily contested programme through a case study of the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa (PCSA), spearheaded by its Ecumenical Relations Committee (ERC), which came to radically different conclusions from the majority of the church membership regard-ing the nature, purpose, and function of the church. Conservative white church members largely eschewed the notion of church involvement in politics, particularly issues relating to violence, which would threaten the status quo which was upheld by violence.

Keywords: Church and Nation (C&N) Committee, Churches of European Origin (CEO), Ecumenical Relations Committee (ERC), Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa (PCSA), Programme to Combat Racism (PCR), World Council of Churches (WCC)

Contribution: This article seeks to investigate the ambiguous response of churches to the controversial policy decision of the World Council of Churches (WCC) to introduce the Programme to Combat Racism (PCR), which had a direct impact on the countries of southern Africa, particularly South Africa, with direct reference to the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa (PCSA). It relates to the disciplines of the History of Christianity and International Relations.

1. Introduction

"This radical secularisation of the idea of Christian mission reached its apogee at the Fourth Assembly of the WCC 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 who 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 focused on social justice, and this is evidenced by the actions of the WCC. The understanding of mission as *missio-Dei* – "participation in God's mission" – is an important concept for this study as it brings together the vertical and horizontal dimensions of outreach and is both our source and goal:

The church comes to be as the church engages in mission … to go to the world and be God's saving, healing, challenging presence … mission precedes the church. Mission is first of all God's … almost incredibly – as an act of grace – God shares that mission with women and men. Mission calls the church into being to serve God's purposes in the world. The church does not have a mission, but the mission has a church (Bevans & Schroeder 2004:15).

The church is an integral participant in mission. The *missio Dei* goes beyond "a narrow ecclesiocentric view of mission" (Bosch [1991], 2011:402), which had defined earlier approaches to mission (Bosch [1991], 2011:401) in a holistic manner (Kritzinger & Saayman 1996:6) as God penetrates beyond the church towards the restoration of a reconciled world through God inspired human responsibility (Livingston 2013:203-204). It is this human responsibility that recognised that God-centred mission required human involvement in God's world and was directed to the unity of the entirety of God's creation; hence, the false view that the world beyond the church was not part of God's care and concern. This was the approach of the WCC, which led to decisions to engage in the sphere of racial politics for the sake of God's oppressed and suffering peoples whose humanity was diminished.

2. World Council of Churches and its Programme to Combat Racism

The WCC 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. At 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 in terms of 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 PCR, 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). This seminar, attended by African National Congress (ANC) leader Oliver Tambo and anti-apartheid activist Bishop Trevor Huddleston, launched the PCR. However, 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 because 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 govern-ments" (de Gruchy 1979:129). Grants were awarded to liberation movements in Namibia, South Africa, Angola, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique. Although it was made clear that the grants were not to be used for violent purposes, they attracted a great deal of 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 based on the WCC's acceptance of 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). This decision was considered unjust because it was imposed without discussion. 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: no page). 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 ul-timately 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-Vicencio 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 Churches of European Origin *(*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) and collusion with it.

From 1970, the PCR 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" (van der Bent 1980 in Thomas 2002:211). This demonstrated a clear missionary purpose not designed to result in the violent actions that followed. The grants were patently given for change through peaceful means in order to restore fractured relationships through the attainment of peace. However, this eirenical concern needed to take account of the suffering endured by victims of racism. There were socio-econo-political issues which required immediate radical transformation, which were within the remit of the *missio Dei* and not just a crude spiritualised approach focussed on the life hereafter or 'exorcism.' It was, however, difficult to control the use of financial resources when they no longer belonged to the donors. They could only respond by refusing to make further grants as a result of the member churches' members' concerns. One major problem was that it was difficult to pursue reconciliation when violence was the methodology employed.

This entire matter caused an international uproar, particularly from the CEOs in South 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 a part of their service mission, 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 long-standing position of the SACC was reaffirmed in 1974 (SACC 1974:16):

> For some considerable time now, the South African Council of Churches had had reason to re-iterate its conviction that violence solves no problem. And we stand by this our Christian conviction, convinced and completely persuaded that there are other avenues along which injustices, problems and different opinions can be solved. We hasten to add that these avenues by no means are the easiest to trace, and to stick to once they have been found. Nor need they be quick in bearing fruit. But certainly they are worthwhile and far more divinely anchored than any violent method or approach.

This quotation indicates that this was not a novel policy and that the results of non-violent action would secure a longer-lasting peace, for example, through dialogue. However, this resulted in tension because such methods were time-consuming

while the needs of the oppressed were immediate, although there was no assurance that violence would achieve a more immediate result. There were also serious implications for the bodies that received the grants regarding how and for what purposes they were used and the conditions that were made by the donors for 'humanitarian' purposes.

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

1. Having concern for or helping to improve the welfare and happiness of people.
2. Pertaining to the saving of human lives or 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 that 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 several 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 14 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 considered 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 challenging situation regarding revolutionary action to bring about change. The use of violence was a critical issue regarding 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. Addressing the South African Parliament at that time, 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 of a lack of consideration for the internal dynamics of existing and witnessing 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 several 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 abortive due to government intransigence relative to the agenda and government travel and visa restrictions (de Gruchy 1979:133-4). However, the grants continued to be paid, thus maintaining the possibility of a 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. Therefore, it is important 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. White and black church members had differing perceptions regarding these risks. For instance, within the CEOs, black and white members co-existed, and their fellowship was at serious risk, as was their need for global

church support. Within the PCSA, this led to the formation of the Black Ministers' Consultation in 1985. As a result:

> Black commissioners at assemblies and in some presbyteries began to be more outspoken in debates on political issues and to vote with much more solidarity. This in turn forced the more conservative white commissioners to see that their positions were racist (Bax 2013:156-7).

Then, there was the conviction that time was short for change to occur. In de Gruchy's (1979:138) words:

> … the WCC action could be regarded as a call to repentance and action on the part of the South African churches. … From now on, a new note of determination could be detected in the churches. But events were not going to make that determination any easier to translate into action.

In the following section, I will focus on the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa (PCSA) to highlight how churches in southern Africa responded to the challenges associated with the PCR.

3. The Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa and the Programme to Combat Racism

The position of the PCSA with regard to racism was, at best, ambivalent:

> The history of the PCSA with regard to race presents a mixed picture. On the one hand it has been characterised by racial segregation, racial prejudice, paternalism, and conservatism in the face of glaring injustice; on the other hand, in spite of attempts by some outsiders to paint the picture darker than it is, there have also been real attempts to take a stand against segregation and injustice (Bax 1997:19). In spite of the protests that it did make the Church never thought at this stage of moving from the comfort zone of such statements of protests to the more difficult and costly path of action (Bax 1997:22).
> … the Assembly also in some ways gave what amounted to support to the Nationalist Government (Bax 1997:21).

This is the voice of an insider; Bax was a minister of the PCSA, and he noted that racism was 'endemic' in South Africa from the arrival of the first Presbyterian settlers at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In 1948, with the legal introduction of the apartheid policy, the PCSA protested in concert with other denominations (Bax 1997:20-21). Responses to matters in the political domain were the responsibility

of the Church and Nation (C&N) Committee. These were often determined by white and black conflict as well as tensions between conservatives and liberals in the PCSA.

The C&N Committee of the General Assembly of the PCSA and how it handled the challenges associated with the PCR could have been described as the conscience of the church regarding its relationship with the state. There are lessons which can be drawn, especially regarding 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 issues often quickly took on an emotional character.

For example, in 1983, the Moderator of the General Assembly of the PCSA 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).

The C&N committee determined the criteria for selecting subjects for review:

a. The mandate helps to promote non-violence given by the 1980 Assembly.
b. Matters brought to our attention by individuals, congregations or other committees of the Church or referred by the Assembly.
c. The extent to which the issue affects members of the PCSA.
d. 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 that affected members of the PCSA, it was not raised under the remit of the C&N Committee, although it certainly met the criteria for the C&N's 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:

a. Relationships with other Reformed Churches.
b. Consideration of material received from ecumenical bodies and other Churches.
c. Responses to issues raised by such bodies, including the SACC.
d. 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 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." The goal of mission as reconciliation inevitably linked it with the goal of ecumenism as unity. 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. The struggle against apartheid in South Africa produced an ecumenical response in the widest possible terms. It involved Christians, other faiths such as Islam, and individuals and organisations with no specific 'religious' affiliation who

were concerned for the full humanity of God's creation through the achievement of freedom, peace, and justice.

As the struggle against apartheid intensified, international institutions, including church bodies, became involved. In 1970, the WCC's PCR made grants of $ 20,000 through its Special Fund to 19 organisations, including the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO), the African National Congress (ANC), and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) to promote 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) which was considered to be "generally more conservative than the other English-speaking churches" (de Gruchy & de Gruchy 2005:128).

Rev Sid Smuts took the initiative to defuse the situation, and Vorster invited him with several ministers to lunch at his Cape Town Residence (Pityana1994:90). Smuts was joined by the Moderator, Rev A Paterson, Rev E Pons, Clerk of Assembly, and Rev H Munro, Junior Clerk. Bax (2013:151) mentions that the perceived atmosphere was one of "chumminess." This probably resulted from Vorster being approached by a group of Dutch Reformed ministers who cautioned him against adopting a hard line with churches. He softened his view regarding withdrawal from the WCC to refusing to receive funds from it (Pityana 1994:90). What is not clear is what the meeting 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.

Bax's (2013) account of this meeting raises several issues. It is inconceivable that Prime Minister Vorster wanted a cosy chat about church affairs in general and the PCR in particular. He had an investment in minimising the impact of church challenges to the government's apartheid policy in the light of growing international opposition (Sullivan 1980). It is significant that he invited 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. He had declared his views, which were not on the table for debate. It is not clear why the ministers accepted

the invitation when they were aware of Vorster's attitude and 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. Further, Vorster had little authority to seek to influence church decisions when he told church ministers to keep to their religious calling and not interfere in politics. The PCSA ministers were working against the interests of the church and its faith by colluding with power. In the nature of things, ministers opposed to Vorster's views would never have accepted an invitation to lunch with him unless they were deluded in thinking 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, Harold Munro was the first to address the Assembly on the issue. He made a forceful speech to persuade the PCSA out of the WCC (Bax 2013:151) and proposed that Assembly:

> a. 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;
> b. 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;
> c. Warns its own members against those misunderstandings and omissions of compassion which would identify this church with white or black nationalisms; and
> d. Strongly urges that
>> i. such funds of the World Council of Churches be applied strictly for the relief of hardship;
>> ii. such funds be administered wherever possible by local Christian Councils, rather than by bodies professing no responsibility to the Lord Jesus Christ;
> Further, it 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. Munro erred by confusing 'nationalist' movements with liberation movements. Further, he did not see that the South African government was a 'nationalist' body. Further, he was using his disdain for nationalist movements in order to avoid the central issue of the oppression of poor people and the Christian responsibility to aid the powerless. Munro's views, if carried, *would* perpetuate the *status quo* and leave the powerful in power. 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 further 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) Assembly reject violence in any form, be it that of the apartheid government or "guerilla organisations in South Africa" (PCSA 1970:18). (2) WCC representatives be invited to South Africa to "discuss the motives and theology behind their decision" for the PCSA view to be expressed (PCSA 1970:18). (3) Assembly protest against the 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) 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 on the matter regarding section (3). Section (4) was agreed upon, with significant dissent recorded (PCSA 1970:63). These dissents represented the conservatives in the General Assembly. Two matters probably affected the amount of dissent expressed and the outcome of votes. The first is that commissioners to the General Assembly changed at each annual meeting, so the views of the Assembly might change accordingly. Second, since the proceedings of the Assembly meetings were public, as were their records, commissioners might vote in a manner which denied their actual views in case they were perceived to be government supporters.

After an emotional debate, the Assembly dissented from the WCC decision "at least as much from the violence inherent in the policies of the government" and from guerrilla violence, and in protest, also suspended its membership fees (Bax 2013:151-2). 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, this was a secret meeting, and its purpose was suppressed? Since all participants have died, we will probably never know. The ultimate decision of the General Assembly indicated that reconciliation among member churches of the WCC and neighbouring African nations was more important than failed reconciliation with the government. Pityana (1994:91) is most likely correct in his assessment that "to project a stance of neutrality and balance" was the aim.

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 outside South Africa, which could be held "without interference" (PCSA 1971:205), or a meeting in Europe if PCSA representatives were travelling. Visa challenges 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 wishing to terminate the WCC membership, 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 it 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).

In 1973, the PCSA approved the *Declaration of Faith for the Church in Southern Africa* (UPCSA 2007:2, 35), which was consistent with its mission of reconciliation. This was a response to two issues it faced: "racial discrimination and the ideology that underpinned this" and "the privatisation of the gospel and racial prejudice [which] still disfigure Church and society." The declaration stated, *inter alia*:

> We believe in the Father,
> > who created and rules all the world
> > who will unite all things in Christ
> > and who wants all his people to live together
> > as brothers and sisters in one family. …
> We believe in Jesus Christ, the Son,
> > who became human and lived …
> > to reconcile both the individual and the world to God,
> > To break down every separating barrier
> > Of race, culture or class,
> > and to unite all God's people into one body. …
> > He summons both the individual and society,
> > both the church and the State,
> > to seek justice and freedom for all
> > and reconciliation and unity between all.
> We believe in the Holy Spirit,
> > who gives the Church power
> > to proclaim the good news to all the world … .

The *Declaration* is clearly a missionary document that acknowledges God as the source of all things, who empowers his Church for his mission, and defines reconciliation as the goal of his mission.

4. Discussion

Of all the CEOs, the PCSA was the denomination that 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 among South African CEOs. It 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 affront 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 and within 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 a lack of trust in their receiving partners.

The challenge of the PCR was to eliminate racism in society, which implied that profound change was required. However, the Presbyterians were not prepared to face the fundamental issues of the PCR challenge. Here, we face the conflict between a considered rational approach to the matter and 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 threatened and destabilised them. The inherent use of violence against black South Africans was no less of a threat. It was inimical to the concept of a society where solidarity as reconciliation was the vision. The mission would, therefore, never be achieved through violence.

One thing that became clear from the issue is that there was serious conflict between the CEOs and 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 fallen human nature 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 and beyond them in the broader 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). In the eyes of many church members, there was an inexplicable difference between legitimised state violence and the violence perpetrated by 'terrorists' or 'freedom fighters.'

Villa-Vicencio (1988:115) sums up the conundrum within the English-speaking church community in 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 (Villa-Vicencio 1987:251).

Yet, all of this is militated against an authentic missionary Christianity, a faith *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). It was also necessary to operate in the present of the sake of those who were suffering and for the sake of future generations. 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 co-operation 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).

5. Conclusion

It is clear that the PCSA found itself in an unenviable situation regarding establishing the Special Fund of the PCR by the WCC in 1970. Other denominations were waiting to see how it responded. The entire discussion provided the PCSA with an opportunity to advance the mission of the church to reconcile the South African community through transformation through the government's dismantling of its apartheid policy and to offer hope to other nations suffering in similar ways. In this, it failed. However, it enhanced its national credentials by focusing on peace and justice. The greatest threat to its internal peace and unity came from the PCR, which did little to improve race relations. Within the ecumenical domain, the PCSA values its membership of the SACC and, internationally, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the WCC. This exposed the existence of latent racial 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 despite the formation of the Black Ministers' Consultation. However, the *Declaration of Faith for the Church in Southern Africa* remained the standard of faith and practice of the PCSA.

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