

**Evangelicals and Ecumenism in South Africa 1960 -1990: *opportunities
and pitfalls.***

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Moses Kabelo Sethunya Ntlha

Declaration

This dissertation, unless specified in the text, is my original work. I therefore declare that I have not submitted this dissertation for any other purposes at any other university or institution.

Name of Student

Date

As Supervisor, I agree to the submission of the dissertation.

Signature of Supervisor

Date

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List of abbreviations

- 1. AE: African Enterprise.**
- 2. AEA: Association of Evangelicals in Africa.**
- 3. AEAM: Association of Evangelicals In Africa and Madagascar.**
- 4. AESA: Association of Evangelicals in South Africa.**
- 5. AFM: Apostolic Faith Mission.**
- 6. AOG: Assemblies of God.**
- 7. BUSA: Baptist Union of South Africa.**
- 8. CASA: Church Alliance of South Africa.**
- 9. CCSA: Christian Council of South Africa.**
- 10. CE: Concerned Evangelicals.**
- 11. CESA: Church of England in South Africa**
- 12. DEL: Doctrine Ethics and Liturgy.**
- 13. EFAC: Evangelical fellowship in the Anglican Communion.**
- 14. EFSA: Evangelical Fellowship of South Africa.**
- 15. EWISA: Evangelical Witness in South Africa.**
- 16. FCB: fellowship of Concerned Baptists**
- 17. ICT: Institute of Contextual Theology.**
- 18. IFCC: International Federation of Christian Churches**
- 19. IMC: International Missionary Council.**
- 20. JPIC: Justice Peace and Integrity of Creation.**
- 21. JTSA: Journal of Theology for Southern Africa.**
- 22. KD: Kairos Document.**
- 23. RFCC: Relevant Fellowship of Concerned Christians.**
- 24. SACC : The South African Council of Churches.**
- 25. TEASA: The evangelical alliance of South Africa.**
- 26. UNISA: University Of South Africa.**
- 27. WCC: World Council of Churches.**
- 28. WEA: World Evangelical Alliance.**

Abstract

The study explores the relationship of the evangelical movement in South Africa with the ecumenical movement. The focus of the latter was taken as organizationally embodied in the South African Council of Churches. The time period 1960 – 1990 was chosen for the study as this was a period of great socio political upheaval and testing for the churches. This was also a period that marked both the escalation of the struggle against apartheid as well as the accentuation of the differences that churches had among themselves as they were confronted with the reality of apartheid. The author believes that the trying times in view, 1960 - 1990; best clarify the lessons that could be learned by both evangelicals and ecumenicals. The trials of this period presented the churches of South Africa unique opportunities for growth in the midst of intense struggles. The study seeks to unpack theological lessons that would perhaps not be as easy to see at a different time, for example under conditions of peace and quiet.

This focus on the evangelical/ecumenical dialogue is prefaced with, firstly, a working definition of the terms evangelical and ecumenism, as well as an examination of the modernist/fundamentalist debate that played itself out in Europe and North America. The significant role that this played in setting the conditions for how evangelicals and ecumenicals related in South Africa was noted.

Evangelical /Ecumenical relations are discussed with a view to looking for ways in which both sides could be enriched as they look for ways to be faithful in their calling to be a witness to Jesus Christ in the post apartheid South Africa.

This is reflected in such documents as the 1983 statement *Transformation – The Church in Response to Human Need*². These issues were, for years, a point of concern in evangelical –ecumenical dialogue.

For its part, the World Council of Churches issued a statement in 1982, called 'Mission and Evangelism – an Ecumenical Affirmation' where a key evangelical concern such as evangelism, received higher priority.

This statement said in part:

The church is sent into the world to call people and nations to repentance, to announce forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

It continues:

The starting point of our proclamation is Christ and Christ crucified.³

Similarly, in many churches of the ecumenical movement, the same trend is noticeable. The Lambeth Conference of the Anglican communion in 1988 issued a declaration that the ensuing decade be considered a decade of evangelism.

Lambeth proclaimed:

This conference, recognizing that evangelism is the primary task given to the Church, asks each Province and diocese of the Anglican Communion, in co-operation with other Christians, to make the closing years of this millennium a 'Decade of Evangelism' with a renewed and united emphasis on making Christ known to the people of this world.⁴

² Transformation – The Church in response to human need: texts on evangelical social ethics (iii). 1986. Regnum books.

³ International Review of Mission: Churches in Mission: South Africa, Vol XXXIII No 28, January 1994. Page 116.

⁴ France, R.T. and McGrath, A. E. eds. 1993. Evangelical Anglican: their role and influence in the church today. Kent: Mackays of Chatham plc. page 24ff

The priority of evangelism is but one area of convergence. There are others. A case could be made that there is greater complementarity between evangelicals and ecumenicals, which would warrant greater cooperation between these two streams of the witness of the churches. The question therefore suggests itself whether the divisions of the past are still necessary.

This work seeks to explore the roots of this division and hopefully to contribute to the search for meaningful expressions of Christian unity in South Africa. The question is not merely academic, as the author, at the time of writing, is the General Secretary of the Evangelical Alliance of South Africa, a movement which brings together progressive and conservative tendencies within evangelicalism.

This study is therefore an attempt, from the point of view of a committed evangelical, to pose appropriate questions to the ecumenical dilemmas of our times. This is with a view to discover lessons that might enable an appropriate and prophetic witness by churches together (evangelical and ecumenical) with respect to the issues pertinent to Christian witness in the post cold war and post Apartheid era.

With regard to the post cold war era, for generations, evangelicals around the world were notorious for defining themselves, at least in their practice, if not in their dispensationalist theology, in terms of anticommunism in the context of the

East -West cold war. They tended to see true faith and piety as part of, and requiring the hegemonic project of the West, while their theological and ecclesiastical rivals, the liberals, were seen as compromised and communist-inspired, particularly during the ascendancy of Liberation Theology.

With regard to the post Apartheid era, because the reality is that in South Africa, when the Ecumenical Movement as represented in the South African Council of Churches considered the anti-Apartheid struggle pivotal to its Christian witness, evangelicals generally chose either to be neutral or to be on the side of the Apartheid regime.

The three decades from 1960 to 1990 in South Africa provided a unique and historic context within which lessons may be learned about the nature of the church (in particular, its unity) and its mission in the world. Indeed it is in contexts where the church is hard-pressed on every side that conditions for its growth are optimised. It would therefore be sad if evangelicalism missed the lessons of the rich history of the church's witness in the last three decades of Apartheid in South Africa, particularly in so far as it relates to the evangelical - ecumenical question.

This study intends to clarify some of the challenges that evangelicals in South Africa have faced in the time frame 1960's -1990's, with the hope that lessons will be learned that could lead to a renewal, maturation and revitalisation of the evangelical witness in South Africa in the new century.

The first two chapters will seek to clarify the terms evangelical and ecumenical respectively. This will be followed by tracing the roots of the evangelical-ecumenical tensions in the Modernist-Fundamentalist debate in Europe and North America (Chapter three).

With that background laid, attention will then shift in chapter 4 to the South African situation, where the different tendencies or postures of evangelical churches in respect of ecumenism will be discussed. This is done on the basis of a questionnaire (appendix 1) that was sent to denominational leaders to assess the relationship of their denominations to the South African Council of Churches. Finally a concluding chapter will explore prophetic possibilities for the future.

1.2 Evangelicals: Definition and features pertinent to evangelicalism.

The meaning of the term 'evangelical', as it will be used in this study, is by no means clear to many within the ecumenical church scene in South Africa, in spite of the fact that about 25% of the Christian community in South Africa considers itself evangelical⁵. This is so for several reasons. In part, it is due to the isolationism of evangelicals themselves from the ecumenical church community. This has led to, at best, no understanding, and at worst, serious misunderstanding, of who evangelicals actually are, what it is they believe and why they do the things they do. Another reason for this state of affairs is that the term means different things to different people in different parts of the world.

⁵ Kretzschmar, L. and Ntsha, M. 2005. Looking back, moving forward: reflections by South African Evangelicals. Johannesburg: TEASA. page 79

Further, even within evangelicalism itself, there is lack of clarity around certain issues – for example the posture of the Evangelical Movement in relation to society. The result is that modern day evangelicalism lacks a sense of memory with which to arm itself in light of current socio political and cultural challenges.

The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian church explains the term as those Christians who *lay special stress on personal conversion and salvation by faith in the atoning death of Christ*⁶. Modern Evangelicalism, like Protestantism of which it is a part, traces its roots to the early Reformers. Luther's teachings of justification by faith alone, the priesthood of believers and the authority of the word of God as contained in the Scriptures - teachings which shaped Protestantism from the beginning - are important to modern evangelicalism.

Frederick Hale contends that the term 'evangelical', and its cognates has been used to signify this Lutheran tradition without interruption since the sixteenth century in Germany, England, France, Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Holland. Hale cautions that this relative international consensus should not, however, hide the fact that the term evangelical has had different meanings added to it at different times in different continents to the point that today, the term, according to Hale *has become so inclusive as to become virtually dysfunctional*⁷

The continued use of the term today is made necessary by the growing importance

⁶ Livingstone 1977:183

⁷ JTSA No 84, September 93, pp 42-3,56

of a world-wide Christian movement that calls itself evangelical and has sufficient internal cohesion and definition. Suffice it to say that the term, as used in this study, refers to its meaning particularly since the 1940s in the USA, when evangelical fundamentalism began to give way to a new evangelicalism that was more *world affirming and culture embracing* rather than separatist and fundamentalist.⁸

1.3 The historical roots of evangelicalism.

Bebbington⁹ dates the emergence of the movement known as Evangelicalism in England around 1734.

The decade beginning in 1734 witnessed in the English-speaking world a more important development than any other, before or after, in the history of Protestant Christianity, the emergence of the movement that became Evangelicalism.

Stirrings of new-found piety and assurance of personal salvation begun to erupt in England and USA, notably in the lives of men like John and Charles Wesley, George Whitefield and others of their contemporaries who came to evangelical convictions around the same time. They found an existential experience of a new birth in Christ, issuing into a new experience of a relationship with God. This was novel in their day.

⁸ McGrath, A. 1994. *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity*. London: Hodder and Stoughton. page 27.

⁹ Bebbington, D. W. 1993. *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A history from the 1730s to the 1930s*. London: Routledge. Page 4.

Whitefield wrote about his spiritual yearning that:

God showed me that I must be born again, or be damned! I learned that a man may go to church, say prayers, receive the sacraments, and yet not be a Christian.

He continued to seek God's mercy praying:

Lord, if I am not a Christian, or if not a real one, for Jesus Christ sake show me what Christianity is, that I may not be damned at last.

He continued to write that:

God soon showed me... that true Christianity is union of the soul with God, and Christ formed within us.... a ray of divine light was instantaneously darted into my soul, and from that moment, and not till then, did I know I must become a new creature.

This he continued until he found a spiritual breakthrough, about which he wrote in his journal:

God was pleased to remove the heavy load, to enable me to lay hold of His dear Son by a living faith, and by giving me the Spirit of adoption to seal me, even to the day of everlasting redemption¹⁰.

This inspired them to proclaim the gospel with boldness and unprecedented power and conviction in their countries, with great results of mass conversions and moral regeneration. This was known in the English-speaking world as the 18th century Evangelical Revival. J. R Green stated about this revival that:

...a religious revival burst forth...which changed in a few years the whole temper of English society. The Church was restored to life and activity. Religion carried to the hearts of the people a fresh spirit of moral zeal, while it purified our literature and our manners. A new philanthropy reformed our prisons, infused clemency and wisdom into our penal laws, abolished the slave trade, and gave the first impulse to popular education.¹¹

¹⁰ Dallimore, A.1990. George Whitefield - God's anointed servant in the great revival of the eighteenth century. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway books, , page 18)

¹¹ ibid 200.

With leaders like Whitefield crossing the Atlantic to strengthen the Evangelical Revival in the USA, working alongside Jonathan Edwards, the spread of evangelicalism was internationalised. The revival took similar patterns in the New World of the American colonies as in Britain. From being “very insensitive to the things of religion”, Jonathan Edwards found the people of his town being, by 1734, suddenly responsive to his preaching on justification by faith. He wrote, in a letter to one Benjamin Coleman of Boston:

This town never was so full of Love, nor so full of joy, nor so full of distress as it has lately been... I never saw the Christian spirit in love to enemies so exemplified, in all my life as I have seen it within this half year.¹²

Edwards’ assessment of these developments was that it was the work of the Spirit and a vindication of sound doctrine that he and others had begun to expound in the churches. This revival was, as it was in England and in parts of continental Europe, characterized by mass conversions, increased seriousness and piety among church members and clergy.

In describing evangelicalism, it is necessary to note that it has historical roots in earlier Christian traditions such as the Reformation, Puritanism and Pietism. This is not to say however, that in the way that evangelicalism seeks to retrieve, defend and propagate what it considers key doctrines crucial to the integrity of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, it had no earlier precedents. McGrath, dating earlier usage of the term ‘evangelical’ from the 16th century, when it was used to refer to Catholic writers wishing to revert to more biblical beliefs and practices than those prevalent in the late medieval church, writes that:

¹² *ibid* 200

It is generally accepted that attitudes towards the personal appropriation of salvation and the spiritual importance of reading of Scripture which would now be called 'evangelical' emerged from Italian Benedictine monasteries during the late fifteenth century.¹³

Further, it is well to note that in the context of the Renaissance, when the Catholic Church first experienced the emergence of evangelical attitudes notably among lay Catholics, this was as a result of the fact that the laity felt alienated by medieval spirituality, which was mostly forged within a monastic context. The laity needed, and in Luther's Doctrine of Justification, found, the relevance of a personally appropriated faith. Initially, writes McGrath, this was welcome by ecclesiastical authorities as "making an overdue and welcome contribution to the spiritual vitality of a tired church"¹⁴

It was only later, in the 1540s, that evangelicalism and Lutheranism were identified, that both were seen as destabilising to the church and thus anathematised.

Having thus established the fact that evangelicalism was present within Catholicism in the 16th century, the question suggests itself whether the Evangelical Movement as we know it today is a recent phenomenon. Indeed, evangelical writers contend that evangelicalism is not merely a new innovation in theological thought. Its history dates further back to the early church. Clive Calver writes:

¹³ McGrath, A.1994. *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity*. London: Hodder and Stroughton. page 11

¹⁴ *ibid* 11

Evangelical Christians trace their spiritual lineage through the mystical and spiritual countercultures of the medieval and early church. ...through great thinkers such as Bernard, Anselm, Augustine, Athanasius and Irenaeus. Others look to minority religious movements who resisted corruption and the perversion of the primitive gospel within the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the times.¹⁵

He continues:

Both within and beyond the established Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches, there were those who maintained and encouraged those distinctive attitudes which would today be broadly termed evangelical.¹⁶

Such evangelical distinctives are believed to originate from New Testament Christianity. Calver quotes a foremost contemporary evangelical spokesman John Stott, who put the matter this way:

It is the contention of evangelicals that they are plain Bible Christians and that in order to be a biblical Christian it is necessary to be an evangelical Christian. Put that way, it sounds arrogant and exclusive, but this is a sincerely held belief....If evangelical theology is biblical theology, it follows that it is not a new fangled 'ism', a modern brand of Christianity, but an ancient form, indeed the original one. It is New Testament Christianity.¹⁷

The present task is now to situate evangelicalism genealogically within the Reformation tradition, in which it finds its modern roots.

1.3.1. Reformation.

In the 1500's, Catholicism had come to display tendencies that were in many ways corrupt, at least as seen by growing numbers of ordinary people at the time. Of prime concern was the teaching of the Church that good works were important to

¹⁵ Calver, C. and Warner, R.eds. 1995. Together we stand. Evangelical convictions, unity and vision. London: Hodder and Stoughton. Page 17.

¹⁶ *ibid* 17.

¹⁷ *ibid* 17

salvation, and that people could, by buying indulgences, receive pardon for their sins.

On the 31st October 1517 Martin Luther, a Catholic monk and teacher of theology, took on the Catholic Church, by nailing his 95 theses on the door of the Castle in Wittenberg, Germany. These were a series of statements critical to the sale of indulgences.

When pressed to back down by Emperor Charles V and members of the Imperial Diet, he replied:

Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either the pope or his councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise.¹⁸

Luther was outlawed, and under the protection of Frederick the Wise, Prince of Saxony, he proceeded to lead a Reformation in Germany until his death in 1546.

Reformers like Luther and Calvin sought to reform the structures, doctrine and spirituality of the Catholic Church along biblical lines. Themes such as Justification by faith alone and the Scripture principle were important to the Reformation. The priesthood of all believers and the right and duty of individuals to interpret scripture for themselves was especially important for Luther. These themes have remained central to the evangelical movement since it first appeared

¹⁸ From the World Book TM Multimedia Encyclopedia 1998 World Book, Inc, 525 W. Monroe, Chicago, IL

in England in the 1730s.¹⁹

While there is such continuity with the Protestant tradition, Evangelicalism extends the reformation agenda in that the latter sought to reform an existing church in a settled Christian cultural context, while the former seeks the conversion of people in secular culture to become members of the Church through evangelism.²⁰

1.3.2. Puritanism

The term Puritan was first used in England in the late 1500s to identify a party within the Church of England. The party sought to make further changes in the church than had been made following the Protestant reforms. Puritanism was led by men who were committed to the Reformed tradition on the European continent. Puritans wanted the Church of England to be reorganised along reformed lines, with a Presbyterian form of government.

They shared Anabaptist beliefs that sought the ideal of New Testament Christianity, which included new birth by the Spirit, personal appropriation of faith and high personal ethical standards.

Puritan influence spread to the American colonies, as some Puritan groups believed that reform was impossible to achieve within the Church of England, and settled in the American colonies. There it shaped political and social institutions,

¹⁹ Bebbington, D. W. 1993. *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A history from the 1730s to the 1930s*. London: Routledge. Page 4.

²⁰ McGrath, A. 1994. *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity*, London: Hodder and Stroughton. page15

establishing Harvard and Yale colleges. Puritan leader and evangelical revivalist Jonathan Edwards, who became president of Yale College, had such impact in the American colony of New England that it was written of him:

He that would know the workings of the New England mind in the middle of the eighteenth century, and the throbbings of its heart, must give his days and nights to the study of Jonathan Edwards²¹.

1.3.3. Pietism.

Evangelicalism also draws from the Pietist movement which developed as German Lutherans and Reformed churches in the 17th century were concerned at the trend towards doctrinal orthodoxy, church formalism, ethical passivity and highly rationalistic forms of theological argumentation that lacked the spiritual warmth and spontaneity of a joyful Christian experience.

If modern day evangelicalism often displays a tendency towards anti-intellectualism, particularly at a popular level, then the traditions of pietism must accept part of the blame. In promoting an inner worldly piety, and for perhaps good reason in their context, they neglected the importance of the mind, and sowed seeds of anti intellectualism. They were very unlike their Puritan fellows in this regard, who were more culturally and intellectually engaging.

Pietists placed considerable emphasis on the need for a personally appropriated faith, or 'reborn' experience, high personal ethical standards, deepening of spiritual life and missionary work. (Especially through the leadership of Nikolaus Ludwig,

²¹ Ahlstrom, S. A. 1972. *A Religious History of the American People*. New Haven: Yale University press. page 129.

count of Zinzendorf, who founded the Moravians as a missionary force.) Pietists were also concerned with aspects of Reformed doctrine which portrayed God as remote and inscrutable, with the Calvinistic inclination to predestination.

Pietists did not form their own ecclesiastical bodies, but remained in the state churches, within small groupings for the nurture and propagation of the Christian life.

These three movements are just some of the traditions that form the ancestry of modern day evangelicalism.

Since this study looks at the question of evangelicals and ecumenism in South Africa in the decades from the 1960s to the 1990s, local expressions of evangelicalism will be an important focus. This however will not be possible without looking at the international Christian context - particularly Europe and America - that has set the scene for the discourse on evangelicalism and ecumenism in South Africa.

Most evangelical mission churches in South Africa are a more recent development, compared to the larger stream of historic Protestantism. This is a result of the fact that they arise as a consequence of missionary activity spawned by the evangelical revivals of the 19th and 20th centuries. This often means that the problem of evangelical relationship to ecumenism is strongly affected by this western missionary legacy.

Further complication in the discussion of evangelicalism, both in South Africa and abroad, is that evangelicals are not a monolithic form of Christianity. Scholars such as Quebedeaux²², Bosch²³ and Fackre²⁴ are in broad agreement in identifying at least four strands of evangelicalism.

1. *Separatist Fundamentalism*: They feel it necessary to separate completely from theological liberalism, and have an extreme form of political and social conservatism.

2. *Open fundamentalism*: They repudiate the explicit alliance of fundamentalism with ultra-conservative politics, but also hold to, though in less vocal and less extreme terms, the need to separate from the historic denominations and their 'unbelieving' theologians.

3. *Establishment Evangelicals*: They drop most of the anti intellectualism of fundamentalism, and do not espouse a separatist stance in relation to other churches. They are generally open to dialogue and co-operation with other schools of thought. They favour "spiritual rather than institutional unity, believing that there cannot be meaningful solidarity apart from basic doctrinal agreement."²⁵

4. *New Evangelicals*. They have a stronger social conscience, and are in "dialogue

²² Quebedeaux, R. 1974. *The Young evangelicals*. New York: Harper & Row.

²³ Bosch, D. J. 1980. *Witness to the World*. London: Marchall, Morgan and Scott.

²⁴ Fackre, G. 1982. *The religious Right and Christian Faith*, Grand Rapids: Eedmans.

²⁵ Quebedeaux, R. 1974. *The Young evangelicals*. New York: Harper & Row. Page 29.

with mainstream ecumenical liberalism, and have begun to converse with other religious traditions and Marxists”²⁶ Other writers refer to this stream as radical evangelicals²⁷ or ecumenical evangelicals.

In all these various nuances of evangelicalism, several features obtain, which make some generalisations possible.

1.4 Common features in evangelicalism.

1.4.1. A transdenominational phenomenon.

Evangelicals are to be found in virtually all Christian denominations and traditions.

In a sense this feature of evangelicalism should predispose evangelicals to be open to the ecumenical insight that God is at work in all churches. In recent years, in almost every denomination, a trend toward an evangelical renewal is observable.²⁸

In view of the fact that most of the historic Protestant denominations have in their founding confessional statement ‘evangelical’ commitments,²⁹ many evangelicals continue to work for evangelical renewal within their own denominations, rather than leave them.

The trans-denominational character of evangelicalism means that there are evangelicals in denominations that are both inside and outside the SACC. A way of describing this problem of evangelical classification is to point out that evangelical Christianity in South Africa is found in several church camps. A

²⁶ *ibid* 39

²⁷ *ibid* 29

²⁸ Nash, R. ed. 1987. *Evangelical Renewal in the mainline churches*. Westchester, Illinois: Crossway books.

²⁹ *ibid* 50

possible classification could be:

- **Evangelical minorities.** Those evangelicals who are part of denominations where they are in a minority.
- **Evangelical majorities.** Some evangelicals are in denominations where they are in the majority.
- **Evangelical denominations.** These are evangelical churches that are totally evangelical.
- **Evangelical independents.** These are new churches that are not within denominational structures, but occur as individual congregations.
- **Pentecostals.** These are those evangelical churches that embrace the doctrine of speaking in tongues as evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit.
- **Charismatics.** These are churches which have, since the sixties and seventies, been involved in the charismatic renewal. They are found in both the so called main line churches as well as the independent newer churches.

All these classifications suggest a variety of possible relations with the ecumenical Council of Churches.

1.4.2. Revivals

Fiedler³⁰ notes that it is possible to see revivals as a driving force of church history, and shows how evangelical history can be viewed as a history of revivals.

³⁰ Vidler, A. R. 1994. *The church in an age of revolution*, London: Penguin. Page 113.

If this is true, the fact that evangelicals come out of revivals often means that they start with a basic suspicion of church authority and tradition. The seeds of resistance, suspicion and uncooperativeness are thus sown from the beginning. Their self understanding imposes a we - they dichotomy³¹, (which makes ecumenical cooperation difficult.) When revivals have issued in foreign missions, particularly in the Third World, the same basic suspicion of the church, its hierarchy and tradition has been sown in the church in the Third World. The ecumenical discussion is therefore further problematised in the emerging mission church. Evangelicalism in South Africa, is largely a result of foreign missions, and therefore inherits this legacy.³²

1.5 The doctrinal distinctives of evangelicals.

Most scholars agree that the doctrinal criteria that are important to evangelicalism are: the authority of the bible, salvation by grace through faith, conversion, personal morality, evangelism, the Holy Spirit and the importance of fellowship within the Christian community.

1.5.1 The authority of the bible.

Just as Protestantism lays a high premium on the bible - being a chief point of contention between Catholicism and Protestantism, so too evangelicals affirm the primacy of the bible. The 'formal principle of the Reformation', summarized as *sola Scriptura* affirmed that only those beliefs and practices that could be shown to be based on the bible were binding to Christians.

³¹ Barr, J. 1977. Fundamentalism. London: SCM press. Page 20

³² Fiedler, K. 1994. The story of Faith Missions. Oxford: Regnum Books. pages 324,400

This insistence on the primacy of the bible is important in that it relativises other sources of Christian theology, such as tradition, experience, reason or culture. True to their roots in the Reformation, evangelicals are happy to affirm with Calvin that:

The power which is peculiar to Scripture appears from the fact that no human writings, however skillfully published, are able so to affect us at all. Read Demosthenes or Cicero; read Plato, Aristotle, or any of that crowd; they will wonderfully allure, delight, move and thrill you; but betake yourself from them and read the sacred book, and willy-nilly it will so affect you, move your heart and fix itself in your very marrow that compared with the force of that realisation (*sensus*) the impressions made by the orators and philosophers will just about vanish away. So it is easy to see that the Holy Scriptures, which so far surpass in their effect all the gifts and graces of human endeavor, breath out something divine.³³

For evangelicals, the agenda of biblical authority is also set against liberal tendencies that tend to devalue the bible as the authoritative Word of God.

To put the concern around the authority of the bible in perspective, it is important to state that biblical authority for evangelicalism implies:

Reliability

The only reliable source of revelation about God is found in the bible. With Barth, evangelicals hold that unless God reveals Himself, humans are unable to discover Him. It is in the bible that we encounter a faithful account of Jesus Christ. This is not to suggest that there is no value in general revelation, or that one might not glean some clues about the existence of an omnipotent God from creation.

What evangelicals maintain is that such revelation is inadequate for a salvific

³³ Packer, J. I. 1999. *Honouring the people of God*. UK: Paternoster Press. page 126

knowledge of God. This knowledge is only premised on the reliability of scripture and the account of Christ that scripture records. No other theological source is accorded equal status, be it reason, experience, tradition or culture.³⁴

Devotion

Evangelicals read the bible with a belief that it is God's word to them. A personal appropriation takes place that makes an inner transformation possible. As McGrath notes, this "inevitably runs the risk of subjectivism". Yet, with Soren Kierkegaard, he is satisfied that "subjectivism is not entirely a negative notion....It means that something has inward relevance and applicability; in short, it has existential relevance."³⁵

George Whitefield, eminent evangelical of the 18th century, wrote in his journal following his conversion experience:

My mind, being now more open and enlarged, I began to read the Holy Scriptures upon my knees...This proved meat indeed and drink indeed to my soul. I daily received fresh life, light and power from above.³⁶

Inspiration

Many evangelicals hold the view that scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit, without necessarily having a consensus about how such inspiration is to be understood. From the 1820's onward, a "body of evangelical opinion began to

³⁴ France, R.T. and McGrath, A.E eds. 1993. *Evangelical Anglican: their role and influence in the church today*. Kent: Mackays of Chatham plc. page 24ff

³⁵ *ibid* 34

³⁶ Dallimore, A. 1990. *George Whitefield - God's anointed servant in the great revival of the eighteenth century*. Wheaton: Crossway books. page 21.

insist on inerrancy, verbal inspiration and the need for literal interpretation of the bible”³⁷

This position, being more fundamentalistic, is in the main, more discredited today in favour of a position on inspiration that sees the Holy Spirit as acting in a manner that accommodates the human agency in the development of the biblical material. This is to say, in using human writers in the authorship of Scripture, the Holy Spirit, respected the mind, outlook, temperament, interests, literary habits and other particularities of the specific author.

This also enables evangelicals to be open to the use of biblical criticism in their interpretation of scripture, giving due respect to contextual considerations on the part of both author and reader. Being children of the Reformation, they assert with Luther in his polemics with Erasmus that:

I certainly grant that many passages in the Scriptures are obscure and hard to elucidate, but that is due, not to the exalted nature of their subject, but to our own linguistic and grammatical ignorance; and it does not in any way prevent us knowing all the contents of Scripture. For what solemn truth can the Scripture still be concealing, now that the seals are broken, the stone rolled away from the door of the tomb, and the greatest of all mysteries brought to light – that Christ, God’s Son, became man, that God is Three in One, Christ suffered for us, and will reign for ever? And are not these things known, and sung in our streets? Take Christ from the Scriptures – and what more will you find in them? You see then, that the entire content of the Scriptures has now been brought to light, even though some passages which contain unknown words remain obscure.³⁸

Similarly, evangelicals hold that as the Spirit was involved in the production and

³⁷ Bebbington, D. W. 1993. *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A history from the 1730s to the 1930s*. London: Routledge. Page 14.

³⁸ Packer, J.I. 1999. *Honouring the people of God*. UK: Paternoster Press. page 130

authorship of the text, so too He is involved with those who read it, making its meaning manifest. This explains why Whitefield would read scripture on his knees.

In making the bible such a foundational aspect of their faith and outlook, evangelicals show a determination not to allow cultural tendencies to dominate their understanding of what is Christian truth. Needless to say, there can never be total escape from a measure of cultural conditioning, but this commitment to the priority and authority of scripture gives evangelicals a fighting chance to contend with the enslaving ideologies of their age.

For this reason, in the age when liberal theologians went a long way to adapting Christian theology to the enlightenment paradigm, to the point where it was barely recognisable as New Testament Christianity, evangelical orthodoxy sought to defend Christian fundamentals. This they did with great courage in the controversies of the 1920s, particularly in the USA. Unfortunately, this was not without error on their part.

It is important to note with Orlando Costas³⁹ that this feature of the authority of the bible is more definitive of Western evangelicalism than Third World evangelicalism. This is because preoccupation with biblical authority in the West was more a response to the Enlightenment context, in which the interlocutor - being a skeptic, rationalist, atheist and materialistic - rejected the bible.

³⁹ Padilla, R. C. and Branson, L. M. eds, 1986. *Conflict and Context: Hermeneutics in the Americas*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans. page 320.

In the Third World, the issues behind biblical authority relate more to ortho-praxis rather than mere orthodoxy. That is to say, right living, in obedience to biblical revelation and teaching, is more important than right doctrine. It is an insistence that the biblical teaching on justice must affect the way society is organised.

1.5.2. Salvation by grace through faith.

This is as opposed to salvation through works, which was a major source of conflict that the reformers had with the Roman Catholic Church. The finished work of the cross of Jesus Christ is believed to be sufficient for the salvation of human kind. This salvation is the grace that God showed to human kind through the death of His Son Jesus Christ. It focuses, for evangelicals, four related truths:

Firstly, that human beings are in a predicament of utter lostness caused by sin. Indeed even a full appreciation of this lostness is made possible only by the grace of God.

Secondly, we cannot save ourselves from this situation. Our confidence in human capabilities is misguided, and in time will lead to disillusionment.

Thirdly, God has reached out in Christ, making available the only way of salvation to human kind. Luther put this point in his Reformational programme thus:

Learn to know Christ, and Him crucified; learn to sing unto Him, and say, Lord Jesus, thou art my righteousness, I am thy sin. Thou has taken upon thee what was mine, and has set upon me what was thine. Thou hast become

what thou was not, that I might become what I was not.⁴⁰

Such salvation is not only salvation from the meaninglessness of life without God in the present age, but also from the judgment to come in the next.

Fourthly, that salvation is gained by placing one's faith on the redemptive work of Christ.

This focus on the centrality and foundational importance for human salvation of the work accomplished by Jesus Christ through His life, death and resurrection, is what others have frowned upon as a scandalous particularity. A claim is made that it is arrogant for evangelicals in a pluralistic context to be so exclusive about the way of salvation.

The insistence on the sufficiency of the cross of Jesus Christ is also a statement on the uniqueness of the Christian message. For evangelicals, there is no other way to attain salvation except through the message of the cross. In a pluralistic context, where interfaith dialogue is an increasingly important item on the ecumenical agenda, evangelical insistence that salvation is only possible through the cross of Christ is bound to cause ecumenical embarrassment.

A downside in the practice of this conviction is that evangelicals often play down social responsibility on account of the fact that it is not critical, as faith is, to their salvation. This will be shown to be so for evangelicalism in South Africa in

⁴⁰ Packer, J. I. 1999. Honouring the people of God. UK: Paternoster Press. page 8

Chapter 4.

Critics of the evangelical movement in the 18th century did consider this reliance on the cross to be rather irresponsible, as it seemed to open the door wide for all manner of sinful behaviour. Evangelical response was that gratitude to the God who showed mercy was the strongest motive for moral behaviour.

“Faith is not understood, much less possessed, if it produced not more holiness, than could possibly be any other way attained,” wrote Henry Venn, 18th century evangelical vicar of Huddersfield.⁴¹

The latter two doctrines have their roots in the Protestant Reformation, underscoring the Protestant rootage of evangelicalism.

1.5.3 Conversion

The idea of a personally appropriated faith is key to evangelical faith and practice.

The famous words of John Wesley, upon conversion on 24 May 1738 were:

I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and had saved me from the law of sin and death.⁴²

The conversion experience, in contemporary evangelical parlance, is often referred to as being *born again* or *receiving Christ as one's personal Lord and Saviour*. It is a conscious choice. As it turns out, it is the point at which evangelicals draw the

⁴¹ Bebbington, D. W. 1993. *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A history from the 1730s to the 1930s*. London: Routledge. Page 11.

⁴² *ibid* 20.

line between those who are saved, and those who are not. It separates committed Christianity from mere nominalism. The latter might be viewed as an acceptance of an outward form of Christianity, without the inner reality of the power of the gospel to transform life.

The relevance of this point for ecumenism is far reaching. For evangelicals, to be truly Christian means to be evangelical in this sense. It means more than a formal acceptance of Christian orthodoxy. It requires a personal appropriation of the Lordship of Christ, rather than mere agreement with Christian propositions.

J. I Packer states that in framing the evangelical position within an ecumenical context where the expectation is often that evangelicalism is one of several varieties of Christian tradition, due in time to be assimilated into the larger whole, it is important to assert that *evangelicalism is indeed Christianity*. By this Packer implies that: "evangelical theology is the whole truth, and that, to the extent that you deviate from the evangelical position, you deviate from Christianity itself."

His argument continues:

You cannot add to evangelical theology without subtracting from it. By augmenting it you cannot enrich it; you can only impoverish it. Thus for example, if you add to it a doctrine of human priestly mediation, you take away the truth of the perfect adequacy of our Lord's priestly mediation. If you add to it the doctrine of human merit, in whatever form, you take away the truth of the perfect adequacy of the merits of Christ.⁴³

Packer is among evangelicalism's most trusted theologians⁴⁴. His assertions, even though decidedly conservative, are not inconsequential in describing how most

⁴³ Packer, J I. 1999. *Honouring the people of God*, UK: Paternoster Press,. page 333.

⁴⁴ Packer was entrusted with the task of theological oversight over Billy Graham's 2004 Amsterdam Conference of Evangelists.

evangelicals view theological liberalism. He adequately articulates, with the benefit of theological erudition, what most lay evangelicals believe about their faith.

A further point of ecumenical concern is that some historic churches consider infant baptism a point at which the infant could be declared regenerate. Baptism is therefore considered the occasion of the new birth in Christ. Evangelicals who are in denominations that embrace this conviction often face difficulties in accepting the official position of the church.

For evangelicals, conversion is not only a work of the Spirit, and a critical point of decisive transformation in an individual's life, it also goes along with assurance of salvation. This was unknown in pre-Evangelical Protestant spirituality. Bebbington⁴⁵ notes that the "novelty of evangelicalism lay precisely in claiming that assurance normally accompanied conversion".

Indeed it was the standard possession of all believers. He continues:

Other Christians, especially those of more Catholic tradition, found the expectation of assurance among Evangelical eccentric, presumptuous or even pathological. Yet it remained characteristic of them.

In the context of the dominant religiosity of the day, believers sought, with single-minded devotion and self-discipline, to be holy and acceptable to God. They could never however, be fully convinced that they were in fact acceptable to God, and

⁴⁵ Bebbington, D. W. 1993. *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A history from the 1730s to the 1930s*. London: Routledge. page 20.

were numbered among those who would finally be saved.

This was indeed the position of John Wesley, until he met with Moravian missionaries. According to the celebrated story of his spiritual journey toward assurance of salvation, John was caught up in a violent storm at sea aboard a vessel with the Moravians, noticed their calmness in the face of danger. Wesley noted how

a terrible screaming began among the English ...while these German people; men, women and children (Moravian missionaries) calmly sang a hymn of trust and praise' while Wesley himself confessed 'I was afraid to die'.⁴⁶

The Moravians showed him how he could be saved, and thus contributed in the life of one of England's finest evangelical preachers.

Further, conversion is understood to be the work of the Holy Spirit in an individual's life. As Jesus taught: "The Holy Spirit brings about conviction about sin, righteousness and judgment" (John 16:9)

This point is perhaps the best indication of the impact of the Pietist heritage upon evangelicalism. Pietists reacted against the "aridity of a faith which is doctrinally orthodox, yet spiritually dead."⁴⁷ Taking this point further in relation to the Enlightenment, McGrath argues forcefully that:

Evangelism is the proclamation and commendation of the trustworthiness

⁴⁶ *ibid* 20

⁴⁷ McGrath, A.1994. *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christinity*, London: Hodder and Stoughton. Page 69

of God and the gospel. It is a travesty of the biblical idea of 'truth' to equate it with the Enlightenment notion of conceptual or propositional correspondence, or the derived view of evangelism as the proclamation of the propositional correctness of Christian doctrine.

This deficient concept of evangelism opens the way to the types of rationalism and formalism which have destroyed the vitality of Christian faith in the past.⁴⁸

The matter of whether conversion takes place instantaneously or gradually, over a period of time, even imperceptibly, has exercised evangelical thinkers for a long time. There are those who, on the one extreme, hold that "the work of conversion is so momentous, that no man can pass through it and not know it"⁴².

There are others on the other hand who are emphatic that "we require nothing sudden". For them, it is "present convertedness rather than the memory of experience of the past conversion which is of fundamental importance."⁴⁹

It is perhaps true to say that it is the all important nature of personal conversion for evangelical identity that locates evangelical religion - for the most part, in the realm of the personal, leaving out of focus for the most part - anything public, political or social.

1.5.4 Personal Morality

Having Puritanism in its ancestry, evangelicalism could hardly be expected to take a low view of moral concerns. Sydney Ahlstrom wrote:

⁴⁸ McGrath, A. E. 1996. *A passion for Truth – The intellectual coherence of evangelicalism*, Apollos: Intervarsity Press. Page 177

⁴⁹ McGrath, A. 1994. *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity*. London: Hodder and Stoughton. Page 70.

The law was dear to his (the Puritan's) heart, and through the centuries he and his Reformed kindred have dwelt unremittingly on the value of the law as teacher and moral guide for the Christian....he recognised that governments, constitutions, and laws were instituted to restrain man's sins and hence were truly of God.⁵⁰

He continues:

with regard to personal life, the Puritan demanded of himself and of others – a reformation of character, the rejection of idle recreations and vain display, and sober, obedient godliness.⁵¹

Having a high view of scripture has already been stated. Evangelicals are keen to order their lives in keeping with what they believe is demanded by biblical teaching.

John Stott, in an interview with Third Way magazine in the UK, answering the question of when he would consider leaving Anglicanism, said: "When they endorse homosexuality, doubt the incarnation and the gospel of justification"⁵²

Secondly, the concept of the Lordship of Christ in the individual's life implies that personal holiness will be the lifestyle that indicates a converted life.

Smith Wigglesworth, (1859–1947) eminent evangelical charismatic preacher who cast a long shadow of his influence long after his death, taught:

I have never seen a man keep the anointing of the baptism of the Holy Spirit who drank intoxicating liquors. I have never seen a man manifest and carry forth the order of the baptism of the Holy Spirit who smoked. If these outward things, which can be seen hinder God from holding sway in

⁵⁰ Ahlstrom, S. A. 1972. A Religious History of the American People. New Haven: Yale University press. page 129

⁵¹ ibid 129

⁵² Interview in Third Way Magazine. October 1995. page 16.

our lives, what about the inward things?⁵³

In speaking thus, Wigglesworth was articulating a key feature of ethical understanding that has characterized historic evangelicalism over the ages: personal morality.

For the record, other strands of evangelicals (see 1.3.4) have expanded the horizon of moral discourse beyond the narrow confines that Wigglesworth spoke of, to include matters of social, political, economic and environmental ethics.

(Orlando Costas contends that the last two features have their roots in the so called second Reformation - the Pietist movement and the evangelical awakening of Wesley, as well as the holiness movement and American Revivalism within the US context - which sought to complete the earlier theological Reformation)⁵⁴

1.5.5 Evangelism.

The overriding mission commitment of evangelicals is evangelism, interpreted as leading those who are not 'saved' to salvation in Christ⁵⁵. It is the communication of the message of the gospel to people with the invitation that a decision be made to receive Christ as Lord at a personal level, issuing in a new life of Christian discipleship.

⁵³ Wigglesworth, S. 1999. *Wigglesworth on the Anointing*. New Kensington :Whithaker House. . Page 30.

⁵⁴ Padilla, R. C. Branson, L. M. eds. 1986. *Conflict and Context: Hermeneutics in the Americas*. Grand Rapids. Michigan.: Eerdmans. page 311 -312

⁵⁵ Anderson , A. 1992. *Bazalwane*. Pretoria: Unisa..

This understanding of evangelism differs in important ways from that held by some historic, mainline churches. These hold that baptised infants are at least potentially Christian, and with the spiritual nurture that the church gives, and as such baptised infants grow, a fuller expression of their Christian faith will result. Evangelism in this scheme of things therefore happens internally within the church.

For evangelicals, evangelism is primarily an invitation to come to Christ to those who do not have a saving knowledge of Him. Often, this has been taken as mere proselytizing by churches who feel that their members are being recruited to join a different group. Evangelical response to this is that proselytism is saying: *join my group!* while evangelism is saying: *Come to Jesus.*

Evangelical churches in South Africa, such as the Assemblies of God consider their *raison d'etre* to be evangelism and church planting.⁵⁶ This, among other things, is what explains the consistent numerical growth of evangelical churches around the world, even as other sections of the Christian church, excluding African Indigenous churches, have shown stagnation and even decline in numbers.

The history of evangelical revivals has been marked by a tremendous amount of evangelistic activism. John Wesley, writes Bebbington,

was a typhoon of energy, preaching more than 40 000 sermons and issuing more than 400 publications.... A working week of between 90 and 100

⁵⁶ Watt, P. 1992. *From Africa's soil, the story of the Assemblies of God in Africa*. Cape Town: Struik Books. page 30

hours was expected of men in the 19th century Wesleyan ministry.⁵⁷

Evangelicals approach the task of world evangelism with the confidence that it is achievable, that the great commission can be brought to completion, even in the context of 21st century pluralism.

When one considers the typical evangelical view of the world, 'the heart of the problem is the problem of the heart'.

That is, the problems of the world are due to the sin in people's hearts, it is understandable that evangelism, narrowly defined, will be the mission strategy developed.⁵⁸

Evangelism affects ecumenism at two levels:

Firstly, mainline churches find it difficult to accord evangelism the missiological priority that evangelicals do. Particularly because of the evangelical understanding of evangelism as stated above, evangelical- ecumenical consensus is hard to find. Ecumenicals proceed from a social analysis that looks at more than the human heart, i.e. social structures that incarnate sin and develop a life of their own. Accordingly, ecumenical missions seek to become more holistic, keeping a balance between the spiritual and the social dimensions of the gospel. Whether they succeed in maintaining this balance is another matter. Rene Padilla contends that:

⁵⁷ Bebbington, D. W. 1993. *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A history from the 1730s to the 1930s*. London :Routledge. page 11.

⁵⁸ Watt, P. 1992. *From Africa's soil, the story of the Assemblies of God in Africa*. Cape Town: Struik Books,. page 30

Everything seems to indicate that the healthy balance between the ecumenical and evangelical dimensions with which the World Council of Churches was organised in 1948 has gradually been lost and that, at the moment the most urgent need of the council is to regain the gospel for its ecumenical work.⁵⁹

Secondly, evangelical churches empirically seem to grow at the expense of mainline churches. "A major shift in affiliation is taking place from large mainline denominations to small, mainly charismatic churches."⁶⁰ This leads to inter church alienation and tension.

1.5.6 The Holy Spirit

Evangelicals believe that the experience of being reborn is made possible by the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity. Without the activity of the Holy Spirit, it is not possible to fully comprehend the alienation from God that sin causes, nor is it possible to believe and receive the grace that God offers in Christ. The process of regeneration as well as discipleship happens as the Spirit is allowed to function in the believer's life.

Further it is the Spirit who forms, sustains, equips and renews the community of believers and apportions spiritual gifts for edification and service to the church.

It is particularly the Charismatic and Pentecostal wing of evangelical Christianity that has given the greatest recognition to the person and work of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life.

⁵⁹Padilla, R. C. and Branson, L. M. (eds). 1986. *Conflict and Context: Hermeneutics in the Americas*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans. page 312

⁶⁰ Anderson, A. 1992. *Bazalwane..* Pretoria: Unisa

1.5.7 Importance of the Christian Community.

While evangelicals do not espouse any particular doctrine of the church, they do have a deep seated awareness of the importance of Christian community in the process of Christian discipling. Membership into the community is by spiritual rebirth. The Reformation conviction of the priesthood of believers is taken seriously, as each believer is encouraged to discover their particular gifts and ministry, so that the life of Christ can be shared together.

A case can be made that such is the weakness of the evangelical doctrine of Church that it easily permits fragmentation within evangelicalism itself, while it is also happy to exclude from fellowship any who do not enter the kingdom by the 'evangelical gate'. The unity of the Church is therefore, for evangelicals, complete when those of evangelical conviction are in fellowship. Relationship with those outside this fellowship can only be by way of evangelism. This too, does not make for good ecumenical relations.

1.6 Evangelicals in South Africa.

Having outlined the main features of evangelicalism as it is experienced and explained by its adherents around the world, it is proper to locate it in South Africa as this is the arena of this present investigation.

The story of evangelical churches in South Africa, in the period of this study is a rather under recorded part of the witness of the Church in South Africa. Much of the church history recorded in this period focuses on the mainline churches and

their ecumenical journey. This is perhaps because mainline Churches have historically been the dominant face of Christianity in the nation.

This is increasingly changed through the emergence and dominance, at least numerically if not politically, of other sections of the church, such as the African Independent/ indigenous churches as well as evangelical/ Pentecostal and charismatic churches. These churches have shown remarkable and sustained growth over the last several decades in South Africa, and look set to be increasingly influential.

Outside of the mainstream ecumenical processes outlined in this study, with focus on the SACC and its predecessor the Christian Council of South Africa evangelicals have their own ecumenical journey. In its brief history of the search for evangelical unity, the Evangelical Alliance of South Africa issued a pamphlet/ newsletter⁶¹ at its launch in 1995, which records the following landmarks on the journey of evangelical search for unity:

- In 1968, a continental body of evangelicals called The Association of Evangelicals in Africa and Madagascar (AEAM), based in Nairobi, Kenya, facilitated a process of unity among evangelicals in South Africa. This led to the formation of the Association of Evangelicals in South Africa. (AESA). While this body sought to be a multiracial and inclusive organisational vehicle for unity, it soon found itself in the difficult situation of trying to unite black

⁶¹ TEASA 1995 newsletter on evangelicals in South Africa

and white believers whose socio political experiences were diametrically opposed.

- This was exacerbated during the unfolding political turmoil in the ensuing decade of the 1970's, when the Soweto youth riots broke out, leading to the radicalisation of the popular mood, especially among the youth, including the Christian youth. The Cyara Declaration⁶² was issued by black evangelical students in this period, calling for a radical opposition to Apartheid.
- White believers in the Johannesburg area, who were part of the Johannesburg Evangelical Fellowship (a regional chapter of AESA), sought to unite with Soweto Evangelical Fellowship, a black fellowship of clergy based in the sprawling township of Soweto. Attempts at unity proved fruitless. This was as a result of the escalating state of political violence and repression in which black Christians were the victims and their white brothers and sisters were, at worst perpetrators, and at best passive collaborators in the repressive machinery of Apartheid. Black and white Christians were divided by seemingly irreconcilable differences, political interests and theological convictions regarding what to do with Apartheid.
- The next decade (1986) saw the formation of the Concerned Evangelicals (CE), which was a formal separation by mainly black clergy from AESA, which later became The Evangelical Fellowship of South Africa. (EFSA).

⁶² The Cyara Declaration is an evangelical document issued by black evangelical youth leaders in the period immediately following Soweto 76 student riots. It was discussed extensively in the black Students Christian Movements and white Students Christian Association

- Concerned Evangelicals (CE) published their theological statement: Evangelical witness in South Africa: evangelicals critique their own theology and practice in the same year.(1986)⁶³
- The Continental body AEA, continued to work to facilitate unity among black and white evangelicals in South Africa. Three Peace Missions were organised in Swaziland between 1988 and 1990, with the view to bring reconciliation among black and white evangelical leaders. This proved fruitless, as the ideological commitments of the evangelical leaders – black and white – were shaped in important ways by Apartheid, and the struggle to end it.
- While these Peace Mission consultations were going on, the political crisis continued to deepen as international sanctions brought external pressure on the Apartheid regime while internally, the mass democratic movement made the country ungovernable.

It was at this point that white evangelical leaders launched another ecumenical body called Church Alliance of South Africa (CASA). The aim of CASA was to seek to counter the calls for sanctions that the ecumenical bodies and leaders such as Bishop Desmond Tutu were making overseas. The constitution of CASA stated in part: “We will address issues such sanctions, disinvestments, violence, moral decay and other issues, which may threaten the preaching of the gospel and the preservation of Biblical Standards in our society.”⁶⁴

⁶³ Evangelical Witness in South Africa: evangelicals critique their own theology and practice. 1986. Johannesburg : Order of Preachers..

⁶⁴ Constitution of CASA.

All of this clearly points to the deep ideological and theological fault lines between black and white believers in the evangelical community as they sought to work for unity among themselves.

- While all this was going on, the same fault lines manifested within denominations, where doctrinal unity did not guarantee the unity of the body. For example, within the Baptist Church community, white and black Baptists from the Baptist Union and Baptist Convention formed the fellowship of Concerned Baptists, separating themselves from the Baptist Union, while among Pentecostals, The Relevant Pentecostal Witness was launched. Among the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) churches, a struggle erupted regarding the victimization and defrocking of black pastor, Rev Frank Chikane. His struggle with his own denomination symbolised and represented the struggle of black believers with the Church. AFM later split along racial lines.

In summary, this chapter sought to develop a working definition of the evangelical movement as we know it today. This has been archived in two ways, firstly by tracing its history in the evangelical revivals of the 17th century, with roots in the Puritan and Pietist traditions as well as the Reformation. We extended the lineage even further down the ages to the biblical Christianity as we find it the New Testament.

Secondly, in defining the task, we have identified some of the strands in the mosaic of evangelical religion, which is by no means a homogenous movement.

The features that characterise the movement have been noted as well as some preliminary discussions of the key doctrinal distinctives.

The South African canvass on which the picture of evangelicalism is drawn has also been briefly looked at. The next chapter will seek to define ecumenism and in that way lay a basis for the discussions of the main thesis of this work.

While ecumenism in the world is not limited to the life and work of the World Council of Churches, the role played by this Geneva-based organisation in the furtherance of ecumenical co-operation is critical, and will be taken as a defining feature of the ecumenism around which this study of evangelicalism and ecumenism is organised. As Ruth Rouse writes in **History of the Ecumenical movement**:

the Council neither is nor claims to be the entire ecumenical movement... There are many other manifestations of the ecumenical spirit which contribute to the forward sweep.⁶⁶

Its founding constitution holds that it is

a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour according to the scriptures and therefore seek to fulfill together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

2.1.1 WCC: A brief history

The Council itself has a history traceable to a missionary conference held in 1910 in Edinburgh. This event was anticipated as early as the nineteenth century by English Baptist missionary William Carey, who wrote from his mission field in Calcutta to his missionary society in London, suggesting the need for regular global conferences for Christians, starting in 1810. This was met with skepticism at the time.⁶⁷

Edinburgh 1910 was a meeting at which the forces of world wide Christian missions gathered to explore possibilities for cooperation. The mood was that it was possible to take the world for Christianity. The resources, the technology and

⁶⁶ Van Elderen, M. 1990. *Introducing the World Council of Churches*. Geneva : WCC publication.

page 38
⁶⁷ *ibid* 18

the will were there. All that was necessary was organisation. The rallying cry of mission minded people was "salvation of this generation in our time".

To be sure, Edinburgh was not entirely triumphalistic. As Ernst Lange, a WCC insider, reflecting on the challenges facing the missionary at the time, wrote:

How little power missions had, how weak and alone and poor the individual missionary was in the big wide world, became especially obvious when they tried to dissociate themselves from their colonial allies. The cynical export of confessional quarrels and unholy rivalry and competition between missionaries - all this was simply wasteful and uneconomic - quite apart from the erosion of credibility. To anyone thinking strategically, the immediate need was cooperation on the mission field, at least a minimum of agreement, comity and mutual support.⁶⁸

It is significant that the Edinburgh meeting of 1910 was a meeting of the International Missionary Council, a group with evangelical concerns. It is on this account that Bruce Nicholls and Bong Rin Ro, commenting in their 1993 study of the WCC Canberra conference, wrote:

Evangelicals claim to be pioneers of the modern ecumenical movement, beginning with the Evangelical Alliance in 1846 and the World Evangelical Alliance in 1912. They had a major role in the forming of the Student Volunteer Movement and of the International Missionary Council. However, they had a minor role in the founding and development of the World Council of Churches.⁶⁹

After the Edinburgh conference, a continuation committee was formed to facilitate missionary cooperation for world missions. This led to the formation of the International Missionary Conference (IMC) in 1921. This body organised international missions conferences from then until 1961 when it was integrated

⁶⁸ Lange, E. 1979. *And yet it moves on: dream and reality of the ecumenical movement*. Grand Rapids Michigan: Eerdmans. page 28

⁶⁹ Bong Rin Ro and Bruce Nicholls (eds). 1993. *Beyond Canberra*. Oxford: Regnum books. page 7

into the WCC.

While the 'mission' process was going on through the IMC, a separate process was afoot to seek to deal with issues of Faith and Order. This was because matters of doctrine and church order were specifically left out of the planning of the 1910 conference, as they were deemed divisive. This approach to Church unity was seen as inadequate by ecumenists like Charles Brent, an Episcopalian from the USA. He convened the first world Conference on Faith and Order in 1927.

At around the same time, there were those who believed that doctrine divides and service unites, and that inter church cooperation should be organised around service to humanity. They started a 'Life and Work' movement.

'Faith and Order' sought to take seriously matters of doctrinal integrity while 'Life and Work' emphasised service to humanity. The inseparability of the two concerns soon became clear, and these two streams of ecumenical commitment agreed to merge in the formation of the WCC in 1948.

In conferences following up on the Edinburgh meeting, it soon became clear that the problems around world mission were complex. Two world wars followed, further manifesting the deep divisions in the world. The mission of the Church was severely taxed as it sought to proclaim its version of truth to an unbelieving and increasingly cynical world. The global context in which the world-wide church had to present the gospel forced a rethinking of the nature of the church and its mission in the world. The theological journey of the WCC became a struggle around how to really be the church in unity and mission. One of its presidents from 1975 –

1983, Jose Miguez Bonino summarised the challenge in this way:

We believe that the unity which is both the will of God and His gift to the Church becomes visible to the extent that in each place at all times those who have been baptised into Jesus Christ and confess Him as Lord and Saviour are gathered together by the Holy Spirit in a fully dedicated community that professes the same apostolic faith, preaches the same Gospel, breaks the same bread, unites in common prayer, expresses itself in witness and service and that, at the same time, are united to every Christian community in all places and in all epochs, in such a way that all can speak and act together as the situation requires, in the tasks to which God calls His people.⁷⁰

This statement outlines the rich theological resources from which the WCC draws and with which it funds the range of concerns that are on its agenda, such as the struggle for Justice, Peace and integrity of Creation. (JPIC)

2.1.2 Ecumenical theology of the WCC.

German ecumenical theologian Konrad Raiser has traced the history of ecumenical theology in five overlapping phases⁷¹:

1. The Edinburgh conference, being the early beginnings of the ecumenical movement, owed much to the 19th century evangelical revivals. The theological character of this early phase of the ecumenical movement was non intellectual and nondenominational.

2. From the mid 1920's, Protestant Liberalism became the dominant theological genre. The 'social gospel', which stigmatised the WCC among evangelicals, comes from this phase.

⁷⁰ *ibid* 37

⁷¹ Van Elderen, M. 1990. *Introducing the World Council of Churches*. Geneva :WCC Publications, , page 138

3. Up to the end of the Second World War, a radical critique of liberalism associated with theologians like Karl Barth, Reinhold Niebuhr and Emil Brunner took ascendancy. It emphasised the fact that theology depended on God's self revelation, and not human effort.

4. In the first years of the life of WCC, biblical theology was dominant, emphasizing Jesus Christ as the centre of salvation history.

5. The sixties saw the waning of the theologies of great systematicians like Barth and Tillich in favour of more prophetic and contextual theologies.

To Raiser's observation of the history of ecumenical theology, one might observe that behind the theological method of Liberalism that funds ecumenism is the struggle to avoid the twin dangers of a conservative orthodoxy that tends to be closed to reason, human experience and science on the one side and secular disbelief on the other. In avoiding conservative orthodoxy in this way, liberalism manages to escape the all too familiar hazards of a self confident fundamentalism that swears by a flat earth, not recognising that theology is a human enterprise always fraught with the imperfections that human frailties and limitation bring to it.

In so far as human experience goes, the world has known plenty of suffering caused by people who claim religious legitimation. Apartheid was a cruel system that caused untold misery to many for years. It too claimed religious legitimation.

So indeed, in the post war and post 9/11 era, it makes sense to require that religion make life livable, and human freedoms expanded rather than limited as in a dictatorship. To do this, liberalism - true to its Enlightenment conditioning - relies on the adoption of criticality as a methodology.

In this laudable program, liberalism risks, and often loses, the possibilities that come with the simplicity of child-like faith. This is so because liberalism values criticality. Indeed criticality is an important sacred cow for liberal academia. Criticality is, to use a metaphor, like a security guard liberalism posts at the entrance of the gate to the edifice of 'true knowledge'. The security guard must search all those who would enter these 'hallowed premises', where true knowledge resides.

Even God must submit to this 'standard' security procedure that the protectors of 'True knowledge' have put up. Not even God has a security clearance. Especially not Him! For He demands to enter as Lord, or not at all. He must be interrogated at the gate, and must pass the test, whose starting point is a hermeneutic of suspicion. It is not difficult to see why God keeps failing these tests at the gate, as He did at His first attempt in Palestine.

It is this tendency that runs in the opposite direction to the evangelical theological method, which affirms, and stands in awe and belief of the revealed truths of scripture, rather than suspicion.

The agenda and hoped for outcome of liberalism to make the Christian message

intelligible to an unbelieving world is something that connects with the evangelical instincts to 'save the world'. What evangelicals question though, is whether the price liberalism appears willing to pay is not too high, and that the victory it might win over secular disbelief is not pyrrhic. Put another way, whether, when liberalism succeeds it will be clear whether it is secular disbelief that won, or liberalism.

2.1.3. Non members of the WCC

2.1.3.1 Roman Catholics.

All the ecumenical developments referred to above happened among churches that are outside the Roman Catholic Church. Together, these churches constitute less than half the number of Christians in the Catholic Church.

After the second Vatican council in 1960-64, the Catholic Church issued its Decree on Ecumenism. This changed the stance of the Catholic Church from one which was essentially aloof from what was going on elsewhere in the Christian community. There was a more positive appraisal of Protestant faith. While the Roman Catholic Church is still – at the time of writing - not a member of the WCC, since 1965 a Joint Working Group was established to facilitate, at the highest level, cooperation between the WCC and the Vatican.

2.1.3.2 Evangelicals and Pentecostals.

In his treatment of the relationship that the WCC has with evangelicals, Van Elderen notes that:

Because most evangelical groups are organised in a way that precludes the kind of direct relationship with the WCC that Church based ecumenical bodies have, the WCC relationship with evangelicals cannot be highly structured.⁷²

Evangelical churches tend to be independent, locally based and led by strong charismatic leaders. Their priorities also often differ from the traditional WCC agenda. That said, it is important to note that the WCC has among its member churches evangelical and Pentecostal churches. Further, the tensions that have characterised evangelical relations with the WCC will be the subject of chapter 4. Statistically, WCC member churches are expected within a very short time, if not already, to constitute less than half the non Roman Catholic Christians in the world.⁷³

It is worth noting that evangelical Christianity has traditionally been suspicious of WCC and its brand of ecumenism, for reasons that will be dealt with in some detail in chapter three. Suffice it to say that evangelicals, particularly in the West, and under the leadership of theologians like Prof Peter Beyerhaus and the Frankfurt Declaration, which he spearheaded, have expressed themselves on what they see as the unbiblical tendencies of the WCC, particularly after the WCC Uppsala assembly of 1968. In the Frankfurt Declaration, which he helped write, Beyerhaus sought to reaffirm the biblical basis of Mission in terms aimed at refuting WCC trends. The declaration spells out seven indispensable elements of mission, namely:

- 1) The foundation of Mission is found solely in the New Testament.

⁷² *ibid* 108

⁷³ Raiser, K. 1997. *To be the church: challenges and hopes for a new millennium*. Geneva: WCC Publications. page xiii.

- 2) The primary goal is to glorify and proclaim God's name throughout the world.
- 3) Jesus alone is the basis, content and authority of mission.
- 4) Mission is the church's presentation of salvation appropriated by belief and baptism.
- 5) The primary visible task is to call out from among all people those who are saved and to incorporate them into the church.
- 6) Salvation is found only through faith in Christ.
- 7) Mission is God's decisive activity that will continue until the return of Christ.⁷⁴

Further, in his book **Missions: Which way? Humanisation or Redemption**, Beyerhaus bemoans the trend to radicalisation of the WCC in the direction of the humanisation of the gospel.⁷⁵ Beyerhaus, being Professor of Ecumenical Theology at the University of Tubingen, and holding leadership roles in evangelical networks, including the Lausanne Movement, is an influential spokesman of conservative evangelicalism.

The Frankfurt declaration, and Beyerhaus with it, cannot be adequate in describing God's mission in the world in the way that it does. Nor does it demonstrate that it is aware of the historical experience of millions of people in the world who are victims of precisely such a theology. The methodological presupposition of evangelicalism that theology can be done in ahistorical terms, without regard to reason, science, experience or criticality is also deficient, as is liberalism. The two need each other as two sides of a coin.

After the Second World War, evangelicals felt the need to express their unity

⁷⁴ Frankfurt Declaration

⁷⁵ Beyerhaus, P. 1971. *Mission: Which way? Humanisation or Redemption*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. Page 120.

through the formation of the World Evangelical Fellowship in 1951⁷⁶ Other evangelical vehicles of unity such as the Lausanne Movement were formed in later years. The result of this was that the word ecumenism is claimed by both evangelicals and ecumenicals to describe their own brand of Christian unity. Commenting on the mandate to express the unity of the Spirit, Fuller, a leading evangelical figure and formerly vice chairman of World Evangelical fellowship, writes:

Evangelicals believe it is possible - and necessary - to preserve both unity and purity. They deplore sectarian disunity among believers, and they recognise their oneness with all who are born again of the Spirit - regardless of organisational labels. They are held together not by conciliar structure, but by the essentials of their faith⁷⁷.

Fuller calls this evangelical unity 'biblical ecumenism', as opposed to what he calls the compromising ecumenism of liberal theology.

He is in good company with other leading evangelicals and theologians, such as Martyn Lloyd-Jones, J.I Packer and others who affirm the conviction that there is no real fellowship among people who differ fundamentally in the cardinal truths of historic Christianity. Instead, their view, as spelt out by Lloyd-Jones, is that:

fellowship exists only among those who believe, as a result of the operation of the Holy Spirit, these essential truths concerning man's lost estate - that we all 'by nature are the children of wrath' (Eph 2:30) - and need the action of God in Christ Jesus for our salvation and restoration. There is no fellowship between people who believe that and those who believe something else, which they may call a gospel but which, as Paul tells the Galatians, 'is no gospel' (Galatians 1: 6,7)⁷⁸

This dual use of the term 'ecumenism' needs to be borne in mind in the treatment

⁷⁶ Fuller, H. 1996. *People of the mandate*. UK: WEF. Paternoster. page 28.

⁷⁷ *ibid* page 174.

⁷⁸ Murray, I. 1990. *David Martin Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of faith 1939 -1981*. Trowbridge :The Banner of Truth Trust, Camelot Press. page 429

of the subject of evangelicals and ecumenism.

Further, in defining ecumenism, all is not said until the term is situated within the broader context of modernity. Beyond the theological reasons that are foundational to the ecumenical pursuit, ecumenism is very much a part of the rationalism of modernity. Bryant Myers observes that institutions of modernity believe in the existence of global solutions to global problems. Accordingly, global structures like UNESCO, World Health Organisation and others were created believing in "the possibility of a meta-narrative that can provide global solutions." Myers continues:

The Protestant Church bought into the same presuppositions. The World Council of Churches was the answer of some of our responsibility to create a unified, global expression of the Protestant Church. Conservative Protestants took another tack and created a whole range of para-church agencies with narrow mission, but global agendas: World Vision, Campus Crusade for Christ ... including Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation and World Evangelical Fellowship.⁷⁹

So the theological foundations of ecumenism notwithstanding, there is a sense in which, ecumenism in its evangelical as well as its ecumenical/liberal expression, is a Protestant negotiation with modernity.

2.2 Ecumenism in South Africa

Ecumenism in South Africa has its early beginnings with the formation of the General Missionary Conference in 1904, later to become the Christian Council of South Africa (CCSA) in 1936. Missionary work was the major concern of the ecumenical movement at this stage, and carried less of the concerns of faith and order, which were to become key in the formation of the World Council of

⁷⁹ International Review of Mission, VolLXXXI No. 323, July 1992 page 401

Churches. To be sure, the formation of the Christian council in South Africa was not unrelated to the ecumenical ferment brewing elsewhere in the Christian world. People like Dr John R Mott and J H Oldham, both connected with the international ecumenical movement, made visits to South Africa to encourage ecumenical co-operation.

CCSA later reconstituted itself as the South African Council of Churches in 1968. As an ecumenical instrument, CCSA brought together individual mission agencies and individuals with missionary work as the main agenda, rather than churches, while the SACC was more a council of churches than a council of mission agencies.

2.2.1 A brief survey of the ecumenical journey of the SACC.

The early beginnings of the Christian council were a preoccupation with seeking cooperation around missionary concerns. It was characterised by the white agenda of the English and Afrikaans speaking churches. The participation of black Christians in the development of the work of the Council was non-existent. Saayman goes so far as assert that the agenda of the churches was informed by the animosity that existed between the English-speaking churches and the Afrikaans-speaking churches as a result of the Anglo Boer war of 1899 -1902. He writes:

much of the lack of ecumenical communication, for instance in the Christian Council (which was a precursor to the SACC), can ultimately be traced back to feelings rooted in this war and in the suspicion between Afrikaners and English speaking South Africans.⁸⁰

A key challenge facing the churches seeking to co-operate in the South African

⁸⁰ Saayman, W. 1991. Christian Mission in South Africa. Pretoria :UNISA. page 40

situation was Apartheid, and how the churches related to it and to each other. The Afrikaans-speaking churches were allied with the government, and helped to provide theological underpinnings to the system of Apartheid.

The English-speaking churches opposed the policies of apartheid, though in a rather meek way, as they themselves were compromised by being beneficiaries of the Apartheid status quo. The African Independent churches, the Catholic Church, and the majority of the Evangelical and Pentecostal churches were not part of this emerging ecumenical movement.

The exclusion of black Christians from ecclesiastical power, while it mirrored what was happening in society, was soon to change. This was as a result of the deepening crisis in the political arena.

By 1960, the Apartheid government precipitated a massacre at Sharpeville, where 69 peaceful demonstrators were killed as a result of police gunfire, while many more were injured. This led the WCC, in an unprecedented move of solidarity with the churches in South Africa, to send a delegation to participate in an ecumenical consultation at Cottesloe, Johannesburg in 1960. The result of this consultation was a hardening of attitudes among Afrikaner churchmen who chose to close ranks with their government against the common witness of the churches. The Cottesloe consultation proved to be a landmark event in the ecumenical journey of the church in the nation. World renowned churchman and Dutch Reformed Church theologian Dr Beyers Naude, formed the Christian Institute following the fallout of Cottesloe.

The Christian Institute, along with the SACC put together a critical ecumenical document called the *Message to the people of South Africa*⁸¹ in 1968, which sought to examine the system of Apartheid in the light of scripture. This document served to undermine the Apartheid policy of government and to strengthen opposition to it among the churches.

By 1969, the World Council of Churches set up a Program to Combat Racism, aimed at combating racism wherever it existed in the world. This went beyond mere words to concrete action. In South Africa, this translated to humanitarian material support being given by the WCC to the liberation movements then operating from exile. The effect this had on churches in South Africa was to polarize them between those who sought to be in the good books of government and those who sought to be in solidarity with the oppressed. Some churches withdrew their membership from the South African Council of Churches, while government put pressure on the churches to distance themselves from the enemies of the state.

By the seventies, with the ascendancy of Black Theology and Black Consciousness, black clergy began to assert themselves in the ecclesiastical arena. To their credit, many white clergy recognised the correctness of the need for black clergy to articulate their own issues and to shape the mission of the churches in important ways. This dramatically transformed the witness of the South African church, under the leadership of clergy such as Desmond Tutu, from being concerned merely about white agendas and a rather meek opposition to Apartheid,

⁸¹ Message to the people of South Africa. SACC document. 1968.

to embracing the cause of the oppressed more fully. The task of ending Apartheid became more deliberately the mission of the ecumenical movement.

By the end of the 80's, the Council of Churches was at the forefront of the struggle to end apartheid. Many black political leaders were either in prison, exiled, banned or missing and presumed dead. Campaigns such as 'Standing for the Truth' were acts of open defiance to unjust rule by the Churches of the SACC.

The confrontation between the government and the SACC came to a head when government agents bombed Khotso House, which was the head office of the Council. Government agents continued to bomb the buildings of other significant opponents such as the head quarters of the Catholic Bishops Conference.

Throughout the struggle against Apartheid, the churches grew in their unity and mission. It was a common sight to see Church leaders of various traditions marching side by side in the streets in protest of one form or another. In many ways, a case could be made that the witness of the churches shone brightest when it was under such attacks as were meted out by the Apartheid regime.

Indeed the worldwide church in many ways stood by the 'suffering church' in South Africa. The outstanding charismatic leadership of clergy like Desmond Tutu, Frank Chikane, Allan Boesak and Archbishop Dennis Hurley was the sharp end of the spear of resistance by many ordinary Christians.

It is possible to see the unity manifested in the struggle against Apartheid as rather artificial, made possible by an external enemy and not funded by the spirituality

and theology of the churches. Commenting on the same issue, Dr Barney Pityana wrote:

Apartheid was, ironically and without doubt, a critical instrument of ecumenical practice. This was the strength and weakness of ecumenical praxis in South Africa. It was a strength because it demonstrated the capacity of the churches to unite into an effective witness against an evil social and political force....But this was a weakness because it was based on circumstances the churches themselves were working hard to destroy.⁸²

Indeed, in the post Apartheid period, there is a noticeable decline in the ecumenical enthusiasm of the churches. The mood is one of returning to the task of concentrating on the institutional development of the churches as denominations.

Turning to the theological basis for ecumenical action by the churches during the struggle against apartheid, Pityana decries the shallowness of the theology that formed the basis of the witness of the SACC. This he does on two counts: Firstly, the fact that the theology of the Church was pandering to the fears of white Christians, and unable to engage in adequate social analysis in order to become more prophetic. This effectively locked the witness of the SACC in what has been called 'Church theology' by the Kairos document.

This theology was in essence a rather weak and timid denunciation of the evil of Apartheid, articulated with caution by Church leaders, who were trapped in their own self interests. In those moments when the SACC was able to break loose from the stifling grip of Church theology, it was because then it was permitting the voice of ordinary Christians to speak, as opposed to advocating the carefully

⁸² International Review of Mission: Churches in Mission: South Africa, VolLXXXIII No 28, January 1994. Page116.

worded pronouncements of the church leaders committed to the maintenance of their ecclesiastical institutional stability. This voice of 'ordinary' people found its most eloquent articulation in the Kairos Document.

Secondly, he decries the fact that much of the ethical action of the ecumenical movement was buttressed by near-fundamentalist biblical interpretations, a fact that may perhaps be pointing to evangelical tendencies in the SACC.

There appeared to be a proof text for every action that was understood to be providing adequate justification. On this basis South African theology generated a battle of biblical texts that actually did not advance moral commitments.⁸³

Throughout most of this period, churches that self-identify as evangelical were not a significant part of the ecumenical movement, and therefore for the most part were theologically and spiritually disconnected from it.

The ecumenical movement in South Africa has other manifestations and organisational expressions, although it is chiefly organised in the South African Council of Churches, constituted as such in 1968 following the dissolution of its previous incarnation, the Christian Council of South Africa. This body's role is crucial in facilitating ecumenical cooperation in South Africa and will be the focus of this study.

At the time of this study, the SACC has as member bodies, all the mainline denominations, the Roman Catholic Church, The African Independent Churches as well as the Charismatic Churches (through their umbrella body the International

⁸³ *ibid* p117

Federation of Christian and Charismatic Churches (IFCC)) and some evangelical churches. Some of the evangelical churches joined the SACC after the end of the anti- Apartheid struggle, perhaps because the struggle was a large part of the cause of the division, as will be clearer in Chapter 4.

It is well to note that ecumenical cooperation also happens at the local level, among ministers fraternals, train churches⁸⁴, conferences and funeral vigils, to mention a few. Institutionalised forms of church co- operation need not blind us to the ecumenical possibilities at grass root level.

This chapter sought to describe ecumenism, rooting it in the Geneva based organisation of the World Council of Churches, while noting that the WCC as an organisation by no means exhausts the meaning of the term.

The history of the ecumenical movement was traced in respect of the three prongs of Missions, Faith and Order as well as Life and Work and how these flowed into the formation of WCC in 1948.

The minimal involvement of evangelicals in the WCC was noted, as well as their particular version of ecumenism.

Finally, ecumenism in South Africa was explored, with the spotlight falling on the South African Council of Churches, its history and role in facilitating the co-

⁸⁴ Believers using railway trains in Gauteng province hold church services in trains on their way to and from work. Coming from different churches, these believers normally take turns sharing testimonies, singing, preaching and praying for commuters.

operation of different churches in the nation.

It is significant that the WCC happened in the wake of the Second World War, when the world faced unprecedented levels of human suffering and pain. A response from the Churches could not but be from a vantage point of a united front. Similarly, in South Africa, Apartheid was the evil that helped to clarify the churches need for each other in order to mount a united response.

Further, evangelical priorities seemed to inform the less than enthusiastic engagement by evangelicals with ecumenical council of churches both at the global and national level. Evangelical theology and praxis, it seems, does not make for effective engagement with social challenges.

The stage is thus set to explore the international factors that inform the theme of evangelicalism and ecumenism in South Africa. This will be the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 3.

3. The Modernist - Fundamentalist debate.

To understand the relationship between evangelicals and ecumenism in South Africa, one needs to examine the international influences on this relationship. Since South African evangelicalism is a result of American and European evangelical missions, and continues to be influenced from those regions of the world, it is helpful to consider the development of evangelicalism in these countries. In particular, the modernist-fundamentalist debate in the USA and its variants in Europe as it has a bearing on how evangelicals have come to relate to ecumenism.

3.1 Europe.

With the rise of the Enlightenment in Europe in the 18th century, the idea that *rationalism was sufficient to understand the world and human existence within it* became the norm. This trend became dominant not only among secular thinkers, but also among Christian theologians. This meant that the basic means of Christian revelation, such as the bible and the person of Christ, were subjected to rational critique. By the mid 19th century Douglas Frank observes that as a result of the use of scientific critical methods of enquiry, “supernaturalism was clearly in the retreat even among Christian thinkers in Europe.”⁸⁵

One response to this Enlightenment liberalism came through conservative protestant theologians such as Karl Barth, who wrote extensively to counteract the liberal theological programme of his contemporaries. Although Barth could not be

⁸⁵ Frank, D. W. 1986. *Less than conquerors*. Grand Rapids. Michigan: Eerdmans. page 49

viewed as a classical evangelical, the neo orthodox theology he espoused in the light of the liberalism of his day eloquently represents evangelical concerns.

Knitter observes about Barth that:

his strong affirmations of the central evangelical principles of the authority of scripture, the centrality and uniqueness of Jesus Christ, and the necessity of Christian witness to the world make Barth an eloquent and sophisticated advocate for the evangelical attitude toward religious pluralism⁸⁶.

Douglas Frank described nineteenth century Protestant theology in Europe as having been "obsessively open to the Enlightenment-influenced intellectual climate of its day".⁸⁷ In comparison with the United States, Europe's embrace of Enlightenment rationalism and its conclusions was much bolder.

It is of significance that Barth's theological programme was also a response to the phenomenon of the 'cultural Protestantism' he encountered in Germany - a trend that saw German Christian leaders and theologians supporting the German war policies as necessary for the defence of Christian civilization⁸⁸.

Within Germany, and more broadly in Europe, theological liberalism was not countered by fundamentalism, as it was across the Atlantic. The theological, intellectual and social context was very different.

There was however, a similar approach in Barth's dialectical theology which in essence taught that:

a) God was unknowable and totally Other. Unless He took the initiative of self-

⁸⁶ Knitter, P. 1989. *No other Name? A critical survey of Christian attitudes toward the World Religions*. New York: Orbis. page 80.

⁸⁷ Frank, D. W. 1986. *Less than conquerors*, Grand Rapids Michigan: Eerdmans page 49

⁸⁸ Heron, A. I. C. 1980. *A century of Protestant Theology*, Cambridge: Lutterworth Press. page 75.

disclosure, He would remain unknowable to humankind.

- b) He has made Himself knowable through Christ.
- c) All human religious and theological constructs are doomed to failure unless they proceed from a) and b).

This theological approach was diametrically opposed to theological liberalism.⁸⁹

British Christianity was less prepared for the Enlightenment than continental European countries such as Germany. “with rare exceptions”; writes Alec Vidler:

theologians had remained impervious to the ferment that had been going on there since the time of Kant, and for the first half of the nineteenth century religious belief in England was comparatively little disturbed by new knowledge.⁹⁰

When the intellectual ferment from the continent took hold in England, it was more toned down. It is a matter of speculation whether this was on account of British temperament or a differing social and intellectual climate. In any event, it did not result in the same anti-intellectualism that occurred in the USA. Heron wonders whether this is because of a “lack of teutonic tough mindedness” among the Anglo Saxons⁹¹

According to J I Packer, the response of British evangelicalism to higher criticism differed, depending on whether one examines non Anglican evangelicalism or Anglican evangelicalism. Writing about the former, Packer contends that:

Before the (nineteenth) century ended, most non-Anglican evangelicals had accepted higher criticism. This proved disastrous, for evangelical theology had been conscientiously monolithic, seeking to be wholly bible based and bible controlled, and to judge everything by the biblical standard. As a result, when the formal principle of divine truth of biblical

⁸⁹ *ibid*78

⁹⁰ Vidler, A. page 114

⁹¹ Heron, A. I. C. 1980. *A century of Protestant Theology*, Cambridge: Lutterworth Press. page 75.

teaching, as such, was given up, evangelical theology literally fell to pieces.⁹²

He continues:

Its sharply defined traditional tenets - verbal inspiration, total depravity, sovereign grace, penal substitution, imputed righteousness, and final perseverance - dropped from the picture and its doctrinal outlines were blurred beyond recognition.⁹³

As for Anglican evangelicalism, Packer notes that there was a strong resistance, in the main, to higher criticism, and historic evangelical positions were upheld.⁹⁴

In the context of British evangelicalism, the liberal-conservative debate could be said to have come to a head in 1966, with the confrontation between two leading evangelical churchmen in Britain, Martyn Lloyd-Jones and John Stott.⁹⁵ The former issued a passionate call for evangelicals within the mainstream churches to come out and form their own churches. This was because to Martyn Lloyd-Jones's mind, the doctrinal laxity that arose in English churches as a result of liberal tendencies were leading to a dangerous spiritual decline. "To him it was a plain matter of fact that most of the church leaders, Anglican and Free Church, did not believe the Confessions of Faith of the denominations to which they belonged" writes Ian Murray⁹⁶. As an example of the trends in that day, a Methodist writer John J Vincent argued in the *Methodist Recorder*, dated 1961 Sept 7, that :

The doctrines of justification, of saving faith, assurance and holiness, belong to an intellectual and theological world which is no longer ours. They describe experiences which are no longer normative for Methodist

⁹² Packer, J. I. 1999. *Honoring the people of God: collected shorter writings*. UK: Paternoster press. page 319

⁹³ *ibid* 319

⁹⁴ *ibid* 319.

⁹⁵ France, R.T. and McGrath, A. E. eds. 1993. *Evangelical Anglican: their role and influence in the church today*. Kent: Mackays of Chatham plc, page 5.

⁹⁶ Brady, S. and Rowdon, H. (eds). 1996. *For such a Time as this*. page 167.

people.⁹⁷

Martyn Lloyd-Jones was a shaping force in British evangelicalism, and had suggested in 1939, with reference to modernist trends that “men of knowledge had been too readily accepted by the Church”.⁹⁸ Stott insisted that they remain within those churches and work for renewal from within. John Stott's motion prevailed, sealing a truce of creative, ‘centrist’ tension between the tendencies of liberalism and those of conservatism.

These trends set the scene in Europe for the evangelical-ecumenical debate.

3.2 The US context.

According to Douglas Frank, by the time the ‘historical critical method came to the States, some of its most stunning contributions had already become something like orthodoxy in Europe’.⁹⁹ Within the American context, there was a fierce resistance to the insights of scientific criticism.

The situation was worsened by the emergence at the same time of the so called social gospel, which was a liberal response to the problems of industrialisation at the time. Liberal theologians embraced this social agenda. A well known spokesman of this trend was Walter Rauschenbusch, who wrote several works such as ‘Christianity and Social Crisis’, ‘Christianizing the social order’ and ‘a Theology of the Social Gospel’. In all these he argued persuasively for the

⁹⁷ Murray, I. 1990. David Martin Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of faith 1939 –1981. Trowbridge: The Banner of Truth Trust, Camelot Press. page 438)

⁹⁸ *ibid* 439.

⁹⁹ Frank, D. W. 1986. Less than conquerors. Grand Rapids. Michigan: Eerdmans page50

acceptance of the social agenda in Christian witness¹⁰⁰. Quebedeaux observes that:

for liberals, the social dimension of the gospel, with its almost exclusive attention to the horizontal needs of man in society and its neglect of the vertical desires of the heart for God, became orthodox Christianity.¹⁰¹

By 1910, conservative evangelicals published twelve small volumes entitled: *The fundamentals: a testimony to the truth*. These fundamentals of the faith sought to defend biblical inerrancy against the liberal onslaught. Pre-millennial dispensationalism was also a strong feature of fundamentalism, which sought to counter what was seen as a liberal understanding that the Kingdom of God could gradually be brought about by human effort. This line up of conservative evangelical forces finally led to a showdown known as the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy.

Fundamentalism became an anti-intellectual counter cultural movement, with a rather populist character. As a reaction to liberalism, it was different from European anti-liberal theological programmes which were more academic. This had far reaching implications for evangelical theology and mission. In theology, a defensive posture developed among the evangelicals with a preoccupation of defending what was seen as biblical Christianity. In terms of mission, the more liberals concentrated on the social gospel, the more evangelicals avoided it. Evangelicals began to renounce social concern, which previously they were willing to consider as a legitimate aspect of the evangelical witness. The agendas of evangelicalism and liberalism seemed irreconcilable.

¹⁰⁰ Quebedeaux, R. 1974. *The Young evangelicals*. New York: Harper & Row, page 7

¹⁰¹ *ibid* 13

With the birth of the ecumenical movement, organised in the World Council of Churches, the fundamentalist-liberal debate translated into evangelical-ecumenical terms.

Within the USA context, by 1948, when the WCC was formed, evangelicals had matured beyond the radical fundamentalism of the 1920's and organised a neo-evangelical movement in the National Association of Evangelicals. The anti-intellectual excesses of Fundamentalism were dropped, and a new look evangelicalism emerged, taking forward some of the battles against liberalism¹⁰²

The battle lines, however remained on issues of theology and mission. Liberalism emphasized the 'already' of the kingdom, that is, the emphasis lay in the fact that the kingdom of God was already partially present within history in the form of concrete social justice, while evangelicalism emphasised the 'not yet' dimensions – where emphasis lay in the fact that the kingdom would come at the end of history.

Liberalism emphasized the secular and material, evangelicalism the spiritual; liberalism the social, evangelicalism the personal; liberalism the immanence of God, evangelicalism the transcendence of God; liberalism a wide vision of mission, evangelicalism a narrowly defined evangelism. While this stark dualism might serve as a model to understand the two movements, it is well to note that there have been shifts on both sides to embrace a holistic approach.

¹⁰² Ibid 14

For evangelicals, a process toward greater acceptance of social responsibility arose in part as a result of a rise of Third World evangelical missiology.¹⁰³ In a document edited by Rene Padilla and Chris Sugden, a series of statements resulting from international conferences affirming evangelical social concern is recorded.

Conversely, the ecumenical movement has also begun to affirm evangelical concerns for evangelism alongside social concern. At its Fifth General Assembly in Nairobi 1975, the WCC restored balance on what was seen as an overemphasis on the social agenda as opposed to the spiritual. The Commission for World Mission and Evangelism of the WCC issued statements to continue this trend. Significantly the statement on Mission and Evangelism - ecumenical affirmation, affirms:

The church is sent into the world to call people and nations to repentance, to announce forgiveness of sin and a new beginning in relation with God and with neighbour through Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁴

Also in 1987, the same body affirmed: "The essence of this good news is that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself and has now called us to a ministry of reconciliation."¹⁰⁵

That this has been without consistency can be seen from subsequent WCC assemblies. Rene Padilla has observed that:

Everything seems to indicate that the healthy balance between the ecumenical and evangelical dimensions with which the World Council of Churches as organised in 1948 has gradually been lost and that, at this moment, the most urgent need of the council is to regain the gospel for its

¹⁰³Rene Padilla and Chris Sugden .Texts on evangelical social ethics 1974 -1983 in Samuel and Sugden 1989: 73

¹⁰⁴ ibid 73

¹⁰⁵ International review of Missions VolLXXXI No.323 . 1992:382)

ecumenical work.¹⁰⁶

That said, the liberal-conservative dualism implicit in these theological currents in both Europe and North America, form the backdrop against which the debate on evangelicalism and ecumenism is to be understood in South Africa.

Indeed the modernist-fundamentalist controversies discussed in chapter three have figured in various ways within mainline denominations as well as the typically classical evangelical denominations.

Further, this modernist-fundamentalist tension has taken on a liberal - conservative political dimension in South Africa, with the notion of liberal connoting the tendency to participate in the struggle against Apartheid, and conservative a tendency to accommodate the Apartheid status quo.

Ecumenism in South Africa could not escape having to deal with the obvious stumbling block in the way of Christian community: the Apartheid policies of the government. Both in its **identity** as the one Body of Christ, in a context that decreed separate racial development, and its *mission* to proclaim the gospel message of reconciliation, the ecumenical movement was destined to a witness of confrontation with secular authority. Ecumenism became the story of how the churches collaborated (or failed to collaborate) in the struggle against Apartheid.

Up until the nineties, the ecumenical movement in South Africa was a Protestant affair. The Catholic Church only participated as full members in the 90's.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid* page 319

This chapter outlines the manifestations of the modernist- fundamentalist debate in the centers from which missions to South Africa was born, namely Europe and North America. The driving force of the debate in these countries was the spirit of enlightenment rationalism, which worked to blur the boundaries set up by evangelicalism, watering down some of its tenets.

It is the contention of this study that the said debate was exported along with evangelical missions to South Africa, and continues to influence the way evangelical churches, mission agencies and leaders relate to the local expression of the ecumenical movement.

It is significant that the South African expression of this debate is not driven to the same extent by the same forces of enlightenment rationalism, but by the way in which churches chose to respond to the system of Apartheid.

The way in which this happens will be explored further in the next chapter.

Chapter 4.

Evangelicals and Ecumenism in South Africa.

As has been stated previously, the locus of ecumenism will, for the purpose of this study, be taken to be the South African Council of Churches. That said, the relationship that evangelical denominations in South Africa have had in the period in question with the South African Council of Churches can be looked at in terms of three possible postures: *Positive, Neutral and Negative*.

Of necessity, this approach is a simplification, for at least two reasons:

Firstly, it is not inconceivable that any one evangelical denomination, numbering tens of thousands of adherents, could have all three postures represented within its ranks. Views of adherents vary according to a range of factors such as race, age group, position in the hierarchy and so on.

Secondly, the categories of positive, neutral and negative are but points in a continuum of possible postures. This is further complicated by the fact that churches have gone through an ecumenical learning curve during the period under study, with some denominations proceeding from positive to negative, while others traversing in the opposite direction. This simplification will be used because it enables the treatment of the pertinent issues that figure in the evangelical-ecumenical problematic. For the purpose of this study, only official views, or views held by persons holding official denominational or para-church leadership positions will be considered.

The objective of this chapter is firstly to describe these various postures in relation to the SACC, and secondly, to analyse the factors that inform alignment to those postures.

The postures that evangelicals take in relation to the SACC

A working definition of each posture will be advanced, followed by a description of the practice that attends a given posture.

4.1 A positive posture.

4.1.1 Definition:

Those evangelicals who take this position believe that evangelicals can have a mutually beneficial relationship with the SACC, learning and sharing in mutuality and interdependent partnership. This conviction has led some evangelical churches to take either observer membership or full membership in the Council of Churches. From the beginning, the SACC, and before it the Christian Council of South Africa had evangelical participation within its life and work. In fact the basis of faith of the SACC is one with which many evangelicals could get along. An SACC publication has correctly pointed out that:

The Christian faith does not have meaning if it does not have individual personal relationship with Jesus Christ. That statement would be agreed to by all from evangelical charismatic to Catholic. The aim of Christian mission is to bring people into a relationship with Jesus Christ and into fellowship through Christ with one another.¹⁰⁷

Indeed this view is echoed by one of the leading Pentecostal theologians in South Africa, Dr Japie J Lapoorta, who argues that evangelicals should have no problems

¹⁰⁷ Spong, B. and Mayson, C. 1993. *Come celebrate: 25 years of the South African Council of Churches*. Johannesburg: Edenvale printers. page 39

accepting the basis for membership in the SACC, which is

a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour, according to the Scriptures and therefore seeks to fulfill their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.¹⁰⁸

Lapoorta observes that this basis for membership is

Trinitarian, Christological and pneumatologically sound. It is firmly grounded in Scripture and affords those who participate an opportunity to be enriched and to enrich the body of Christ. It affords them the opportunity to have fellowship with God in the presence of fellow human beings and with other believers. From this engagement new relationships may be fostered and developed to the advancement of the kingdom of God.¹⁰⁹

4.1.2 The practice of the churches.

With the positive posture thus defined, a question arises whether there are in fact evangelical churches that fit this definition, and in practice have membership status with the SACC. In the period under investigation, 1960 -1990, evangelical churches that had, at one stage or another taken full or observer membership with the SACC included such churches as the Baptist Union, Baptist Convention, Church of the Nazarene, Salvation Army, International Fellowship of Christian Churches.

In this connection it is necessary to point out that some of these denominations, namely the Baptist Union of South Africa and Church of the Nazarene, have had serious theological differences with the Council, and in the period in view, have chosen to disaffiliate.

¹⁰⁸ SACC brochure.

¹⁰⁹ Lapoorta, J. J. 1997. *Unity or Division? The unity struggle of the black churches within the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa*. Cape Town: Salty print. Page 172.

4.1.3 Analysis of the underlying issues.

Of the twenty-nine member churches of the Evangelical Alliance of South Africa, ten (10) have responded to a questionnaire on their relationship with the SACC.

Three denominations, namely the Baptist Convention, the International federation of Charismatic Churches and the Salvation Army, describe their relationship with the SACC as positive (30%), two negative (20%) and five neutral. (50%).

This section will seek to discover, firstly, why those evangelicals who take a positive view of ecumenical relations do so, even as they maintain the same core values and doctrines espoused by their more conservative kindred. What benefit is this to them? In what ways can they expect to contribute to the well-being of the ecumenical movement?

4.1.3.1. *Theological issues.*

The issue to explore is what theological considerations figure in a positive evangelical assessment of the ecumenical ideal. A way of looking at the matter is to consider the ecumenical rhetoric of unity in mission, and to seek to discover whether, and to what extent, evangelicals embrace the undergirding theology. In doing so, evangelical core beliefs will be used as a yard stick. That is, does ecumenical participation enhance or undermine these core evangelical beliefs?

As has already been stated in 4.1.1 above, Dr J J Lapoorta, a leading Pentecostal pastor in the nation and a national executive member of the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa, argues that the AFM should have no difficulties in

accepting the basis of membership of the South African Council of Churches. Lapoorta takes seriously the High Priestly prayer for unity 'that the world may see and know.' The visible unity of the church affords convincing witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

While his own denomination at the time of this study is not yet part of the SACC, Lapoorta himself could be described as an ecumenical evangelical.

As stated previously (Chapter 1: page 16) in relation to the various strands that constitute evangelicalism, this posture tends to be adopted by the new evangelicals/radical evangelicals or ecumenical evangelicals. These are evangelicals with a strong social commitment and are open to dialoguing with liberation theology and the ecumenical movement.

Concerned Evangelicals, A group of evangelicals who emerged in the mid 1980s with an insistence that conservative evangelical theology did not demand conservative politics, and were involved in the struggle against Apartheid, rationalised their views on ecumenism thus:

This separation between evangelicals and so called ecumenicals is evident in South Africa...

We believe that salvation and social change cannot be separated from one another... We believe that the saving act of God is directed not only at individuals but at the whole creation... the saving act of Jesus must deal with the spiritual and the political socio economic realities of the world in which we live.¹¹⁰

Those evangelicals who participate in ecumenical contact can expect a vigorous

¹¹⁰ Evangelical Witness in South Africa, evangelicals critique their own theology and practice. 1986. Johannesburg: Order of Preachers Page 13

interrogation, and possibly reinterpretation and or theological deepening of their core beliefs around the themes of: Biblical authority, the sufficiency of the cross, conversion, evangelism and personal morality. The Kairos document, issued by ecumenical theologians in South Africa in 1985, and seen widely as an adequate assessment of ecumenical praxis in the South Africa of the 80s, will be used as a basis for this discussion.

Concerned Evangelicals, will be used as a case study to investigate these themes.

Biblical authority.

To assert that evangelicals hold a high view of scripture is not to state a uniquely evangelical belief. It is part of the common heritage of the Christian Church, in particular, the Protestant section of the church. Modern evangelicalism considers the matter of the authority of scripture between two poles. On the one hand, there is fundamentalism, which refuses to allow any biblical criticism, holding rather to unsustainable notions of inerrancy and inspiration. On the other hand, there is a biblical criticism that concludes that the "Bible is historically inaccurate, internally contradictory and theologically mistaken."¹¹¹

Evangelicals who have accepted the challenge posed by ecumenical interaction on the matter of biblical authority have sought to discover a middle path between the two poles. One that "welcomes the critical method in principle, yet denying that its implementation necessarily undermines, in theory or practice, the historic Christian

¹¹¹ France, R.T. and McGrath, A. E. eds. 1993. *Evangelical Anglican: their role and influence in the church today*. Kent: Mackays of Chatham plc, page 30

conviction concerning the divine authority of scripture.”¹¹²

This is obviously a welcome development on the part of modern evangelical scholarship, and promises a more engaging intellectual posture in regard to modern and postmodern challenges to biblical integrity.

Accordingly, ecumenical evangelicals have benefited from this ecumenical-evangelical dialogue.

In South Africa, the theological debate among evangelicals on biblical authority has not reached the levels of intellectual rigour that it has elsewhere in the world, particularly in so far as the integrity of the biblical witness in the context of Apartheid is concerned.

Evangelicals have tended pragmatically to engage in struggle against Apartheid without due regard to the task of consciously rooting their praxis on biblical ethics. In part this is on account of the limited resources and biblical scholarship available in the country. This is a weakness of the ecumenical discourse in South Africa, and will clearly need to be addressed if ecumenism is not to degenerate into mere pragmatism, where unity is based purely on utilitarian considerations.

It is noteworthy that numbers of leading Evangelicals and even Orthodox Christians within the ecumenical movement are concerned about this trend. A Statement of concern by participants of the Orthodox Churches at the WCC

¹¹² *ibid* 31.

Canberra assembly has noted:

The tendency to marginalise the Basis (of faith) in WCC work has created some dangerous trends in the WCC. We miss from many WCC documents the affirmation that Jesus Christ is the world's Saviour. We perceive a growing departure from biblically-based Christian understanding of the Trinitarian God, salvation, the good news of the gospel itself, human beings as created in the image and likeness of God and the Church.¹¹³

In similar vein, leading Latin American ecumenical evangelical theologian Rene Padilla bemoans the lack of theological cohesion in the WCC. Writing about the same Canberra assembly, he observes:

There are many today, inside and outside the WCC, who think that the original purpose (of the WCC) has slowly receded in the interests of ideological concerns that, however praiseworthy, do not unite but separate the churches. The solution is not to set aside the struggle for justice, peace and the integrity of creation, but to be involved in that struggle on the basis of a firm commitment to the Lord Jesus, God-man, and in faithfulness to scripture.¹¹⁴

Noting the gap between the WCC confessional basis and its programmes, he calls the WCC to address "the theological task of relating faith and life".¹¹⁵

These sentiments are clearly the concerns of people committed to the ideal of ecumenism, and who take the view that evangelicals can and should be participants in the ecumenical journey of the churches. The challenges of the 21st century will require a stronger biblical grounding of ecumenical praxis.

To be sure, biblical authority has been asserted in evangelical churches, without seriously grappling with the contradictions that have been brought about by the

¹¹³ Bong Rin Ro and Bruce Nicholls (eds). 1993. *Beyond Canberra 1993* Oxford: Regnum books, page 51

¹¹⁴ *ibid* page 37.

¹¹⁵ *ibid* 37

fact that the Protestant witness in South Africa has left a legacy of a theologically legitimised Apartheid. In this regard, the Concerned Evangelicals (CE), in a publication called *the Evangelical Witness in South Africa: evangelicals critique their own theology and practice*' (EWISA) elaborate the necessity for evangelicals not to approach the text of Romans 13 on submission to authority in a biblicist way, but to take the trouble of locating this text within its textual and historical context.

In doing this, CE was able to avoid the trap of a biblicist interpretation of the said scripture that had the effect of rendering them blind supporters of the Apartheid regime. After noting the political and class interests of those who insist on a biblicist reading of this text, the EWISA document notes:

For even a better understanding of Romans 13, and Paul, we also need to recapture or reconstruct, from various other sources, the circumstances during the time of Paul. That is, we need to understand the context of the text. This context does not only refer to the understanding of the whole text but it also refers to the historical circumstances of the time which prompted Paul to address this issue.¹¹⁶

Further, the comparing of notes within the evangelical-ecumenical context of struggle, led to the following insight in the EWISA document:

Scholars who have researched this historical context say that Paul was addressing himself to those who believed that Jesus is their only Lord and King to the extent that no other person or government should exercise authority over them.¹¹⁷

It was this sharing of resources of biblical scholarship that enabled a deepening of biblical criticism among ecumenical evangelicals, and helped to fund a prophetic evangelical praxis. As has already been mooted, it is only sad that more of such

¹¹⁶ Evangelical Witness in South Africa. evangelicals critique their own theology and practice. 1986. Johannesburg: Order of Preachers. Page 23.

¹¹⁷ *ibid* page 17.

resource sharing of the tools of biblical scholarship was not a widespread phenomenon.

The sufficiency of the cross.

The theme of the cross of Jesus Christ and His atoning death is virtually the fulcrum of the evangelical theological system. It informs other major themes, such the doctrine of sin, justification by faith, mission, conversion and salvation. In this sense evangelicalism is Christ centered. The uniqueness of Christ as Lord and His Salvific work are strictly upheld.

David Bosch in his book **Witness to the world** examines the theology and practice of missions among evangelicals and ecumenicals. Using simplified models of the respective positions of evangelicals and ecumenicals in respect to missions, he concludes that ecumenicals tend to view missions as humanisation while evangelicals tend to see it as evangelisation (saving of souls). Both, he says, need to be “engaged in more dialogue with each other and hopefully, to transcend their differences by becoming weak and humble, rather than arrogant and triumphalistic”.¹¹⁸

In doing so, evangelicals will be able to hear the ecumenical insights of holism that are a helpful corrective to the dualism of spiritual/secular, church/world, personal morality/community/social morality that often characterise evangelicalism.

Indeed this development is observable in the ecumenical journeys of evangelical

¹¹⁸ Bosch, D. J. 1980. *Witness to the World*. London : Marshall, Morgan and Scott, p 38.

churches such as the International Fellowship of Charismatic Churches, whose social concern have increasingly become a feature of their public witness, particularly in the 90's .

Ironically, it is this doctrine of the sufficiency of the cross that often led evangelicals in South Africa to be complacent in their sense of salvation by faith on the cross alone, as if the cross could be understood in ahistorical terms, where praxis is of secondary importance.

The EWISA document, in reference to Romans 5:10 which reads: "while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son", points out that:

It is clear that reconciliation (in South Africa) will not happen without sacrifice and pain. Reconciliation at times goes with tears. Some of us may have to be sacrificial lambs to effect reconciliation... reconciliation is not possible without repentance, confession of sins and forgiveness.¹¹⁹

Such then is the vision and approach of ecumenical evangelicals to the doctrine of the sufficiency of the cross. It enables a development of a holistic practice of their faith in the light of concrete circumstances in history, rather than a retreat into an ahistorical piety.

Conversion.

For some ecumenical evangelicals, such as the Salvation Army, the reason for ecumenical participation is, in part, in their very doctrinal basis. David Guy, ecumenical officer in the International Head quarters, London, writes:

¹¹⁹ Evangelical Witness in South Africa, evangelicals critique their own theology and practice. 1986. Johannesburg: Order of Preachers.. p 13

Because Salvationists believe that one vital element in the Christian life is evangelical conversion....we can never logically demand any other test of Christian identity than faith that works by love. If another trusts in Jesus Christ as Saviour and follows Him as master and Lord, no secondary doctrinal difference or divergence in worship and culture can forbid recognition and fellowship.¹²⁰

Yet it is possible to imagine Christian conversion in ahistorical terms. This is particularly possible when evangelicalism isolates itself from historical processes such as those that characterised the epic conflict in recent times between the Apartheid regime and the Democratic Movement that sought its demise.

Ecumenical participation on the other hand, enables the theological significance of conversion to be worked out in the context of the life and death struggles of the times.

Ecumenical discourse on Black Theology, Black Consciousness and Liberation Theology has helped to cast what might otherwise be an ahistorical conception of evangelical conversion onto a broader canvass of the totality of the human predicament in terms of social, structural and community as well as spiritual oppression.

Indeed Black Consciousness and Black Theology helped to deepen the present author's grasp that Christian conversion has limited meaning if it does not represent a rebellion against a sense of black subservience induced by the sin of white racism. Accordingly, conversion became not only a 'vertical' turning to Christ as Lord and Saviour, but a 'horizontal' commitment to the reclamation of

¹²⁰ Ecumenical Review, Vol 46, no 4, Oct 1994 page 436

black humanity through struggle.

The EWISA documents proclaimed:

In our proclamation of the gospel, we condemn sin in all its forms: personal, collective and structural. We also call people to repentance, with the promise of forgiveness of sin and restoration of relationship with God and people.¹²¹

Evangelism.

Like conversion, evangelism can be conceived in overly individualistic and ahistorical terms. Given the fact that evangelicalism in South Africa has, in the main, upheld a privatised religion of personal salvation, the ecumenical context has brought with it the challenge that if evangelism consists in the proclamation of the gospel that calls human beings to turn away from sin and commit to Christ by faith, then the following is true:

- a) Sin, being not only personal, but social and structural, needs to be repented of as it presents itself.
- b) Proclamation takes on a subversive character where sin has been institutionalised in society.
- c) The integrity of the evangelist consists in part in his/her non participation in the dominant sin of the culture. In the case of apartheid South Africa, Christian collaboration with Apartheid became evangelistically shortsighted.

Personal morality.

The evangelical ethos is strongly individualistic. Accordingly evangelical morality takes the same character, and selects a narrow agenda of personal morality as opposed to structural and social morality. The sin of Apartheid, being a social and structural sin, would ordinarily fall outside this moral vision. Ecumenical

¹²¹ Evangelical Witness in South Africa, evangelicals critique their own theology and practice. 1986. Johannesburg : Order of Preachers.. 17.

involvement has helped in the broadening of this vision to include Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation. The EWISA document has this to say about the need to expand the evangelical moral vision:

The problem with us evangelicals is that we became very radical and uncompromising against a selected set of sins and ignore the rest for reasons not clear to many. We preach vociferously against adultery, fornication and drunkenness, thieves, robbers, hatred, but are completely silent about the sins of discrimination and the sin of Apartheid.¹²²

As South Africa rebuilds itself in the new political context, it is not hard to see how evangelicalism, if it learns to broaden its moral horizon, could become more effective in the programme of nation-building. This is because this programme requires the linking of important moral concerns – curbing crises such as corruption, crime and the scourge of HIV/Aids – to socio-developmental concerns that help the alleviation of poverty.

How may these evangelicals contribute from their own heritage to the well-being of the ecumenical movement?

Ronald Nash, in his assessment of why most large mainline denominations in America have experienced a resurgence of evangelicalism in the late twentieth century, writes that:

Protestant liberalism was a religion without a personal God, without a divine Saviour, without an inspired bible and without a life-transforming conversion. By the end of the 1920s, this new religion had gained control of denominational schools, publications, mission boards, and eventually total control of mainline denominations.¹²³

Enquiring about the same phenomenon within Anglicanism in the UK, RT France and Alister McGrath write:

Survey after survey demonstrates the same finding: Evangelicalism is of

¹²² *ibid* 36.

¹²³ Nash, R. ed. 1987. *Evangelical Renewal in the mainline churches*, Westchester, Illinois; Crossway books. page ix.

growing importance to the worldwide church. Scarcely any part of the world has remained untouched by the global renaissance of evangelicalism. Even Latin America, traditionally regarded as a stronghold of Roman Catholicism, is now expected to become dominated by evangelicalism by the year 2025. The Anglican churches, and the Church of England in particular, are no exception to this rule. Anglicanism has been deeply affected, especially during the last two decades, by a resurgent evangelicalism within its ranks.¹²⁴

Arguing the case for evangelical renewal in the Lutheran church in the USA,

Waldo Werning draws attention to the following statistics:

... 30% of Lutherans have doubts about the deity of Jesus Christ, 40% have doubts about the existence of God, 25% of the Lutherans who were polled rejected the Trinity, 33% doubted that Jesus was perfect in every way, and 31% doubted that Jesus was even alive today...72% believed that most world religions lead to the same God, while 44% believe that salvation depends on simply being sincere in what you believe...¹²⁵

This international trend indicates that the people in the pews are passing a motion of no confidence on the mainline churches, voting with their feet and migrating to those churches with an evangelical commitment. Anderson (1992) bears out this trend in South Africa through his empirical research, documented in his book **Bazalwane**. People who explain why they left other churches simply put it: "...there was no teaching of salvation in these churches."¹²⁶

It seems that as the Christian Church starts the 21st century, an urgent need for doctrinal renewal obtains. People are looking for a deeper and more holistic spirituality than historic churches have allowed. Much blame must be laid at the door of theological liberalism on the wings of which the historic churches of the ecumenical movement have departed from some cardinal doctrines of the church.

¹²⁴ France, R.T. and McGrath, A. E. eds. 1993. *Evangelical Anglican: their role and influence in the church today*. Kent : Mackays of Chatham plc. page 1.

¹²⁵ Nash, R. ed. 1987. *Evangelical Renewal in the mainline churches*, Westchester, Illinois; Crossway books. page ix.

¹²⁶ Anderson, A. 1992. *Bazalwane*. Pretoria: UNISA. .page 31

As Nash puts it (1987: xii)

Liberalism denies the importance of repentance and conversion...For all its shortcomings, evangelicalism has something missing from liberalism: the life transforming message of the New Testament.¹²⁷

Ecumenical evangelicals who remain within ecumenical contexts consider it possible that by their presence and contribution they could become instruments of renewal, calling the churches to the original confessions of the reformation.

This requires a deliberate and vigorously pursued evangelical agenda to be thought through, systematized and executed with a long-range vision lasting decades. This is the case in other parts of the world, for example in the UK where Anglican Evangelicals have set up an organisation called the Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion (EFAC), whose founder president is a well-known evangelical theologian and pastor Dr John Stott. EFAC embarks on programmes that advance the cause of evangelicalism in the Anglican Church. In South Africa, this seems unlikely, in part because evangelicalism enters the ecumenical movement as a rather shy and timid minority, lacking confidence and theological sophistication to tackle the challenges at hand.

The history of compromise with Apartheid, and the lack of prophetic vigilance in the difficult years in the nation's history has left evangelicalism rather apologetic and uncertain of itself.

4.1.3.2 Some ideological/political issues: Lessons from the Kairos Document.

¹²⁷ Nash, R ed. 1987. *Evangelical Renewal in the mainline churches*. Westchester, Illinois: Crossway books. page 30

The theology and practice of ecumenical Christianity in South Africa in the last two decades can best be understood in terms of the Kairos Document (KD).¹²⁸ This document was published by the Institute for Contextual Theology in 1985, as a theological comment on the political crisis in South Africa at the time. It is world renowned for its incisive analysis of the South African situation at the time, and the way in which it made manifest the role various Churches played in relation to the key issues dividing the Church and Nation in the 80's. While the document was not published by the SACC, it significantly rationalises the modes of action that the SACC took in resistance to Apartheid at the time. The Kairos document also discloses the paradigm of Liberation Theology, on the basis of which evangelicals avoided SACC.

In its critique of the various theologies espoused by Christians in the face of the evil of Apartheid, it has some pertinent things to say that are of particular relevance to evangelicalism. This is so even if the document does not explicitly indicate that it intends to address evangelicalism as such.

It takes to task what could be seen as the tendency of evangelicalism in regard to:

- individualism,
- a liberal ethos,
- its theological method and
- its failure to be truly prophetic at a crucial time in the history of South Africa.

These points of criticism are not merely peripheral to the evangelical faith, but fundamental to its essence as well as the shape of its present and future witness in

¹²⁸ Kairos document. 1986. Braamfontein.: Skotaville publishers. Page 9.

South Africa. In a way, the Kairos document uncovers what seems to be a fundamental structural weakness with evangelical theology in South Africa. These are discussed as follows:

Individualism and its theological concomitants

Individualist concepts of sin, salvation, evangelism and reconciliation have far reaching implications for evangelical witness.

When the Kairos document attacked the superficial concepts of reconciliation and the moderation of church theology, it was taking issue with evangelical stereotypes. It so happens that at the time of the publication of the Kairos document, reconciliation as a possible national intervention to the South African crisis was advanced by the evangelical organisation, African Enterprise (AE), with significant evangelical support.

Undergirding this zeal for reconciliation seems to have been the idea that the social crisis into which South Africa was engulfed was due to individuals having a difference of opinion, to be resolved through talking things over. The fact that the sin of racism was not only a personal sin, but incarnated in socio-political institutions did not seem to have influenced strategies and tactics of this move for reconciliation. Such is the absence of rigorous social analysis in evangelicalism forged in a crucible of individualist religion. Individualism seems to be the hermeneutic through which evangelicals practise their religion.

Similarly, the theology of evangelism often lacks any social dimension, limiting

itself to the saving of souls. In fact, the problem of evangelism and its relationship to social concern is one of the problematic themes in evangelical-ecumenical discourse.

It is also of concern that in those (mainline) churches, such as the United Methodist Church in the US, which had experienced evangelical renewal, the result has been a rejection of liberation theology, setting up conservative programs such as the Institute for Religion and Democracy, whose anticommunism and rejection of liberation struggles are well known.¹²⁹

About the groups organising for evangelical renewal in the US Presbyterian church, Nash writes:

Some are concerned primarily with doctrinal renewal or evangelism or spiritual renewal, while others focus on single issues such as abortion, homosexuality, or denominational leaders' support for leftwing social and political causes.¹³⁰

Liberal values.

Liberalism in Europe from the early 19th century produced an intellectual, cultural and political attitude that celebrated personal liberty. Its values included the ideal of political liberty, the inevitability of progress through reason and the virtue of toleration¹³¹. These values continue to inform liberal discourse in South Africa today. It is easy to see how evangelical theology, with its insistence on personal piety, can be influenced by liberalism.

¹²⁹ Nash, R. ed. 1987. *Evangelical Renewal in the mainline churches*, Westchester, Illinois : Crossway books. page 90

¹³⁰ *ibid* 90.

¹³¹ McGrath, A. 1996. *A passion for Truth: the intellectual coherence of evangelicalism*. Leicester: Intervarsity press.

Balcomb shows that what often masquerades as evangelical balance in the context of revolutionary struggle, is really to do with the values of liberal democracy to which the evangelical establishment is conformed. This liberalism is unable to recognize its

own incipient ideological commitments which must, in turn, indicate a fundamental weakness in their theology. This weakness is reflected in the tendency to uncritically accept aspects of the ideological substructure of liberalism - for example its individualism and its penchant for free market capitalism. It is also reflected in the tendency to believe that theology can be done in a sociopolitical vacuum without taking into account the profound influences that socio political contexts bring to bear on the theological process.¹³²

The Kairos document poses the question of 'who' is speaking for the evangelical establishment: the dominant for whom the 'harmonising' values of liberalism are appealing, or the oppressed, whose context of agony and oppression demands radical transformation. It fingers the crucial role played by context, rather than only text, in the determination of Christian practice. A matter that evangelicals are wont to deny.

In the post cold-war period the dominance of liberalism is even greater. This means that the hegemony of liberalism as the 21st century begins will be almost complete, but for the faint voices of the poor, who clamour for alternatives in the economic, political, cultural and religious spheres. Whether Christianity in general, and evangelicalism in particular will be discerning enough to accompany the poor, remains to be seen. The EWISA document posed the question:

Does Christianity mean marriage with the government of the day? Is our evangelical faith radical or liberal? Does it call for uncompromising

¹³² Balcomb, A. 1993. *Third Way Theology, Reconciliation, revolution and reform in the South African Church of the 1980s*. Pietermaritzburg :Cluster publications,. page 79.

righteousness or for the compromised moderation?¹³³

The theological method.

How evangelicalism understands the bible, truth and the word of God was severely challenged in the process of the struggle and as indicated by the EWISA document. The ecumenical Christian community in South Africa was prophetic in the role it played in the Apartheid crisis and its transformation.

Many evangelicals have had to publicly apologise for the error of their ways. (Rustenberg¹³⁴) Those who felt called upon to offer the confessions very likely did not recognize the full extent of the error at hand. These apologies were, in essence, an admission that the evangelical method of arriving at the truth was inadequate, that in trying to remain biblically faithful, they became unbiblical.

To their surprise, God's decisive word in relation to the whole crisis of racism, evangelical complicity with Apartheid, as well as the struggle in South Africa came not from the bible preacher who promised to deliver 'the word of God', but from the youth, the women, the communists, the Catholics, the ecumenicals and the non believers - most of whom were thrown out of the church by the bible preacher.

The idea that discerning God's word and Christian faithfulness has something to do with working together with others did not enter the evangelical mind. Many of

¹³³ Evangelical Witness in South Africa, evangelicals critique their own theology and practice. 1986. Johannesburg : Order of Preachers... 36

¹³⁴ Rustenberg conference was an historic ecumenical conference widely representative of Churches across all denominations. The Conference convened to consider how Churches might respond to the unravelling political situation in the 1990s.

them insisted in working alone within evangelical camps, assured that they knew better what the will of the Lord is. They were wrong. This fact is on recorded in the annals of the nation in the form of the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, as a witness for ever to the fact that evangelical noninvolvement in the ecumenical struggle to end Apartheid was wrong.

The Rustenberg confessions were inadequate on two counts:

a) They were not confessions equal to the profundity of the error. The error was not merely that evangelicals did something wrong, i.e. failed to fight Apartheid. The error seems to be that they in fact *could not* do so. This on account of the structure of their individualistic theological method. The inadequacy of this method was neither admitted nor changed. Dr Derek Morpew, leader of the Association of Vineyard churches in South Africa, probed this difficulty in his own confession as a Charismatic leader when he spoke of a “gnostic dualism akin to the Gnosticism confronted by the early church fathers (dichotomy between spiritual and material reality)¹³⁵ that is discernible within the evangelical community in South Africa. In this reference to the problem of evangelical dualism, Morpew was only scratching the surface.

In a public confession at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, November 1997, the Church of England offered this explanation for their action:

We in the Church of England in South Africa found ourselves in a dilemma. To get on board the social action programmes and protest movements was to identify with a theological emphasis which we saw as a betrayal of Christ's message. As we distanced ourselves from liberation theology we were seen to support the system even further....Our way forward was to continue with the teaching and preaching of the Word of

¹³⁵ Alberts, L. and Chikane, F. 1991. The Road to Rustenberg, Cape Town: Struik Christian Books. 264.

God and to establish Churches...¹³⁶

This confession is that the preaching of the Word of God and the establishing of Churches was alright. How this was done, and what content was given to preaching was not given consideration. There is an incapability to recognize that the preaching of God's word would by definition be opposed to the sin of Apartheid, calling people out of it, and into forms of resisting it. But the personal, individualistic way of conceiving their faith puts structural sin out of focus.

b) The timing of the confessions - at the end of Apartheid - lends itself to the suspicion that it was opportunistic. It will be difficult to show that such confessions are not inspired by self-interest in a changing South Africa. Ellis Andre, former president of the Baptist Union, in his confession added that "we have often succumbed to our own self interest and not those of the Lord."¹³⁷

Failure to be prophetic

Precisely because of the above, and the biblicism prevalent among evangelicals, what the Kairos document describes as 'State' and 'Church' theologies have been significant features among evangelicals. The Evangelical Witness document affirms:

Our frustration was that our own churches, groups or organisations were almost lost and could not provide prophetic light in this situation. At worst most would be supporting the status quo instead of being conscience to the state. We felt that although our perception of the gospel helped us to be what we are, saved by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, born again into the family of the Kingdom of God, our theology nevertheless was

¹³⁶ Truth and Reconciliation Commission records, Nov 1997.

¹³⁷ Alberts, L. and Chikane, F. 1991. *The Road to Rustenberg*, Cape Town: Struik Christian Books. page 196

inadequate to address the crisis we were facing¹³⁸

Evangelicalism has simply never learned to incarnate the word of the gospel in its life, institutions and theology. As a result, it was largely irrelevant in South Africa.

Ideological and political considerations.

While the Kairos document provides a theoretical tool to understand the way the churches aligned themselves with respect to the challenge of Apartheid, it is important to consider how some churches reacted at an ideological level in respect of participation with the SACC.

Ideologically, responses to the last three decades of apartheid rule could be viewed as right wing, liberal and left wing. As used in this case, these terms broadly mean:

Right wing: The ideology that supports the political system of Apartheid, which was based on white supremacy, and black subjugation.

Left wing: The ideology that seeks to bring about the total transformation of this political system and to replace it with a non racial democracy extending the franchise to all.

Reforminst: A compromise ideological option that avoids total transformation on the one hand and support of the status quo on the other. Concretely and programmatically, this is a reformist approach to change.

¹³⁸ *Evangelical Witness in South Africa, evangelicals critique their own theology and practice.* 1986. Johannesburg : Order of Preachers.. page 2.

From the seventies, with the rise of black leadership at the SACC, and the popularisation of Black theology and Black Consciousness, the SACC increasingly moved to the ideological left.

As the nature of South African politics unfolded in the 80s and 90s, churches felt called upon to declare their position with regard to Apartheid. In concrete terms, this boiled down to whether they were willing to become part of the prophetic witness of the SACC, or whether they wished to remain outside that witness. Remaining so invariably meant collaboration or acquiescence with Apartheid. Several opted to join the SACC.

In the years before 1994, evangelical churches that joined the Council did so to '*join the struggle*' as it were.

Members of the Baptist Convention wrote in a March 1987 newsletter of the Fellowship of Concerned Baptists:

What can we as Baptists do to extend the Kingdom of God in South Africa at this time and how can Baptists through a prophetic ministry as well as specific actions help to build a new, democratic, non-racial South Africa in which the Church of Jesus Christ will be an influential force.¹³⁹

This marked the beginnings of the acceptance of the pioneering and prophetic leadership of the SACC.

In subsequent years, particularly after the end of Apartheid the reasons for evangelical participation have become more mixed. The International Fellowship

¹³⁹ Kretschmar, L.1998. Privatisation of the Christian faith: mission, social ethics and the South African Baptists. Legon, Ghana: Legon Theological Studies Series. Page 316

of Christian and Charismatic Churches (IFCC), for example, describes matters in this way:

with the fast changing political and social landscape, the IFCC leadership believed it was important for the organisation to position itself to become a role player in the new South Africa.¹⁴⁰

Public positioning in respect of the new power structures in the nation became an important consideration. This points to a need to develop a serious biblically grounded theology of political participation. Ecumenical evangelicals, in joining the SACC, have taken the first tentative steps in that direction, but clearly the need is to deepen reflection in the area of evangelicals and politics, so as to fund a more realistic engagement with the unfolding democratic transformation of South Africa. Otherwise ecumenical discourse will remain opportunistic and shallow, unable to plumb, and bear witness to, the depths of the ideal of unity to which the Lord of the Church has called it.

4.2. A neutral posture.

4.2.1. Definition

This posture could be understood as a pragmatic participation in ecumenical relationships, rather than participation as a matter of theological principle. To be or not to be involved is rather inconsequential. There is an attitude of half-heartedness about matters ecumenical, no theological vision for ecumenism and certainly no serious material nor personnel investment in it. Discussing what he sees as fracture points for evangelicals in the UK, Rob Warner believes that the great majority of evangelicals in that country fall within this posture. He writes:

¹⁴⁰ Questionnaire IFCC response to questionnaire. See sample in appendix 2.

They are neither convinced by the claim that biblical principles demand unqualified participation in the ecumenical structures, nor by the claim that biblical integrity forbids entirely all manner of cooperation and dialogue... they therefore prefer to stay involved to a limited degree... Their participation is cautious and pragmatic.¹⁴¹

This trend is also noticeable in South Africa, as the majority of evangelical denominations describe their posture as neutral. In some instances, neutrality has consisted of a balancing act of opposing forces within the churches, where one section of the church, typically white, seeks a negative posture while another section of the church, typically black, prefers the positive posture. This is evident in the Apostolic Faith Mission case study discussed below.

At other times the internal tension between these opposing racial tendencies fracture, leading to one side of the Church joining the SACC, e.g. the black Baptist Convention, while the white Baptist Union prefers to remain outside the SACC.

It is helpful, in discerning this posture, to consider a comment by Dr Francois P Moller,¹⁴² in his response to ecumenist Prof John De Gruchy at the Rustenberg conference. After conceding the problem of Church fragmentation in these terms:

we are fragmented and divided, and are therefore not always trustworthy in our witness to the world. We have to reaffirm, in words and in action, our unity in Christ and our common witness. Although this concept is not new to us, this sense of belonging to one another, as Prof De Gruchy stated, has far too often been broken apart when we return to our own constituencies and continue our own ministry in the parameters of our own particular Church, cultural and racial group. And may God help us to change this attitude.

After this realistic appraisal of Christian disunity, he turns, in his conclusion, in the

¹⁴¹ Calver, C. & Warner, R. 1995. *Together we Stand, evangelical convictions, unity and vision*. London: Hodder & Stoughton. Page 74.

¹⁴² Alberts, L. Chikane, F. 1991. *The Road to Rustenberg*. Cape Town.: Struik Christian Books. 123,124.

opposite direction:

But in conclusion I would like to make one negative remark. It is clear to me that there is no hope for the unity and the effectiveness of the Church's message without a very personal and real relationship with the living Christ. I am convinced we will not survive as a Church and as Christians in this very hostile world, by living in a relationship with certain truths, although these truths are based on the bible itself.

He continues:

Christianity involves more than certain truths about God, society and the world. We have to confront people, not only with some things about the Gospel, but primarily with someone - Jesus Christ...

To Moller's mind, evangelical-ecumenical unity stands or falls on the priority and importance of the evangelical doctrine of personal faith in Christ, and whether missions is conceived in this narrow sense. Moller believes that:

change in society begins with a change in heart due to the encounter with God Himself, through a real and concrete intervention of the Holy Spirit.¹⁴³

He obviously does not know what Concerned Evangelicals knew when they wrote that they faced a crisis in the

dilemma of being oppressed and exploited by people who claim to be Christians, especially those who claim to be born again. A dilemma of being detained by these people, tortured and even killed by them in the name of Law and Order.¹⁴⁴

This posture therefore is typically an event-based cooperation, such as joint conferences and joint action. Not hard to see in light of what Moller says:

divisions are here to stay until the return of Jesus Christ. That is a reality. My question is therefore: is there any possible way in which we can use these difference and divisions to promote the task and witness of the church?¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ ibid 125

¹⁴⁴ Evangelical Witness in South Africa: evangelicals critique their own theology and practice. 1986. Johannesburg: Order of Preachers .Page 5.

¹⁴⁵ Albers, L. and Chikane, F. 1991. The Road to Rustenberg. .Cape Town: Struik Christian Books. Page 125.

What Moller asserts though, is an important and nonnegotiable part of evangelical self-identity. It is what the evangelical feels called to steward and bear witness to in the world. While other believers may indeed embrace these typically evangelical beliefs, they may not feel called to prioritise them above all others as evangelicals do. They steward and bear witness to different graces and charisms from the Lord of the Church. The ecumenical imperative enjoins us to nurse the hope that the one will learn from the other, in all humility.

This statement demonstrates the dilemma of contradictory tendencies inherent in the posture of ecumenical neutrality.

4.2.2. The practice of the churches.

Evangelical denominations that have described their relationship with the SACC as neutral include:

Apostolic Faith Mission Church, The Full Gospel Church of God and The Alliance Church of South Africa.

A common expression of ecumenical co-operation among these churches include joint conferences, projects and renewal services, especially among charismatics.

A. Joint evangelical - ecumenical conferences.

This form of ecumenical participation, while it points to rapprochement and the lessening of tensions, leading to greater understanding, falls short of the principled unity, in which resources and personnel are committed in the pursuit of common

goals.

That said, the following ecumenical experiments are mentioned for the record as pointing to the possibilities of greater evangelical- ecumenical co-operation.

4.2.2.1 The Durban mission congress in 1973.

This was held at the suggestion of SACC general secretary John Rees and Michael Cassidy of the evangelical organisation African Enterprise.¹⁴⁶ It was a significant watershed in the theological life of the SACC.¹⁴⁷ It brought together 630 delegates from 31 denominations. Thomas observes that the fact that the conference could “hold such a wide spectrum of Christians together for ten days despite considerable strains and tensions indicates the growth of a significant ecumenical spirit”.¹⁴⁸

Reporting in the SACC magazine *Kairos* at the time, editor John de Gruchy wrote of conservative evangelicals at the conference speaking of “socio-political issues with a deep felt concern such as I have seldom heard.”¹⁴⁹

Of the same conference, Assemblies of God (AOG) pastor Peter Watt, writing a history of his denomination, comments about how the Durban ecumenical conference on mission and evangelism, in which key AOG leaders participated, had a marked impact in the AOG. Structures of racial differentiation within the

¹⁴⁶ Spong, B. and Mayson, C. 1993. *Come celebrate: 25 years of the South African Council of Churches*. Johannesburg: Edenvale printers. page 46.

¹⁴⁷ *ibid* 114

¹⁴⁸ *ibid* 32

¹⁴⁹ *ibid* 47

AOG work were changed.

In 1973 representatives of the Assemblies of God attended the congress on Mission and Evangelism in Durban. This was the first time that any Assemblies of God leader had been exposed to such contact with other South African churches. It was quite a traumatic experience. At this conference the realisation dawned on John Bond and Nicholas Bhengu that the separate interim conferences that were being held could be interpreted as a reflection of government policy and the maintenance of the status quo in the church. For the sake of the ministry of the Assemblies of God in black Africa, they felt it was necessary to scrap all the appearance of division that could be viewed as apartheid in the church.¹⁵⁰

This underlines the fact that ecumenical participation had an important role to play in the self-understanding of the church, that is, how the AOG's presence in the world was to be accounted for. That Watt refers to the ecumenical encounter as 'traumatic' is telling. The shock value of encountering truth in others must have done something to the AOG, which ordinarily displays a sort of complacent smugness in respect to ecumenical matters.

4.2.2.2. *Rustenberg Conference 1990.*

A remarkable feature of the Rustenberg conference, held in 1991, is that it brought together the largest denominational spread of the Christian churches in South Africa, mainline churches as well as African Independent churches, evangelical as well as charismatic churches. Churches of the SACC came together with evangelical churches in a rare occasion of ecumenical collaboration.

It is significant that this event was occasioned, sadly, not by the churches themselves, but the then State President, whose agenda was rather dubious. Once the initial reservations were overcome, the churches gathered to consider the issues

¹⁵⁰ Watt, P. 1992. *From Africa's soil, the story of the Assemblies of God in Africa.* Cape Town: Struik Books. page 72.

at hand amidst huge mistrust among themselves.

Co-chairman of the conference, and then General Secretary of the SACC Rev Frank Chikane, had this to say about this landmark event in the ecumenical journey of the churches in South Africa:

We had, for the first time, the opportunity of living together, praying together and sharing together. We had an opportunity to get to know one another. We had an opportunity to shed stereotypes, distortions and caricatures of one another. We discovered that we can witness together and listen to the same Lord irrespective of our differences.¹⁵¹

These comments are all the more significant as they were said by an evangelical leader who happened to be the General Secretary of the SACC.

This Rustenberg conference will go down in history as an event in which the churches gathered on the eve of the demise of Apartheid to consider their past record of witness as well as their future course of action.

A significant feature of this conference was the frank confessions by all church leaders of the failure of their church institutions to bear effective witness during the dark days of the nation's history. It was an occasion for reconciliatory confession between the churches and the different races. In this way, it laid the basis for future cooperation between the churches. Most significantly, the relationships that were forged during this event, led to the effective brokering of the National Peace Accord in the ensuing period to stem the tide of political violence.

¹⁵¹ Alberts, L. Chikane, F. (ed). 1991. The Road to Rustenberg: the Church looking forward to a new South Africa. Cape Town: Struik Christian Books.. page 10.

Whether more of such positive public interventions could be possible in the future is an open question, as the momentum of the post Rustenberg conference dissipated due to the fact that there were no broadly accepted mechanisms to harness the energies of the disparate forces of Rustenberg. (This inability for effective follow up is part of the weaknesses of an event based unity.)

B. The charismatic renewal.

The charismatic renewal is ecumenical in character in that it is a spiritual experience and manifestation of charismatic gifts that happened spontaneously since the 1960's in all denominations. About it Michael Harper writes:

There is a sharing together at the deep levels of worship, prayer, spiritual gifts and ministries and testimony, as well as biblical teaching. This is not to disguise the fact that there are still many differences between Christians and many difficulties in the pathway to unity. But those involved believe that this is where Christians should begin in their quest for unity, not at the conference table or the debating chamber...The ecumenical movement seems to put the cart before the horse; where this new move of the Holy Spirit is indicating what we should be doing first.¹⁵²

In South Africa, a leading Charismatic Archbishop of the Anglican church and former Generals Secretary of the SACC, Dr B Burnett, in a letter to a leader of an evangelical Pentecostal church wrote:

I have ...deep gratitude for the help freely given to me and to many Anglicans as the Holy Spirit came upon parts of our Church from 1972 onwards. Your deeply rooted Biblical base had much to teach many of our priests and lay people. It is clear to me that the Assemblies of God is a Church which sees itself as part of the Catholic church of God.¹⁵³

There can be no argument that the charismatic movement did a lot to lessen the

¹⁵² Quebedeaux, R. 1974. *The Young evangelicals*. New York: Harper & Row. page 43

¹⁵³ Watt, P. 1992. *From Africa's soil, the story of the Assemblies of God in Africa*, Cape Town: Struik Books.. page 161

tensions that have characterised evangelical - ecumenical relations in South Africa, while at the same time underscoring a common divine authorisation of ecclesiastically disparate groups. A quote in the official newsletter of the SACC in June 3, 1974 goes:

In Johannesburg last Sunday..a Roman Catholic priest and an Anglican clergyman shared in a 'house mass' for a group of Charismatics. In Kloof near Durban, a minister from a conservative Pentecostal church addressed a large group of mainly Anglican and Catholic Charismatics. In East London, Baptists, Catholic Charismatics and Methodists joined in counseling and ministry sessions in an Anglican renewal campaign... in the words of Catholic Charismatic leader Mr Cliff de Gersigny: 'Catholics were unsaved and unsaveable as far as people in the Pentecostal churches were concerned. But now we are having the closest fellowship with these people.'¹⁵⁴

This participation, however does not take away the general trend of evangelical non-involvement in the ecumenical movement. It does however, point to the fact that whenever ecumenical co-operation has occurred, the possibilities for growth have been advanced.

Speaking at the Rustenberg conference about the fact of evangelical non-involvement in the SACC Rev Ellis Andre of the Baptist Union said: "We certainly felt the impoverishment of our self imposed exile, and much, much

poorer for our foolish action of actually withdrawing even observer status from the SACC."¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ Thomas, D. 1980. Councils in the Ecumenical Movement South Africa 1904 -1975, SACC, Johannesburg page 34.

¹⁵⁵ Alberts, L. Chikane, F. (ed), 1991. The Road to Rustenberg: the Church looking forward to a new South Africa, Struik Christian Books, Cape Town. p 195

4.2.3. Analysis.

4.2.3.1 Theological issues.

What are some of the theological considerations that inform the neutral posture. In answering this question a case study of the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) Church will be used.

The Apostolic Faith Mission

(The AFM is arguably the largest Pentecostal denomination in South Africa, with a membership of a million people)

The AFM sent a delegation to the SACC in 1988 to discuss issues of concern, which were particularly problematic because the general secretary of the SACC at the time was an AFM pastor, Rev Frank Chikane. These issues included Liberation Theology, Marxism and interfaith issues.¹⁵⁶ These three issues form, in the main, the crucial basis informing non participation of evangelical churches in general, but the AFM in particular, in the ecumenical movement in the period under study.

For the AFM, as indeed for many evangelical churches, participation in the ecumenical movement was racially polarised. The General Secretary Rev George Mahlobo writes about the SACC¹⁵⁷:

Those who were opposed to taking SACC membership argued from a political perspective that SACC was perceived to be advocating a violent change of the political system. That SACC generally was embracing liberation theologies and ideologies which were not accommodated in the Pentecostal circles.

¹⁵⁶ AFM response to Questionnaire (appendix 3).

¹⁵⁷ Minutes of Doctrine, Ethics and Liturgy joint committee AFM, 1994.

Those who were positive about taking SACC membership were arguing from a pragmatic perspective that Christians were entitled to embrace force as part of their self defence against apartheid. Liberation theologies assisted in articulating resistance to apartheid. SACC was the most vocal, relevant and effective ecumenical body to empower people to rise against an oppressive and diabolical system.

The general theme of Liberation theology was clearly found relevant by black sections of the church, while it was found objectionable by the white section, many of whom were beneficiaries of the Apartheid system.

The Doctrine, Ethics and Liturgy joint committee pronounced in 1994 regarding Liberation Theology that:

We acknowledge that the theologies of apartheid and Liberation are outdated due to the new social order in South Africa

We reaffirm whole heartedly our commitment and acceptance of the sovereignty of the God of the bible, His exclusive revelation in Jesus Christ and the Bible as the supreme source of theology as expressed in the confession of faith.

All other theologies in conflict with the above are not acceptable.

To the Doctrine, Ethics and Liturgy (DEL) joint committee, Apartheid and liberation theology were both history and irrelevant to church life in South Africa.

The joint committee DEL made these pronouncement at the end of the Apartheid era and in the heat of the struggle for the unity of the up to then, a racially divided denomination. Apartheid was a key factor in the division, and the relief at its demise is discernible in the pronouncement of the DEL.

Further, merely saying that “the theologies of apartheid and liberation are outdated due to the new social order in South Africa” shows a lack of serious engagement

with the underlying issues, which even in the new South Africa continue to hinder effective unity and reconciliation. This is quite apart from the fact that the AFM, in making this pronouncement, lost an opportunity to give witness to the liberating power of the gospel in a world in which billions globally continue to suffer oppression and marginalisation not dissimilar to Apartheid.

About Interfaith matters, the DEL pronounced:

We declare that the Triune God is the only true God and that Jesus Christ His Son, is the only way to God and Salvation.

Although we stand for freedom of religion, we totally reject the equality of all religions before God.

In as far as the standpoint above is not acknowledged by the Interfaith Movement we can not be involved in it.¹⁵⁸

And further, regarding the SACC, the DEL continues:

that the declaration taken on the interfaith movement sufficiently covers any participation in the SACC.

The above pronouncements of the AFM are typically evangelical declarations of faith, and revolve around the three coordinates of the authority of scripture, the uniqueness and sufficiency of the cross of Christ and a notion of evangelisation that excludes the insights of liberation theology.

4.2.3.2 Ideological issues

This option allows those who embrace it to sit on the fence in their consideration of how concretely to give expression to ecumenism.

In the case of the AFM, it is important to note that in the period 1960 to the nineties, the AFM was, though majority black, a mainly white denomination, with

¹⁵⁸ *ibid*

the black section of the church being relegated to a mission department of the church. The power relations therefore, were heavily on the side of the white section of the church.

In practice, this meant that the ideological commitment of the white churches held sway, and was mainly an acceptance of the Apartheid status quo. The AFM official mouthpiece, *The Comforter*, carried an article on 'The Church and Racialism' in September 1955, which argued that whites are "emotionally far more sensitive than blacks" and that "it is an undeniable fact that the spiritual susceptibility of the races are miles apart." The article concluded: "God does not want to see the two races in the country merge and become one". This was seen as "wrong and contrary to the divine will."¹⁵⁹ This type of racism, appearing in official publications as recently as 1955, can be expected to continue to exist even though in subtler forms in subsequent years.

While this white supremacist ideology was a feature of the white church, the black section of the church, when it became vocal in the course of the revolutionary ferment of the ensuing years, articulated at its Workers Council in 1986:

We reject the system of apartheid based on racial discrimination. We stand for justice and equal opportunities for every body in all aspects of life.¹⁶⁰

The struggle for Church unity inside the AFM is therefore a struggle that brings the two opposing ideological commitments together in an encounter that has far-reaching implications for reconciliation and mission beyond Apartheid. What

¹⁵⁹ Lapoorta, J. J. 1997. Unity or Division? The unity struggle of the black churches within the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa, Salty print, Cape Town. page 58.

¹⁶⁰ *ibid* 75

direction such an encounter will take remains to be seen. Suffice it to say that the neutrality for the AFM is a balancing act in view of the left and right wing tendencies in the church.

This approach is best understood in terms of the evangelical tendency of seeking balance between revolution on the one hand and accommodation of the status quo on the other. Orlando Costas argues that in Latin America, evangelical missions have embraced uncritically the liberal ideological ethos of the West. Belief in such values as progress, liberty and individualism show the links between the modern missionary enterprise and the world of free enterprise, as do the embrace of organisational models borrowed from capitalist enterprises and training seminary institutions that embrace liberal ideology.

In so doing, they (evangelical missions) fail to be prophetic in their own context. They find themselves serving the interests of the liberal project, wittingly or unwittingly as they function within a “worldwide system that often uses people, movements, and institutions for purposes other than the communication of the gospel and its liberating power”¹⁶¹

It is therefore no surprise that the evangelical ecclesial practice has often opted for neutrality in the face of social conflicts in which liberation confronts oppression, such as it was in the struggle against Apartheid.

¹⁶¹ Costas, O. 1982. *Christ outside the gate: mission beyond Christendom*, Orbis Books, New York. Page 66.

Similarly, Balcomb makes the case that the commonality of interests between the politics of liberalism in South Africa and 'third way theology' influences Christians to embrace uncritically "aspects of the ideological substructure of liberalism - for example individualism and its penchant for free market capitalism."¹⁶²

In South Africa, this is mainly noticeable in relation to the problem of Apartheid and how the churches have responded to it. If it is true that the ecumenical movement in South Africa in the thirty years between 1960 and 1990 has seen the struggle against apartheid as a key aspect of the witness of the churches, evangelical churches opting for ecumenical neutrality display a tragic indecision in giving witness against a universally accepted evil.

It is as if evangelical witness could be allowed the luxury of being ahistorical in the face of concrete challenges to its integrity. The Relevant Fellowship of Concerned Christians (RFCC), a black grass-root movement within the Apostolic Faith Mission Church, in its critique of the theory and practice of unity in the AFM church called on the Church, in a publication *The Apostolic faith Mission Church - a challenge to action*, to encourage ecumenical fellowship between the AFM and other churches and relevant church bodies.

This meant that for the AFM, the challenge was to join the struggle against the system of Apartheid. The RFCC self-consciously presented the publication as an

¹⁶² Balcomb, A. 1993. *Third World Theology, Reconciliation, revolution and reform in the South African Church the 1980s*, Cluster publications, Pietermaritzburg. page 79.

ecumenical contribution, thus rooting itself within the ecumenical milieu. The document was issued as a “reflection.... to give an amount of hope, to create more awareness and prompt action among all AFM members, evangelicals and the broader ecumenical family”.¹⁶³

The fact that the RFCC was a black grass-root movement within the church also shows the ideological split that is a typical feature in churches during the years of Apartheid. White church members typically gravitated to the ideological right, while blacks went to the ideological left.

Another way of looking at the problem of liberalism in respect of the practice of the churches is to explore what the Kairos document described as Church theology. This is a theology that white church leaders used to respond to the crisis of Apartheid. About it the Kairos document says:

We have analysed the statements that are made from time to time by the so-called ‘English speaking Churches’. We have looked at what Church leaders tend to say in their speeches and press statements about the apartheid regime and the present crisis. What we found running through all these pronouncements is a series of interrelated theological assumptions. These we have chosen to call ‘Church theology.’....In a limited, guarded and cautious way, this theology is critical of apartheid. Its criticism, however, is superficial and counter productive because instead of engaging in an in depth analysis of the signs of the times, it relies upon a few stock ideas derived from Christian tradition.¹⁶⁴

The Kairos document attempted to show that the theology and practice of the church leaders was out of touch with the majority of the people in black churches. It not only lacked social analysis, it lacked understanding of politics and the need to develop a political strategy that tackles political conflicts. Church theology was

¹⁶³ Apostolic Faith Mission: A challenge to action, ICT, Braamfontein 1987

¹⁶⁴ The Kairos Document. Page 14.

paralysed by its search for Church solutions to what is basically a political problem awaiting political resolution.

There is no specifically Christian solution. There will be a Christian way of approaching the political solution, a Christian spirit and motivation and attitude. But there is no way of bypassing politics and political strategies.¹⁶⁵

A further critique of Church theology, which is particularly critical to evangelical theology, is the type of faith and spirituality that informs it. It is a spirituality that is otherworldly and relies on God's intervention in history, while relegating human agency to a passive mode. It is a type of spirituality that, because it is otherworldly, conforms itself to the existing culture, just as water takes the shape of the container in which it finds itself. This is clearly a weakness in a spirituality that seems, by its very nature of being focused on the other world, unable to effectively question existing structures of injustice. This lends credence to the charge that religion is the opium of the people.

4.3 A negative posture

4.3.1 Definition

The view held here is that with varying degrees of politeness, ecumenical relationships are a waste of time, leading to a compromise on doctrinal truth and the priority of evangelism. There is a sense of principled antipathy.

Alan Gibson has written that there might well be a "duty for churches to bear witness to the gospel, not only by their preaching but also by the company they keep."¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ *ibid* 19

¹⁶⁶ Brady, S. and Rowdon, H. (eds) 1996. *For such a time as this: perspectives on evangelicalism*,

This approach argues for the need for formal separation from churches that appear to deny the gospel as evangelicals understand it. "It is a matter of conscience and loyalty to the Saviour Himself", writes

Gibson ¹⁶⁷

Harold Fuller, writing the story of the World Evangelical fellowship, believes that evangelicals committed to doctrinal purity and Christian unity exercise what he believes to be a biblical ecumenism. Such evangelicals "recognise their oneness with all who are born again of the Spirit." He observes that

they are held together - not by a conciliar structure, but by the essentials of their faith. The spiritual unity transcends politics, geography, and culture. ¹⁶⁸

While this may be true elsewhere in the world, the experience in South Africa is that evangelicals have been unable to be ecumenical even among themselves.

EWISA noted that:

the most startling part of this question of evangelicalism and ecumenism is that evangelicals find it difficult even to relate to one another. One finds various forms of ecumenical structures between the so called ecumenical Churches....Within evangelical circles there is very little ecumenical activity or fellowship. ¹⁶⁹

Probing the reasons for such a state of affairs, the EWISA document states:

Some of the reasons advanced are: dogmatism, purism (i.e. a holier than thou attitude), the belief that one has the whole truth as against everyone else, the problem of individualism (individual faith) as against community faith, their ecclesiology.... a ghetto theology, fear of being influenced and misled, etc. ¹⁷⁰

past, present and future. Scripture Union. page 272.

¹⁶⁷ ibid 272

¹⁶⁸ Fuller, H. 1996. People of the mandate, WEF, Paternoster, UK page 174.

¹⁶⁹ EWISA p 28

¹⁷⁰ ibid 29

Putting the failure of prophetic witness squarely at the door of this lack of ecumenism, the documents states:

We feel that this spirit amongst us which makes fellowship and joint efforts together difficult or impossible is responsible for our failure to minister effectively to a society at war. We need to broaden base through ecumenical cooperation to meet both the spiritual and social needs of all the people of South Africa.¹⁷¹

This point aside, it is the case that this negative posture towards ecumenism enables evangelicals to stick to their own kind, in their doctrinal purity and thus redefine their own ecumenism, in an ahistorical manner. A manner that considers as irrelevant critical issues in relation to Apartheid, where politics, geography and culture are contested in a life and death struggle in which only the dominant can afford the luxury of transcending them.

4.3.2 The practice of the churches.

Major evangelical denominations that have described their relationship with the SACC in these terms include: The Church of England in South Africa and the Baptist Union.

A Baptist theologian E Glenn Hinson, writing in the *Ecumenical Review* states:

Baptists around the world have probably greater reluctance than most world communions to engage with other Christians in serious efforts to effect Christian unity, behind their hesitancy lies a potent corporate fear of ecclesiastical structures which might exert control.¹⁷²

Baptists, coming as they do from the Free Church tradition, cherish the volunteer

¹⁷¹ *ibid* 29

¹⁷² *Ecumenical Review*. Vol 46, No 4, October 1994, page 406.

principle. Hinson goes on to explain something of the Baptist ecumenical rationale, quoting the writings of the General Secretary of the World Baptist Alliance who, in 1928 sought to encourage Baptists to support their own Baptist Alliance by saying:

It is a purely fraternal association, whose members are bound to one another by the silken cords of love, that holds its place in Baptist life...No formal contract binds us each to each - anyone of the constituent groups could secede at any moment; their adhesion is in the strictest sense voluntary....Individualists we are, standing for the supreme value and the solemn and separate responsibility of every human soul; isolated we are not, for in Him we are indissolubly united. The Baptist World Alliance demonstrates that our polity has room for the unforced expression of an inward and spiritual unity which no human scheme can either create or destroy.¹⁷³

It is this individualist disposition and preoccupation with inward and spiritual unity that helps to explain the ecumenical journey of the Baptist Union of South Africa.

In 1968, the Baptist Union distanced itself from a crucial prophetic document, *The message to the people of South Africa*, issued by the SACC in that year. Their communication to the SACC stated that: "much of the theological reasoning and some of the conclusions (of the Message) are unacceptable."¹⁷⁴

The Baptist Union held the view that salvation through grace alone cannot be made contingent upon supporting or rejecting a political philosophy. "The views and attitudes of an individual in racial matters do not enter into the realm of his being justified by faith", the Baptist statement said.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ *ibid* page 408.

¹⁷⁴ Spong, B. and Mayson, C. 1993. *Come celebrate: 25 years of the South African Council of Churches*. Edenvale printers, Johannesburg. page 30.

¹⁷⁵ *ibid* 30

The BU assembly resolved to withdraw from the SACC the following year, and at the time of writing this study in 2007, has not returned.

For similar reasons, the Church of the Nazarene withdrew its membership in 1962; the Salvation Army nearly pulled out in 1971¹⁷⁶

In a pamphlet entitled '**Whither the SACC**', published in 1996, Baptist Union theologian Rev Jeffree James, also head of the Protestant Association of South Africa, in a veiled call for evangelical separation from the SACC, and critiquing a liturgy and order of a reconciliation service formulated by the SACC wrote:

It does not need a microscopic examination of this document for our readers to judge for themselves the direction in which the SACC is moving. It is not towards the New Testament. Rather, it is in the general direction of religious syncretism.¹⁷⁷

4.3.3 Analysis

4.3.3.1 Theological issues

Those churches that have responded to a questionnaire (see appendix 1) point out that a key area of concern explaining their unwillingness to join the SACC is the matter of interfaith work or syncretism and liberation theology. Doctrinal purity, as these churches see it, stands in the way of ecumenical participation.

The Church of England in South Africa (CESA), asked about its non participation in the council responded in the following way: "CESA has viewed the SACC with great suspicion because of their perceived political agenda and commitment to

¹⁷⁶ Thomas, D. 1980. Councils in the Ecumenical Movement South Africa 1904 -1975, SACC, Johannesburg page 52

¹⁷⁷ Whither the SACC? The path to Religious Syncretism. Published by The Protestant Association of South Africa as a supplement to Protestant Reveille 2nd and 3rd Quarters 1996, Box 2976, Cape Town, 8000.

Liberation Theology.”¹⁷⁸ .

This was corroborated by the submission made by the denomination to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission which stated:

some evangelicals saw liberation theology as a sell out to the Gospel of Christ crucified and risen, to secular vision of utopia on earth. There was a sense of dismay among evangelicals as we saw the Gospel of Christ's redemption redefined to suit the mood and agenda of the day. Many evangelicals felt that while liberation theology had recaptured the important truths of justice in society, it had in the process assimilated an ideology that undermined the basic message of the Gospel.¹⁷⁹

Along with liberation theology, other concerns expressed are the views of the SACC on scripture, sin and redemption. Again, it is worth noting that non participation in the SACC is seen by these churches as a way to safeguard the core evangelical convictions mentioned earlier.

Biblical authority

Evangelical isolation from ecumenism as a basis for safeguarding biblical faithfulness has led precisely to the end they wished to avoid. As it turns out in South Africa, Apartheid separated the races from each other, and on its own this set the scene of a reading of the biblical tradition in ways that made serious blind spots inevitable.

Different race groups tended to hear different messages from the bible: blacks hearing the liberating word of the prophetic tradition, and whites hearing a message that served to legitimise the status quo.

¹⁷⁸ Church of England in South Africa's response to Questionnaire. Appendix 4

¹⁷⁹ Church of England submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, October 1998, East London.

For evangelical Christians whose disposition was to avoid biblical criticism as a liberal distortion that takes away from the authority of the biblical texts, the result of lack of ecumenism was far reaching. Unaware of their own ideological commitments, evangelicals have tended to presume that they come to the bible without a baggage of their own. This took more serious dimensions in the phenomenon of right wing religion, which served the social function of giving religious legitimisation to the Apartheid regime at the height of the struggle in the 1980s.

This was common place among a range of evangelical groupings that saw their task as the defence of biblical Christianity. Such groups include: Gospel Defense League, Signposts and United Christian Action. These organisations were prolific in their writing of pamphlets and booklets aimed at attacking those involved in the struggle against Apartheid.

While it might be difficult to prove their connection with the Apartheid state, it is quite evident that their brand of theology and political propaganda served to buttress the system of Apartheid. They clearly served an important role in the government psychological warfare program of winning the hearts and minds of the people. All of these groupings went on a campaign to systematically vilify the ecumenical movement, its leaders and its witness against Apartheid.

Sufficiency of the cross.

The doctrine of the sufficiency of the cross of Jesus Christ to effect salvation from sin is pivotal to evangelical faith. It is open to the interpretation that beyond a

declaration of faith in Christ, nothing more needs to be done. The Baptist Union seems to be arguing along these lines when they rejected the SACC document called *the Message*. "The views and attitudes of an individual in racial matters do not enter into the realm of his being justified by faith".¹⁸⁰

Evangelism:

Due to the ecumenical isolationism of Churches such as the BU, the theology and practice of evangelism has tended to be narrow and escapist. Louise Kretzschmar writes in her doctoral thesis, an account of a certain Mr Kunene, whose experience of such evangelism left him virtually alienated from the political struggle that raged all around him:

All my plans, my Communistic ideas, my interest in politics, all fell to the ground. I immediately lost interest in everything worldly, and I never went back to those things.¹⁸¹

The implication of this sort of conversion is that not only is conversion understood in ahistorical terms that abstract one from the concreteness of life, but it further compromises discipleship. Life is understood in dualistic terms that separate politics from spirituality.

Personal morality:

The narrow, personal vision of morality, deriving from the individualism inherent in such faith leaves the Christian witness patently inadequate to deal with the totality of the human predicament.

¹⁸⁰ Spong, B. and Mayson, C. 1993. *Come celebrate: 25 years of the South African Council of Churches*. Edenvale printers, Johannesburg. page 30.

¹⁸¹ Kretzschmar, L. 1998. *Privatisation of the Christian faith: mission, social ethics and the South African Baptists*. Legon, Ghana: Legon Theological Studies Series. page 242.

It is therefore sad that the witness that groups falling in this category sought to safeguard, suffered such serious consequences. Leading BUSA theologian Rev Ellis Andre, commenting on the anti ecumenical stance of the Baptist Union of South Africa said: "We are much, much poorer for our foolish action of actually withdrawing even observer status from the SACC."¹⁸²

4.3.3.2 Political and ideological issues

The politics of evangelicals that adopt this posture is clearly a conservative politics, as shown by the fact that the prevailing view of liberation theology is a dim one. Indeed the Baptist Union not only separated from the SACC on account of conservative politics (e.g. the refusal to identify with the SACC document *Message to the people of South Africa*), they also separated from their own black Baptist kindred, the Baptist Convention of South Africa, whose political inclination was more anti apartheid. This shows that at play were not only doctrinal problems - because black and white Baptists share common doctrinal positions - but clearly political ones as well.

Liberation theology

For both the BUSA and CESA, the concern about liberation theology points to the ideological commitment of these churches. The ideological captivity of the English speaking churches in South Africa has been documented adequately elsewhere.¹⁸³ Suffice it to say that there are two ways in which English speaking Christianity responded to the moral challenge of apartheid.

¹⁸² Alberts and Chikane (eds) page 196

¹⁸³ Cochrane, J. 1987. *Servants of Power*, Ravan, Johannesburg

Firstly, there was the typically right wing response, whose elements included explicit support for the apartheid regime and engaging in ideological struggle against the growing momentum of the liberation process within church and society.

The latter included

undermining the theology of Liberation by misrepresenting its theological programme (especially the use of Marxist social analysis), questioning its Christian integrity, and defaming its principal advocates.¹⁸⁴

The second way in which such churches responded to the apartheid challenge was to concentrate on the 'spiritual' aspects of the church, such as evangelisation and the preservation of the Church institution. In the absence of any concrete programme addressing apartheid, such a posture invariably served the interests of Apartheid, and helped to keep it in power.

Although the rightwing response is decidedly different from the more 'spiritual' response, the social function served is the same. Writes Alan Brews:

Whereas the religious right deliberately sets out to legitimate the programme of current political and economic power, the actions of the English Speaking churches unwittingly perform the same function. The one is premeditated, the other accidental. But the result is the same.¹⁸⁵

In this chapter, a model of the three different possibilities of evangelical ecumenical relationships has been presented. These being positive, neutral and negative. This was followed by an examination of the churches whose practice

¹⁸⁴ Alan Brews in *Journal of theology fore Southern Africa*, Right wing religious Movements, December 1989, No 69, page 42.

¹⁸⁵ *ibid* 29

follows these models. Further, a theological and political analysis of the different choices made by the churches was done. In doing so, lessons were explored that will hopefully illumine the journey of the churches together as they enter the post Apartheid dispensation.

It is interesting to note the consistency of theological reasoning between evangelical agencies in Europe and North America in rationalising these modes of relating with the ecumenical movement. As previously stated in chapter 3, the manifestation of this evangelical/ecumenical challenge is best understood against this international background.

The following chapter develops an epilogue that anticipates the way ahead from the lessons learned.

Chapter 5.

5. Fragments of hope: Opportunities and pitfalls

The ecumenical challenge

The story of the transition of South African society from Apartheid to an inclusive nonracial democracy cannot be fully told without reference to the role the churches played. From the early skirmishes of struggle against white rule, the Christian faith played a significant part.

The national anthem *Nkosi sikeleli Afrika*, is an example of the type of spiritual resource that Africans tapped into for years as part of their resistance. Many of the leaders of the liberation struggle were themselves people of strong Christian faith, including men like Chief Albert Luthuli, who was the first African to receive the Nobel Peace Prize for his contribution in the fight against apartheid.

South Africa owes a debt of gratitude to the witness of the churches, even though this witness was at times dubious and ambivalent. The chequered route traversed by the churches in their witness together and separately throughout the three centuries of the church's presence in the southern tip of Africa bears witness to the character of the church as salt of the earth.

Sometimes this witness took the form of mission schools that nurtured the current crop of political leaders – including Nelson Mandela, or hospitals and other socially and spiritually redeeming aspects of the church's work. At other times the ecumenical movement, particularly in the form it took in the last decades of

Apartheid, was more prophetic and radical. At its lowest moments, the witness of the churches was informed more by its self-interested ecclesial agendas, stifling its ability to be a light in times of darkness. Indeed this study has noted the ways in which the church has often been in ideological captivity, and hindered from becoming as effective as it could be as a sacrament of the kingdom.

For the ecumenical journey of the churches that have sought to maintain a redemptive presence in the world, the task of 'salt of the earth' has been one of identification, commitment and emersion in the struggles of the people of South Africa. This has not been without some awkward dilemmas as indicated by the following true, but somewhat anecdotal story.¹⁸⁶:

At the height of the struggle against Apartheid, a 'foreign affairs' diplomat of the then exiled African National Congress held a conversation with a Catholic Priest and political activist involved in the Mass Democratic Movement inside the country. The year was 1984. The discussion centered around how the struggle for liberation could be advanced, and how the legal space available for internal political mobilisation within South Africa could be optimised.

Both the politician and the priest came to the conclusion that it would be good to provide theological leadership in the political crisis that engulfed the country at the time. The task at hand, they reasoned, was about clarifying the questions that the revolutionary context of South Africa posed at the time, and guiding believers to

¹⁸⁶ Mr Thabo Mbeki's address to the meeting of the Institute of Contextual Theology, 1992 following the unbanning of the ANC.

discover a course of action that would help end tyranny. The politician reckoned it would benefit the people to do this, and it would advance the liberation project. The priest reckoned it would be pleasing to God to do so.

Both men embraced, shook hands, and started work, each man respecting the point of departure of the other, even though not necessarily endorsing it. The result was, several months later, the publishing of the Kairos document. Its impact was revolutionary. It transformed the ways in which Christians around the country saw their role in society. Many previously uninvolved believers joined the struggle to end Apartheid at that point.

It is not to overstate the case to say that the church, in its relation to the raging anti Apartheid struggle at the time, was never the same after the Kairos document. The voice of the Kairos document reverberated around the world as many saw their political role in society in a new light, and made radical and prophetic commitments to work for change in their corner of the globe. This was an indication of the impact of the synergy possible when prophet and revolutionary join hands for a common purpose.

This intersection point in the paths of progressives and prophets need careful theological assessment. This is because the danger is that the prophet may simply take a spiritual and theological short cut and presume that the prophetic vocation is simply the embrace of the progressive agenda. This needs not always be so. Also, the progressive activist could be forgiven for imagining that the church is a useful and co-optable ally, without a transcendent reference point named God, to whom

she is accountable.

First, an attempt at clarifying these terms.

The word '*progressive*' tends to be a politically and ideologically suggestive term, connoting an openness to progress, to reform of the social, political and economic structures in the direction of greater justice, and the rationalist spirit of the modern age. It is about the breaking with traditional intellectual, religious, political and cultural beliefs that hinder reform in society. Progressive people tend to locate right and wrong within the context of what is acceptable as such within the logic of a democratic order. James Hunter, writing about progressiveness in religion, observes that:

What all progressive world views share in common is the tendency to resymbolise faiths according to the prevailing assumptions of contemporary life'¹⁸⁷

On the other hand to be prophetic – at least in the Christian theological sense - requires fidelity to Christian revelation and truth, a firm rootage in biblical revelation. Prophets distinguish themselves in terms of their fidelity to God's revelation and their passion to call others to it.

In his discussion of the notion of a prophet Max Weber has written about prophets that:

subjectively they were no political partisans. Primarily they pursued no political interests. Prophecy has never declared anything about a "best state"...nor has it ever sought ... to help translate into reality social-ethically oriented political ideals through advice to power holders. The state and its doings were, by themselves, of no interest to them. Moreover,

¹⁸⁷ Hunter, J. D. 1990. Culture wars: the struggle to define America. USA: Basic Books, Harper Collins Publishers. page 42

unlike the Hellenes they did not posit the problem: how can man be a good citizen? Their question was absolutely religious, oriented toward the fulfillment of Yahweh's commandments.

He continued:

First and foremost, prophecy is a religious phenomenon; whatever political significance it may have is secondary to and derivative from its religious mission.¹⁸⁸

The dialectic of (religious) prophet and (secular) progressive raises the persistent problem of faith and reason. The prophet is a person of faith, of revelation and answers to a divine and transcendent Other. The progressive is a humanist who is guided by what is reasonable and answerable to the liberal and democratic ideal. In a sense, the progressive seeks emancipation from the very idea of an authority outside of the rational individual. Progressives ride the wave of secularisation, while prophets are about sacrilisation, which is about restating the claims of a Creator God upon the entirety of His creation.

Just as it is possible that a watch that has stopped to function will be *on time* at least once in twelve hours, it is conceivable that the progressive agenda will intersect at some point with the prophetic agenda, and at that point synergy is acquired. But this is not what will always be. It is a point in history that needs careful theological assessment, otherwise it may be absolutised as what will always be. A mistake that happens is that the prophet who assumes that it is enough to be progressive will easily accommodate all aspects of progressive politics. A few examples of this will be in order.

¹⁸⁸ Hadden, K. J. and Shupe, A.(eds). 1986. Prophetic Religions and politics: religion and the political order. New York: New Era, Paragon House. page 10

- *The dilemma of same sex marriage in the new South Africa.*

South Africa has a constitution considered one of the most progressive in the world. It was written by people some of whom suffered severely at the hands of Apartheid government policies purely because, as black people, they were denied rights on no other basis other than that they were black. In writing the constitution, it was to be expected that they would determine that no South African ever again would suffer the indignity of being denied their human rights. The implication of this is that gay people demand the 'right' to marry, and seek constitutional protection to practise this right. While it might be a progressive, politically correct thing to accept that gay people may marry, it does nonetheless, not accord with biblical morality and certainly not with Judeo/Christian values. This issue is an example of the parting of the ways between progressive morality and prophetic morality.

It is, to return to the theme of this study, a conflict between a worldview that sees biblical morality as revealed in Scripture as the final authority in matters of conduct, as opposed to a view that takes the ideology of human rights as the final authority. It is the sort of dilemma that flows from a disconnection between what is right – in the moral sense – and what is lawful – in a technical sense. For what is right in the moral sense, requires a 'prophetic' word from the church, while what is legal is a matter easily settled by the courts.

The history of South Africa is not unaccustomed to the notion of a policy that was legal in so far as the courts were concerned, while wrong in so far as biblical

revelation was concerned. The church in the post apartheid South Africa will be hard pressed to provide a witness which enables the nation to escape the illusion that 'righteousness' can be found in the doctrine of human rights or political correctness.

It is a matter in which the church in its unity must show moral leadership and courage, but unfortunately shows every sign of surrendering to the idea that it is only necessary to be politically correct. The SACC position on the matter has been at best ambivalent, while evangelical voices, even within SACC churches, have been outspoken in their rejection of same sex marriage.

- *The challenge of democratic pluralism.*

The government's nation building agenda tends to require, if implicitly, that

Evangelicals insist that Christian unity must not deny the salvific finality of Christ. It is often the case that interfaith dialogue and cooperation is seen by some as a logical extension of the ecumenical agenda. To be sure, much good can be achieved by the various religions co-operating to end wars, poverty, common threats and inter religious conflicts etc. But where this eclipses the redemptive uniqueness of Christ, the evangelical character of the faith is undermined. Christian ecumenism is about bearing witness to the uniqueness and redemptive purposes of the Person of Christ.

- *The quest for justice in a neo liberal new South Africa.*

Coming at this point from another angle, Alan Boesak, writing in '**The Future of Prophetic Christianity**' about the ongoing prophetic challenge to hold on to a vision of the kingdom of God amidst the political compromises of post Apartheid South Africa, has asked:

Are we now confused about the role that the church is playing, because in our theology of struggle we allowed our theology to be dictated (to) by the struggle rather than by the demands of the gospel? So now the people in the struggle are saying...'we are not sure that you have a role to play'...we are not assertive. We are not ready to tell Mr. Mandela, 'You and your organization have no right to tell the church which role we have to play.

Further, he continues to drive this point home saying:

Key words for the church are not only democracy, also justice. Not only progress, but also humanity.¹⁸⁹

So it is that churches together (ecumenically) would do well to exercise the prophetic vocation with care, respecting their horizontal/ progressive - as well as the vertical/prophetic - mandates. Indeed the unfolding democratic process in

¹⁸⁹ Carmody L Denise, Carmody T John (eds), 1993, *The Future of Prophetic Christianity: essays in honour of Robert McAfee Brown*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, page 11

South Africa is one that no doubt will have many points of convergence between the prophetic and progressive. It is however important that this convergence does not seduce the prophets to complacency, but that they will exercise ongoing prophetic vigilance.

Correctly, they must accompany the process of democracy. This they must do however, without any illusion that the democratic path that takes as normative the priority of reason over revelation could ever permanently avoid the pitfalls that have to do with the essential sinfulness of human nature, individually or collectively.

For the biblical prophet, the biblical story of the prodigal son aptly summarises the predicament attending an intentional choice for rationalism over revelation, self will over God's will. It is a choice that inevitably leads to decadence and crisis. It is this that points to humanity's need for a Saviour.

What does this mean to the question of evangelical – ecumenical relations?

The question is not whether or not Christians should pursue unity among themselves. Or even with the legacy of those believers who have left tradition - in the Catholic sense - behind. Scripture is clear that they must. It is shortsighted for any particular group to tribalise itself and to exclude input from other sections of the church. Fackre writes that:

Theological tribalism happens in the Christian community when fundamental Christian identity is associated with loyalty to the sub community of common stock with its attendant customs and traditions.¹⁹⁰

¹⁹⁰ Fackre G, 1993, *Ecumenical Faith Evangelical Perspective*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids MI page 74

That such tribalism will impoverish rather than enrich stands to reason.

It is rather that they need to determine what kind of unity is adequate and fruitful for the task of giving account of themselves as Church in Mission.

Ecumenism is about unity in the Truth of Christ: It is a unity whose value is less in the fact of human solidarity than in its potential to disclose the redemptive purposes of God as the people of God bear witness to the full picture of the manifold graces of God. It implies that each part of the body of Christ brings its own unique contribution to the catholic nature of the church. Three things follow from this:

- Unity is not an option to be embraced or dismissed in the cavalier manner in which evangelicals of *neutrality* do it, or spurned in the way those of *negative posture* do. It is a matter of Christian obedience. The task of explicating it is a necessary one, pointing to the need for a serious theological reflection on all aspects of the plurality of the question within the conditions of the post Apartheid, and perhaps post modern context.
- The redemptive nature of ecumenism points to the necessity of the question to constantly be asked: Does our unity bring us closer to (or further from) the mission for which Christ came, namely to set humanity free, reconciling them to their God. Ecumenical integrity is maintained to the extent that this question is answered in the affirmative.
- Thirdly, truth is important. A reclamation of the Bible as a central resource in the life and witness of the Church is key. Without that it will be difficult to ground prophetic witness within the locus of revelation. Fackre writing about the notion of evangelical catholicity notes as follows:

Standing alone, catholicity could be a worse alternative than the tribalism it purports to challenge – a new normless tribe with no self-critical principle, a process ideology that asserts interaction for its own sake.

He continues:

For believers today the same standard must obtain. Both the mode and content of catholicity (must) live under the evangelical norm. The claims of each tribe, what they give to and receive from the charisms, must pass muster before Scripture as read in the light of the full gospel and according to its center Jesus Christ.¹⁹¹

Conclusion

In looking ahead in the journey of the churches together, this chapter has affirmed the benefits of living in ecumenical community, as opposed to ecclesial tribes that do not share in the gifts that God has placed in each member of the body. The struggle to end Apartheid in South Africa was the result of the collaboration of churches on the one hand as well as, on the other hand, people of other faiths or no faith at all. Much good came out of this collaboration.

The journey of struggle has also disclosed the possibilities of synergy between prophetic faith and progressive politics. It was pointed out that there are times when the prophet and the progressive might act in concert and achieve great results. This need not mask the fundamental differences between the two actors. Indeed the progressive might in essence represent a radical rebellion from submission to the authority of revelation, choosing rather to ground their practice on human rights and ideological commitments. Theologically, the intersection of progressive politics and prophetic faith need to be carefully assessed in order to avoid pitfalls, especially to those for whom biblical revelation matters.

For evangelicals, ecumenical participation will be a fruitful endeavor to the degree

¹⁹¹ *ibid* page 87

that they do not surrender, but enrich, the charisms endowed on them for the benefit of the church. Similarly, ecumenicals bring important contributions to the broad ecumenical table. Mutual sharing can only enrich all parties. As iron sharpens iron, so a robust ecumenical conversation on various themes important to the mission of the church must be had.

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Appendix 1

Questionnaire on **Evangelical** relations with the **South African Council of Churches** from 1960 – 1990.

(Requested as part of a study on **Evangelicals and Ecumenism**
Only responses from official spokespersons of the Churches/organizations will be considered.)

1. Name of the Church/ Organisation.....
2. Name of Church official.....
3. Position held in the Church.....
4. During the period 1960 -1997, was the Church a member of the South African Council of Churches? Yes/ No.....
5. How would you describe the relationship of your Church/Organisation toward the SACC in the period 1960 -1997. (Tick where applicable)

Was it:

- 3.1 positive (positively considering membership) (Yes/No)
- 3.2 Neutral (Indifferent to the SACC) (Yes/No)
- 3.3 Negative (Opposed to participating in the SACC) (Yes/No)
4. Did the position of the Church remain the same over the period 1960 -1997?
(Yes/No)
5. What was the motivation for the position(s) taken?
.....

Name:
Date:.....

Signed:.....

Appendix 2.

Questionnaire on Evangelical relations with the South African Council of Churches from 1960 – 1997.

(Requested as part of a study on **Evangelicals and Ecumenism** by Rev Moss Ntlha)

Only responses from official spokespersons of the Churches/organizations will be considered.

1. Name of the Church/ Organisation IFCC
2. Name of Church official... Rev Ron Steele
3. Position held in the Church: PR and ecumenical affairs.
4. During the period 1960 -1997, was the Church a member of the South African Council of Churches? Yes/ No Initially no, and in later years Yes
5. How would you describe the relationship of your Church/Organisation toward the SACC in the period 1960 -1997. (Tick where applicable)

Was it:

- 3.4 positive (positively considering membership) (Yes/No) No
- 3.5 Neutral (Indifferent to the SACC) (Yes/No) No
- 3.6 Negative (Opposed to participating in the SACC) (Yes/No) Yes

4. Did the position of the Church remain the same over the period 1960 -1997?
(Yes/No) No

5. What was the motivation for the position(s) taken?

with the fast changing political and social landscape, the IFCC Leadership believed it was important for the organisation to position itself to become a role player in the new South Africa.”

Name:...Ron Steele..... Date:.....July1998.

Appendix 3

Questionnaire on **Evangelical** relations with the **South African Council of Churches** from 1960 – 1990.

(Requested as part of a study on **Evangelicals and Ecumenism** by Rev Moss Ntlha)

Only responses from official spokespersons of the Churches/organizations will be considered.

- 1. Name of the Church/ Organization:** The Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa
- 2. Name of Church official:** Mphikeleli George Mahlobo
- 3. Position held in the Church:** General Secretary
- 4. During the period 1960 -1990, was the Church a member of the South African Council of Churches?** No
- 5. How would you describe the relationship of your Church/Organisation toward the SACC in the period 1960 -1990? (Tick where applicable)**


Was it:

- 3.7 Positive (positively considering membership) (Yes/No):** Yes and no. During 1960 to 1990 the church was still divided according to racial lines. Although the official position was somewhat negative there were individuals in leadership positions who were positive about taking SACC membership, especially from your Black and Coloured Divisions. Around 1990 the leadership of the combined Black grouping called Composite division (comprising of the African, Coloured and Indian churches) was more positive than the White grouping known then as Single division.

4. What was the motivation for the position taken?

Those who were opposed to taking SACC membership argued from a political perspective that SACC was perceived to be advocating a violent change of the political system. That SACC generally was embracing liberation theologies and ideologies which were not accommodated in the Pentecostal circles.

Those who were positive about taking SACC membership were arguing from a pragmatic perspective that Christians were entitled to embrace force as part of their self defence against apartheid. Liberation theologies assisted in articulating resistance to apartheid. SACC was the most vocal, relevant and effective ecumenical body to empower people to rise against an oppressive and diabolical system.

Signed:.....  Date: 03 September 2007.

Appendix 4

Questionnaire on **Evangelical** relations with the **South African Council of Churches** from 1960 – 1990.

(Requested as part of a study on **Evangelicals and Ecumenism**
Only responses from official spokespersons of the Churches/organizations will be considered.)

1. Name of the Church / Organisation..... Church of England of South Africa.....

2. Name of Church official.....Bishop Frank Retief...

3. Position held in the Church.....Presiding Bishop

4. During the period 1960 -1997, was the Church a member of the South African Council of Churches? Yes/ No.....No

5. How would you describe the relationship of your Church/Organisation toward the SACC in the period 1960 -1997. (Tick where applicable)

Was it:

3.8 positive (positively considering membership) (Yes/No) No

3.9 Neutral (Indifferent to the SACC) (Yes/No) No

3.10 Negative (Opposed to participating in the SACC) (Yes/No) Yes

4. Did the position of the Church remain the same over the period 1960 -1997?

(Yes/No) Yes

5. What was the motivation for the position(s) taken?

CESA has viewed the SACC with great suspicion because of their perceived political agenda and commitment to Liberation Theology

6. Name: Bishop Frank Retief..... **Date:**19 July 1997.....