

Institutional Hearing: The Faith Community

• INTRODUCTION

- 1 Some of the major Christian churches gave their blessing to the system of apartheid, and many of its early proponents prided themselves in being Christians. Indeed, the system of apartheid was regarded as stemming from the mission of the church. Other churches gave the apartheid state tacit support, regarding it as a guarantor of Christian civilisation. They were the beneficiaries of apartheid, enjoying special privileges denied to other faith communities.
- 2 Religious communities also suffered under apartheid, their activities were disrupted, their leaders persecuted, their land taken away. Churches, mosques, synagogues and temples – often divided amongst themselves – spawned many of apartheid's strongest foes, motivated by values and norms coming from their particular faith traditions. They were driven by what has been called the 'dangerous memory' of resistance and the quest for freedom, often suppressed but never obliterated from their respective faiths.
- 3 As involved and implicated as they were in the past, South Africa's religious communities also represented important sites of transformation. Different interests, perspectives and world views are represented - often within the same faith tradition. Likewise local churches and similar communities contained victims, beneficiaries and perpetrators of apartheid. Reconciliation within such communities could have a leavening effect for the whole society. From them should flow a source of renewal extending to the entire South African society.
- 4 These factors served to indicate the importance of bringing faith communities into the Commission process. A further reason – grounded in the desire of many within the religious communities themselves – was to remind themselves of their obligation, testified to within their own traditions, to participate in social transformation and the national process of reconciliation.
- 5 In total, forty-one faith communities made written submissions or gave representations at the hearings. While a fairly wide spectrum of churches was represented, some important churches were missing. The Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk did not respond to the invitation sent by the Commission. The Gereformeerde Kerk considered the invitation but decided not to participate – although four theologians from this church (dss Alwyn du Plessis, Bennie van der Walt, Amie van Wyk and Ponti Venter) made a submission in their personal capacities.
- 6 The Chief Rabbi and the Hindu Maha Sabha sent submissions and testified at the hearings, as did the Baha'i Faith. A submission was received from the Buddhist Dharma Centre. The Moulana Ibrahim Bham of the Jamiatul Ulama Transvaal testified, as did Moulana Farid Esack, formerly of the Call of Islam. The Muslim Judicial Council of Cape Town (MJC) attended. Subsequently, the Muslim Youth Movement (MYM) made a submission.

• FAITH COMMUNITIES IN SOUTH AFRICA

- 7 The term 'faith communities' encompasses groups as diverse as the Baptist Union and the Jamiatul Ulama Transvaal (Ulama), the South African Council of Churches (SACC) and the African religious community, the Church of the Province of Southern Africa (Church of the Province) and the Hindu community.
- 8 Placing such a diverse assemblage together, and asking each to answer the same questions, risked overlooking differences in organisation and accountability structures. Some, such as the Baptist Union, have a strong voluntarist tradition and emphasise the local congregation and its autonomy. Others, such as the Roman Catholic Church, are much more hierarchical in character. Still others, such as the Afrikaans Reformed Churches and the African religious community, are largely associated with a cultural or ethnic group and identify organically with its activities. There are also different groups *within* each of the religious traditions. Precisely *who* was being represented was a problem that surfaced at the hearings.
- 9 While not comprehensive, the representation of religious groups and movements in submissions and at the hearings reflected a broad spectrum of religion in South Africa. They included:

African Traditional Religion

- 10 African Traditional Religion in South Africa is at a significant disadvantage when placed alongside more highly organised institutions. Often dismissed as 'culture' rather than religion (based on the early settler view of Africans as religious 'blank slates'), African Traditional Religion often lacks centralised and acknowledged leadership and regulatory bodies to give it identity. It is, indeed, often represented by black Christian theologians rather than traditional religions themselves. It nevertheless represents a vibrant cluster of practices that are part of the lives of many Africans, including those who attend Christian churches.

Christian churches

- 11 Although Roman Catholicism arrived in South Africa with the Portuguese explorers, Christianity in South Africa was established predominantly in Protestant churches (or denominations). The Dutch Reformed Church and the Moravians represented early settler and missionary Christianity respectively. The white Lutheran churches were established with the arrival of German and Scandinavian settlers. Groups that would coalesce into the so-called English-speaking churches date from the nineteenth century onwards. Ironically, the majority membership of these churches is black and does not use English as its first language. These include the Church of the Province (Anglicans), the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (Methodists), the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa (Presbyterians) and the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (United Congregationals). The Roman Catholic Church (Catholics) is usually grouped with these.
- 12 Black churches (not included in the English-speaking churches) comprise the black mission churches, historic black churches and African-initiated (or indigenous) churches. Unlike the converts of the English-speaking churches, the converts of the Afrikaans Reformed Churches, some other mission churches and certain missionary societies were

formed into separate churches – always under the watchful eye of the white missionaries. The black churches within the Afrikaans Reformed church traditions are discussed below. The Scottish missionaries established the Bantu Presbyterian Church (today Reformed Presbyterian Church). The Swiss established the Tsonga Presbyterian Church (now the Evangelical Presbyterian Church) and the American Board of Missions was responsible for the emergence of the Bantu Congregational Church. The latter church went into union with the Congregational Church to form the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa in 1967 and the Reformed Presbyterian Church is planning to unite with the Presbyterian Church of South Africa, although the Evangelical Presbyterian Church is not part of that union. The origin of the American Methodist Episcopal Church is to be found in the rejection of racism in the post-Civil War period in the United States of America and was first established in South Africa in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

- 13 Perhaps the most significant emergence of black churches came with the advent of the African Initiated Churches. The causes were the lack of black representation in the leadership of the established churches, coupled with white paternalism, class assertion and cultural hegemony. The largest of these is the Zion Christian Church, best known for its annual gathering at Morija. Also prominent (and especially strong in KwaZulu-Natal) is the Ibandla lama Nazaretha or Shembe church, which strongly reflects Zulu culture.
- 14 African Initiated Churches have, at times, been regarded as inward looking and disinterested in political participation. This is not, however, always the case. The Council of African Initiated Churches unites across a number of bodies and has been politically engaged. It is also connected to other churches through its membership of the SACC.
- 15 The Afrikaans Reformed Churches were widely identified with Afrikaner nationalism and held to be complicit in apartheid. The largest of the group is the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (Dutch Reformed Church). The others include the Nederduitse Hervormde Kerk, the Gereformeerde Kerke and the Afrikaanse Protestantse Kerk. Of these, only the Dutch Reformed Church made representations to the Commission. Located within the Dutch Reformed Church's 'family' are three mission churches: the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Sendingkerk (Coloured), the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in Afrika (black) and the Indian Reformed Church. In 1994, the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Sendingkerk and Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in Afrika amalgamated as the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa (Uniting Reformed Church). Negotiations for inclusion of the white Dutch Reformed Church and the Indian Reformed Church were ongoing at the time of the hearings.
- 16 Like the Afrikaans Reformed Churches, the Apostolic Faith Mission was segregated along racial lines. A Pentecostal church, the Apostolic Faith Mission drew many of its members from the Afrikaans Reformed Churches. Pentecostal and charismatic religion in South Africa is also represented by a number of other groups, organisations and movements, including the International Fellowship of Christian Churches. Membership of these groups is growing fast, particularly (though not exclusively) in white suburbs.
- 17 Other churches with strong constituencies were also established, including Lutheran churches. Some evangelicals have remained in these churches, although there are also denominations that are explicitly conservative in doctrine and ethos. Many of these churches were represented at the hearings and in submissions - either directly or through the Evangelical Alliance of South Africa (Evangelical Alliance).

- 18 The Baptist Church has been in South Africa since the mid-nineteenth century. The two largest denominations are the Baptist Union and the Baptist Convention, which split from the Union in 1987.
- 19 The other main evangelical denomination at the hearings was the Church of England in South Africa (Church of England) which claims to be the original representative of Anglicanism in South Africa. Also notable in this camp are the Salvation Army and the Seventh Day Adventist church.
- 20 Many of the communities mentioned above are members of the SACC, including more conservative evangelical and charismatic churches, such as the Salvation Army and the International Federation of Christian Churches (which joined some five years before the Commission hearings). The Catholics joined in 1994, on the same day the Dutch Reformed Church became an observer member. Before the fall of apartheid, the SACC drew its members mainly from the English-speaking churches. Increasingly, as it was marginalised by the state and seen to identify with resistance movements (causing considerable tension with its older constituents), its membership became increasingly black.

Islam

- 21 Islam traces its origins in South Africa to the arrival of political prisoners and slaves at the Cape from the late seventeenth century. Conversion to Islam was widespread in the Cape, due to the exclusion of slaves from the Dutch church (the chief reason for which was insistence by the Dutch East India Company that Christianised slaves be manumitted). In this environment, Islam provided a political haven for slaves and 'free blacks' and provided them with basic religious rites they were denied by the church. In the early twentieth century, Indian traders who settled in the Transvaal and Natal also introduced Islam. Important class differences, expressed in theological distinctions, are rooted in these communities.
- 22 Formed in the Cape in 1945, the MJC was set up to promote unity amongst Muslims. Despite the leadership of Imam Abdullah Haron, who was killed in 1969, the MJC took an apolitical stance for many years. The emergence of the Muslim Youth Movement (MYM) of South Africa, the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC)-aligned Qibla and the United Democratic Front (UDF)-aligned Call of Islam created a stronger social and political consciousness amongst Muslims (and within the MJC). This often pitted them against the conservative Ulamas.

Judaism

- 23 The Jewish community in South Africa descends from immigrants of Anglo-German and Lithuanian origins who arrived at various stages during the nineteenth century. The SA Jewish Board of Deputies (formed in 1912) and the SA Zionist Federation (1898) are its two main representative bodies. Originally, members of the Jewish faith in South Africa looked to the Chief Rabbi of Britain for spiritual leadership. Eventually, in 1933, synagogues in the Transvaal federated under a chief rabbi. In 1986, Cape and Transvaal groupings that had remained fairly independent up until then amalgamated. While members of the Jewish community made their greatest contributions to South African human rights as individuals, some organisations also played a role. During the last years of apartheid, Jews for Justice and Jews for Social Justice were important voices of protest. The Gesher Movement, formed in Johannesburg in 1996, aims "to serve as a Jewish lobby speaking with one independent voice, 'to enlighten' the Jewish community in the new South Africa, and to combat Jewish racism."¹

Hinduism

- 24 Seventy percent of the one million South African Indians are Hindu. The first Indians came to South Africa in 1860 to work as indentured labour, mainly on sugar plantations in Natal. After the term of their indenture ended, many stayed on as farmers - despite government attempts to repatriate them in the 1920s. The so-called 'free' or 'passenger Indians' arrived towards the end of the nineteenth century and set up trade and merchant businesses. Indians in South Africa are a very diverse group. They include four major language groups with distinctive (though sometimes overlapping) worship practices, religious rites, customs and dress.
- 25 From the turn of the century, various Hindu communities and religious institutions came together under the banner of a national body. The Hindu Maha Sabha was formed in 1912 as a forum for discussion of the religious, cultural, educational, social and economic welfare of the Hindu community. It embraces the four main language groups, temple societies and neo-religious organisations that subscribe to the views of Hinduism.

Buddhism

- 26 While some Buddhists came to South Africa from India and other Indians have embraced the religion since its arrival late in the nineteenth century, most South African Buddhists are white converts. Buddhism in South Africa does not have centralised structures, but is present in small organisations and centres. The first Buddhist society was formed in 1917 in Natal. Buddhism grew amongst whites through the work of Molly and Louis van Loon and others who travelled and learned its practices abroad. The Dharma Centre, representing the Zen tradition, was set up at Somerset West in 1984.

The Baha'i Faith

- 27 Although present in South Africa since 1911, the Baha'i Faith only began to grow in the 1950s. While committed to inclusivity, the South African Baha'i community worked to promote its black leadership. This was, as it said in its statement to the Commission, "a result of [its] great emphasis on spiritual, moral, and ethical aspects of community life". The Baha'i faith places great emphasis on offering itself as a model for reconciliation, both racial and religious.
- 28 Throughout the hearings and in submissions, faith communities identified their role in South Africa's past as 'agents' of oppression, as 'victims' of oppression, and/or as 'opponents' of oppression.

• FAITH COMMUNITIES AS AGENTS OF OPPRESSION

- 29 In most cases, faith communities claimed to cut across divisions of race, gender, class and ethnicity. As such, they would seem *by their very existence* to have been in opposition to the policies of the apartheid state and, in pursuing their own norms and values, to have constituted a direct challenge to apartheid policies. However, contrary to their own deepest principles, many faith communities mirrored apartheid society, giving the lie to their profession of a loyalty that transcended social divisions.

- 30 While the submissions of many faith communities focused on their acts of commission and omission, some reflected an ethos where racism was tolerated. Faith communities often helped reinforce the idea that South Africa was a relatively normal society suffering from a few racial problems. Challenges to the consciences of whites were rare. Against this background, the faith communities acknowledged that, either through acts of commission, of legitimisation or of omission, they often, in addition to all else they did, also provided *de facto* support for apartheid. They either deliberately supported apartheid policies, participated (or advocated participation by their members) in the machinery of the state, refused to oppose a state professing to be 'Christian', or simply promoted a consciousness that insulated their members against opposition.

Acts of commission and legitimisation

Active support of state policies and agents

- 31 The submissions revealed ways in which individual members of churches - even members of those churches that were outspoken against government policies - co-operated with the regime or the Security Branch. Nico Smith, a former *dominee* who was himself outspoken against apartheid, quoted from Goldhagen²: "many of these willing executioners ... were members of our congregations." Many state operatives claimed to have found positive support in Dutch Reformed Church teaching and received the church's "blessing [for] their weapons of terror".³ Responding to this, the Dutch Reformed Church confessed to having "misled" its members by presenting "apartheid as a biblical instruction". From the outset, the Dutch Reformed Church provided theological and biblical sanction for apartheid, even though some of its theologians questioned this justification. It was only in 1986 that the Dutch Reformed Church's sanction of apartheid began to be officially questioned.
- 32 The complicity of the Dutch Reformed Church in the policy of apartheid went beyond simple approval and legitimisation. The church actively promoted apartheid, not least because it served the Afrikaner interests with which it identified. The Dutch Reformed Church admitted that it "often tended to put the interests of its people above the interests of other people." It gave no examples of times or events when it did *not* put the interests of the Afrikaner community above those of others.
- 33 While only the Dutch Reformed Church spoke of giving official sanction to apartheid laws, other faith communities admitted to actions and practices that amounted to acquiescence to them. The Presbyterian Church confessed to giving "qualified support" to government in the 1960s. For example, it defended Bantustan policies in 1965 and the right of the state to suppress "unlawful subversion".

Involvement in state structures

*The Afrikaner churches, universities and other institutions acted as no more than the limbs, hands, feet, and brain of the volk and the State.*⁴

- 34 Churches participated in state structures, most notably in the military chaplaincy. Chaplains were appointed from the ranks of the Afrikaans churches and the (black) Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in Afrika, as well as from the ranks of the Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, Apostolic Faith Mission and the Roman Catholic churches. The appointment of these chaplains was regulated by formal agreement between the state and the churches. According to

a submission to the Commission by Chaplain General Johan de Witt, the Chaplains' Service, as the official channel through which the churches were able to minister to their members in the South African Defence Force (SADF), provided services in the fields of pastoral care, crisis intervention, welfare problems, operational trauma and the handling of war related stress and anxiety.

- 35 Whatever the motivation of the individual chaplains, their participation served to reinforce the acceptance of the apartheid cause in the minds of church members, and often 'justified' the demonisation of their opponents. Here again, leadership came from the Dutch Reformed Church. Dominee Neels du Plooy, a former SADF chaplain, testified at an earlier hearing⁵ that those who objected to service in the Defence Forces were described as "unbelievers". Those who served, on the other hand, were given a New Testament with a special message from South Africa's then President, PW Botha, telling them that the Bible was their "most important weapon". This message was later removed, at the request of chaplains from the English-speaking churches.
- 36 Du Plooy said that the appointment of chaplains and the involvement of the church in the military were governed by an official agreement between the state and the Dutch Reformed Church - approved by both the national synod and Parliament.⁶ Nico Smith said that many perpetrators of human rights abuses were never challenged by the Dutch Reformed Church but were tacitly or otherwise encouraged in their activities.
- 37 In its submission, the Apostolic Faith Mission church, dominated by white Afrikaners, also admitted that numerous of its members were "employed in the structures of the former government" and that many had held "top positions in the former government organisations".
- 38 Other churches also confessed that their members participated in the state machinery. The Reformed Presbyterian Church, for example, admitted that some of its members took part in homeland structures. Indeed, members of most faith communities did so. The difference lay in whether or not the faith communities *themselves* gave their support for such activity. Furthermore, while it is true that non-Christians were discriminated against by the state, this changed to some degree after 1984 when Coloured and Indian people were co-opted by the Tricameral Parliament. At this stage, a number of Hindus and Muslims became complicit.

Suppression of dissidents

- 39 Some faith communities confessed that they did not give sufficient support to activists in their communities (see below). Others admitted to suppressing, censoring and condemning dissidents, and even to branding them as 'heretics'. The torture of Frank Chikane (then General Secretary of the SACC and a leader in the black section of the Apostolic Faith Mission) took place under the supervision of an elder in the white section (who afterwards went off to worship).
- 40 In addition to such acts of outright repression, there was a failure to support dissidents and activists within community ranks.
- 41 Even the most apparently benign activity was construed as subversive. Ponti Venter spoke at the hearing of the efforts of the Potchefstroom supporters of the National Initiative of Reconciliation to supply study space for black matriculants during the 1980s. Local churches, under the watchful eye of the Security Forces, labelled the initiative

“communist-inspired,” and no church in town would grant it support. The communications of members of Potchefstroom University (a prominent ‘Christian National’ institution) who raised their voices to question apartheid were monitored. Farid Esack spoke of the way Muslim leadership marginalised dissident voices during the struggle years. This was also the case in the Hindu community.

Internalising racism

- 42 Despite their claim to loyalties that transcended the state, South African churches, whether implicitly or as a matter of policy, allowed themselves to be structured along racial lines - reinforcing the separate symbolic universes in which South Africans lived. Besides the Afrikaans churches and the Apostolic Faith Mission, the Lutheran Church, too, was racially divided; its white members consistently refused to join the unity movement that was to become the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Conservative-evangelical organisations were also affected by the climate of the country. The Student Christian Association split into separate white (SCA) and black (SCM) organisations. While the Seventh Day Adventist Church was unified at its highest level, many of its structures became segregated – into racially divided Union conferences and secondary and tertiary educational institutions - as the church began to “pattern itself after the thinking of the politicians”.
- 43 Yet even churches which retained the principle of non-racialism in their structures were not guiltless in practice. Some, such as the Salvation Army, confessed to tacit support of racism. And while the Catholics officially disavowed racial divisions, “effectively there was a black church and a white church.” This was equally true of each of the English-speaking churches - it has been suggested that Sunday morning and evening constituted the most segregated hours of the week. In those communities where black clergy were in the majority, they were insufficiently empowered as leaders within church structures. Stipends were drastically different for black and white clergy, reinforcing racial stereotypes of lifestyle differences. According to the Baptist Convention, some black Baptist ministers earned as little as R50 per month after thirty years of service to the Union.⁷

*The same contradictions that are prevalent in society are present and often reflected in the teaching and life of the church.*⁸

- 44 Discrimination was not unknown in faith communities outside of Christianity. According to Imam Rashid Omar of the Claremont Mosque, Cape Town, theological distinctions between Indian and Malay Muslims reflected ethno-class distinctions, as exemplified in the Ulamas and the Cape organisations respectively. Hence, whether legislated or not, and even in the face of their own resolutions to condemn racist government policies, many South African faith communities admitted to having mirrored the racial divisions of society.

Propagating ‘state theology’

- 45 The term ‘state theology’ is derived from *The Kairos Document* and refers to the theology that gave legitimacy to the apartheid state. The effects of state theology were to “bless injustice, canonise the will of the powerful and reduce the poor to passivity, obedience and apathy.”⁹ Few churches did not allow a distinction between black and white members at Sunday worship.

- 46 The most obvious example of a faith community propagating state theology was the Dutch Reformed Church, although it never (even in its submission to the Commission) confessed to actually 'bowing down' to the monster that apartheid disclosed itself to be. Right wing Christian groups¹⁰ also promulgated state theology and acted as arms of the state, infiltrating especially evangelical and Pentecostal denominations. This became particularly evident in investigations into the information scandal of the late 1970s, when it was disclosed that government was funding groups such as the Christian League – the forerunner of the Gospel Defence League.
- 47 Evangelical churches were often used by government agencies to 'neutralise dissent'. Moss Nthla referred to government-sponsored youth camps which targeted township children for evangelism. "I used to be involved in the struggle," he recalled one young man saying, "and now I've received Jesus Christ as my Lord and Saviour, and I'm no longer involved". The Apostolic Faith Mission confessed to preaching that opposition to apartheid was "communist-inspired and aimed at the downfall of Christianity." Other churches admitted to propagating state theology indirectly by promoting the idea that it was in the interest of 'Christian civilisation' to support the state's 'total onslaught' strategy. Claiming to speak for "eleven million evangelical Pentecostals", Assemblies of God leaders often travelled around the world denouncing the activities of anti-apartheid Christians.¹¹

The military chaplaincy: a window into church-state relations

- 48 General Magnus Malan, former Minister of Defence and, before that, head of the SADF, was interviewed in the *Kerkbode* in early 1995. He was asked about the extent to which the church assisted him and his colleagues in times of difficult decision making in a war situation. He responded as follows:

The Christian Protestant faith is by far the strongest [of religious traditions] in the military and we received from the chaplains the correct guidance. We are all familiar with the church and the Christian-ethical principles and we would like to say thank you for preceding us in prayer through the difficult decisions that had to be taken.

Prayer always causes one to search one's conscience ... The church has played a great role in the war situation and also in the post war situation. My family and I pray for the church.

- 49 His words capture the perception of the chaplaincy shared by many soldiers as well as the families and friends of those who served in the military.
- 50 This institution also helps bring into focus several of the issues already discussed which aim to identify the role of Christian churches in the abuses of the past. Many local congregation members either themselves served in the defence forces or had family members or friends who did. As such, they felt that their churches owed them pastoral care, regardless of the church's position on the war or attitude towards apartheid.
- 51 At the same time, at official, denominational levels, the chaplaincy was often an embarrassment - especially to those who claimed to be against apartheid oppression.¹² The SACC proposed an 'independent' chaplaincy service, with chaplains wearing distinctive uniforms and not receiving a salary from the state. Some churches threatened to instruct their ministers not to wear military uniforms. Some responded by supplying chaplains to the liberation movements as well. Others incurred the wrath of their members by withdrawing their chaplains altogether. Many churches, however, saw the defence forces as servants of God and the chaplaincy as an important and legitimate

support. Without doubt, the Dutch Reformed Church supplied the largest number of chaplains (some 74 per cent) to the SADF. The English speaking churches provided a further 16 per cent.¹³

- 52 The military chaplaincy gave moral legitimacy to a culture characterised by the perpetration of gross human rights abuses. It served to filter out dissenting voices, to strengthen the resolve to kill and to reassure the doubting soldier that he or she was serving the purposes of God. In spite of professions of a loyalty higher than that of the state, chaplains found themselves lending succour to persons trying to kill 'enemy' soldiers who were sometimes members of their own denomination.
- 53 Chaplains ostensibly attending to the pastoral care needs of church members were under the strict control, not of the church, but of the SADF command. They were given uniforms and rank, lending further sacrality to military culture. They were expected to report to the officer commanding and to report on the conduct of those under their charge. Thus, the chaplain was an instrument of the will of the commanding officer on a wide variety of issues. The submission by the Chaplain General, Johan de Witt, stresses that officers were not, however, permitted to determine the contents of sermons and were obliged to respect the confidentiality between chaplains and those members of the military who chose to meet with them. The relationship between state and church was nevertheless frequently a compromised one as a result of the chaplaincy. The principle of non-interference by the military was often violated by individuals. Chaplains, in turn, often became part of the military milieu in which they served. By default if not design, they were part of an institution that proclaimed obedience to the state as having been instituted by God.¹⁴

*Our silence was in fact sin and our failure to act decisively against all forms of apartheid made us party to an inhuman political ideology.*¹⁵

- 54 This is not to say that all chaplains *intended* to give legitimacy to the policies of the state. There were different understandings of the social and political situation within which the SADF existed. Chaplain General de Witt conceded that some chaplains *were* protagonists of state theology. At the same time, he insisted that the majority of chaplains, each in their own way, regarded themselves primarily as ministers of the Gospel, responsible for the pastoral care of their flock.
- 55 After completing his theological training, Professor Dirk Human served for some time as national service chaplain (*dienspligkapelaan*) in the SADF. In a separate submission, he contended that a number of national service chaplains became very critical of some aspects of the chaplaincy. From time to time, they came into conflict with the higher echelons in the Chaplain General's office, especially on issues of the church's ideological support towards the struggle (*die bosoerlog*), the close co-operation between church and state, the obligatory wearing of military uniforms, as well as the way in which pastors or priests were appointed to the chaplaincy.
- 56 The Revd Leigh Sundberg, a former Methodist chaplain, argued in his submission that: "the chaplaincy was by no means a convergent whole". Individual chaplains carried with them "different views and degrees of conviction about the social and political context". He stressed that, as an institution, the chaplaincy was an arm, an organ of the SADF which was seen to be defending white privilege.
- 57 In general, however, apart from the intentions of individuals within it, the chaplaincy was a tool in the hands of the military, and thus an important cog in the apartheid machine. The degree of involvement of the chaplaincy in the

defence forces is a good illustration of the importance that the apartheid state attached to religion and its power to command allegiance. It illustrates, too, the complexity and interconnectedness of the social, political and cultural web in South Africa.

Acts of omission

Avoiding responsibility

- 58 The idea of 'responsibility' differs amongst groups. While some communities (especially, though not only, English-speaking churches) saw themselves as consciences of the nation¹⁶, others defined their responsibilities primarily to their own members. Communities generally expressed the view that it had been their moral responsibility to speak out against injustice, making their silence under apartheid especially regrettable. Offering a variety of reasons, including complicity with white business interests, poor or inadequate theology or some other reason, faith communities and their leadership confessed to silence in the face of apartheid wrongs. In its submission, the Roman Catholic Church said that this was perhaps its greatest sin. The Salvation Army too, despite its heritage of "standing up and being counted", noted its lack of courage. Even the Uniting Reformed Church, which in the 1980s was an important player in opposing the theological justification of apartheid, confessed to taking too long to make a stand, particularly against the migrant labour system. Such a failure indicated "silent approval" of state actions.
- 59 Farid Esack accused the Muslim leadership of failing to speak out strongly against apartheid and especially of remaining silent after the death in detention of Imam Abdullah Haron in 1969, despite the injuries found on his body.
- 60 The Hindu Maha Sabha said that Hindu religious leaders failed their communities by failing to protest against apartheid. This created the impression that Hindus were part of the system. The community also failed in that it did not remove those "irresponsible" leaders, as it should have done.

Lacking courage

- 61 Communities as diverse as the Church of England, the Catholics, the Council of African Initiated Churches and the Presbyterians admitted that they could have been more aggressive in campaigning for reform. They gave various reasons for this. Sometimes they were protecting the interests of their wealthy constituents. Sometimes it was a simple failure of nerve or a refusal to place privilege - whether of individuals or of the community - at risk.¹⁷ The Jewish community, with fresh memories of Nazi atrocities, said that it feared to give the impression that it was against the state. The Catholics made a similar observation, citing its tenuous position as '*die Roomse kerk*'. The mostly German Evangelical Lutheran Church of Southern Africa (ELCSA) spoke of its minority cultural status.

Failure to translate resolutions into action

- 62 In their submissions, faith communities commonly confessed not only to a failure to speak, but also to a failure to act. Many communities that were opposed to apartheid in principle found it difficult to translate strong resolutions into practical action. In the nature of institutional politics, resolutions were watered down by the time they were actually passed.¹⁸ More than logistic problems, such failures represented "a blatant omission and silent approval of the conditions and main cause of human rights violations."¹⁹

Failure to support members who were involved in anti-apartheid activities

- 63 Faith communities did not necessarily support the activities of their activist members or even leaders. ELCSA confessed to not encouraging its clergy to speak out against atrocities and failing to support those who did. The Church of the Province apologised to Archbishop Tutu for its failure to support his call for economic sanctions against the former regime. The Baptist Convention accused the Baptist Union of having a number of activist members, including some detained on Robben Island, but refusing to acknowledge them. Farid Esack accused Muslim leaders of denying space and legitimacy to Muslims engaged in anti-apartheid activities.
- 64 Opposition to apartheid by members of faith communities tended to take the form of individual opposition by people who, often despite the institutions to which they belonged, remained faithful to what they saw as the true spirit of their religion. These included, during the period under review, people such as Trevor Huddleston, Beyers Naudé, Ben Marais, Cosmas Desmond, David Russell, Sheena Duncan, Frank Chikane, Sister Benedicta Ncube, Smangaliso Mkhathshwa, Molvi Cachalia, Abdullah Haron, Hassan Solomon, Farid Esack, Ebrahim Rasool, Ela Gandhi, Franz Auerbach and others. Some rose to leadership positions in their respective churches, notably the Reverend Seth Mokotimi, Archbishop Dennis Hurley, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Dr Allan Boesak.
- 65 Similarly, institutions that were engaged in anti-apartheid activities and had the apparent verbal support of faith communities were effectively unsupported. In 1975, the Christian Institute was declared an 'affected' organisation by the Schlegbusch Commission and thus prevented from receiving external funds. Little or no material support came from those churches that had verbally supported it in synods and assemblies. When it was banned two years later, along with its executive leadership, little action was taken and little support given to many of those who were affected.

• FAITH COMMUNITIES AS VICTIMS OF OPPRESSION

- 66 Black, coloured and Indian members of faith communities suffered under apartheid legislation. Forced removals had a powerful effect on faith communities. The effects were also more direct, where faith communities were attacked for what they stood for — as alternative centres of loyalty or (in the eyes of the state) disloyalty.²⁰

Direct attacks by the state on members and organisations

- 67 Perhaps the most famous instances of direct attacks on churches and related institutions by the state were the banning of the Christian Institute in 1977 and the 1988 bombing of Khotso House, the headquarters of the SACC. This latter action by the state should be seen in the context of an ongoing battle with the SACC, waged on a number of fronts, symbolic (through media disinformation) and legal (the Eloff Commission). The SACC said that it was often the target of security raids. Many SACC staff members and associated personnel were detained, and some tortured. Others died in mysterious circumstances.
- 68 Six weeks after the bombing of Khotso House, the headquarters of the South African Catholic Bishops Conference was destroyed by arsonists who, it is now known, were agents of the state.²¹ Father Smangaliso Mkhathshwa, the Secretary General of the Bishops Conference, was detained and tortured by the state many times. Other faith

communities said that their leaders, members and offices were targeted and detained. Post was intercepted and telephones tapped. The free movement of church officials and representatives inside and outside South Africa's borders was hindered.²²

- 69 The submissions of the MJC, the MYM and Farid Esack mentioned Imam Abdullah Haron who was detained for four months in 1969 under the Terrorism Act and tortured to death. The Church of the Province singled out Father Michael Lapsley as "a living icon of redemptive suffering within [the Church of the Province]". Father Lapsley lost both arms and an eye in a savage parcel bomb attack in April 1990 (two months after the unbanning of the liberation movements).

Closure of buildings, schools and institutions

- 70 Inevitably, faith communities were affected by Group Areas legislation; congregations were forced to relocate and historic buildings lost.²³ Among those mentioned in the submissions were the London Missionary Society church at Graaff Reinet (built in 1802) and the stone church at Majeng in the Northern Cape (built in 1874 and bulldozed in 1975). According to the submission of the United Congregational Church, the congregations of these churches were declared "trespassers in their own homes." The Moravian Church said it suffered the loss of a number of Churches, especially in Port Elizabeth and Cape Town.²⁴ Churches were forced to sell properties at low prices - something which seriously hindered their efforts to re-establish congregations after removal.
- 71 Bantu Education forced the closure of mission stations and schools that had provided education for Africans for many years.²⁵ Several churches with a long tradition in mission education, such as the Methodist Church, the United Congregational Church and the Church of the Province lost large numbers of primary schools and many secondary schools as well. The Methodist Church spoke of losing Kilnerton and Heald-town, and the United Congregational Church of the loss of Adams College and Tiger Kloof. The Reformed Presbyterian Church spoke of the loss of Lovedale and Blyswyth to the governments of Ciskei and Transkei. Indeed many properties belonging to this latter church were in so-called 'white' areas and the church was forced by law (which prohibited ownership of such properties) to sell them.²⁶ Several submissions made reference to the closing of the Federal Theological Seminary in Alice and the taking of its land.²⁷ Hospitals and other institutions were also affected by Group Areas legislation. One example of this is when the Seventh Day Adventist Church was forced to close its Nokuphilia Hospital in Alexandra township.
- 72 While many communities suffered losses, however, others benefited from them. The Volkskerk, a coloured 'split-off' from the Dutch Reformed Church, worshipped in a building they had built themselves in the centre of Stellenbosch, but lost it in the early 1960s under the Group Areas Act. The building was taken over by a white Christian congregation. The Uniting Reformed Church congregation in Messina made a similar allegation against its neighbouring Dutch Reformed Church congregation. According to the Hindu Maha Sabha presentation, Christian churches readily bought up Hindu religious sites after removals. The fact that faith communities - sometimes within the same tradition - both suffered and benefited from the same series of removals highlights the need for reconciliation and restitution between communities.

Repression and abuse of religious values and laws

- 73 Despite the many different religious allegiances of its subjects, the apartheid state saw itself as the guardian of 'Christian civilisation' in southern Africa. From the time of the arrival of the colonists in the seventeenth century, other faith communities were barely tolerated. Using education as its weapon, the apartheid state perpetuated this. Christian National Education was imposed on non-Christian faith communities – a fact highlighted in Muslim and Hindu submissions. The expression of certain religious values in education was repressed and other alien values were imposed. This was true even in the case of such Christian communities as the amaNazaretha where taboos concerning shaving were not honoured in schools and children were forced to remove their hair, causing ritual defilement.
- 74 Related to the repression of religious values in education was the repression of religious law, especially in the case of Islam and Hinduism. Muslim marriages observed by the Ulama were not legally valid, making their children illegitimate.²⁸ The MYM pointed out that the state was also able to use religious laws to suit its own ends. It recalled how the Ulama were co-opted onto a South African Law Commission committee on the recognition of Muslim marriage in 1986 - a cynical attempt on the part of the state to gain the approval of the Islamic community.²⁹
- 75 The religious values of the Baha'i faith preclude opposition to governments, a position contested by other faith communities. While its racially mixed worship practices and black leadership resulted in state surveillance, members of the so-called 'black Baha'i' were traitors in the eyes of some other blacks. This resulted in the tragic execution of four of its adherents at its places of worship in Umtata and Mdantsane.

Manipulation by state propaganda

- 76 The apartheid state targeted faith communities in other ways. Evangelical groups such as the Church of England said it was subjected to state propaganda, especially in relation to the struggle against Communism. Such propaganda played on white fears and distorted the meaning of the Bible which the church saw as authoritative. It was thus "misled into accepting a social, economic and political system that was cruel and oppressive" and "failed to adequately understand the suffering of [its] many black members who were victims of apartheid."³⁰ It might be an over-statement to link such 'victimisation' with the more direct and violent attacks by the state on anti-apartheid leaders. However, the fears of white church members made them vulnerable to propaganda, leading them into sins of omission. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the Chairperson of the Commission said:

I would want and I'm sure that all of my fellow Christians would want to apologise to you members of other faiths for our arrogance as Christians when for so very long, we behaved as if we were the only religious faith in this country, when in fact from the year dot, we have been a multi-faith society.

Victimisation by other faith communities

- 77 Churches willingly engaged in fomenting division in society and were paralysed by propaganda. The demonisation and dehumanisation of other faith communities were prevalent, especially in conservative and right wing Christian groups. In 1986, at the same synod where its policy of uncritical support for apartheid was beginning to be challenged, the Dutch Reformed Church proclaimed Islam a "false religion".³¹ The victimisation of African Traditional Religion by Christians was highlighted in the submission of Nokuzola Mndende: Africans were forced to become Christians, as a baptismal certificate was a common form of identification.

- 78 As Farid Esack observed at the hearings, the past was only partly about apartheid, security laws and so on: "It was also about Christian triumphalism." All non-Christian faith communities were victimised by an aggressively 'Christian' state, and *die Islamse gevaar* took its place alongside the other enemies of the state.
- 79 There were other kinds of victimisation of one faith community by another – even *within* Christian churches. The submissions indicate that this took a number of forms, from denominational splits to the appropriation of buildings declared off-limits to black people under Group Areas legislation.³² Fault lines developed in churches on questions of commitment to the struggle, and conservative 'splinters' proliferated.³³ While these newer institutions often claimed 'theological' reasons for their existence as alternatives to mainline groups, many served the state as 'shadow' institutions and denominations set up to oppose those who were against apartheid policies. The Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches, a breakaway from the United Congregational Church, was set up in the wake of the debate over that church's membership of the World Council of Churches. It was linked to churches funded by the state and exposed in the 1979 information scandal.³⁴

A special note on gender and faith communities

- 80 The representatives of faith communities at the hearings were overwhelmingly male. Only four of the sixty-six persons who appeared before the Commission in East London were women, and little mention was made of the links between racial, class and gender oppression. Women and women's groups played key roles in supporting victims and opponents of human rights abuses, as witnessed by the fact that most of those who testified at the human rights violations hearings were women, and usually did so on behalf of others rather than themselves. Yet, in churches and mosques, as elsewhere, they were relegated to secondary status.

• FAITH COMMUNITIES AS OPPONENTS OF OPPRESSION

- 81 As in other institutional hearings (most notably the business hearings), what may be regarded as 'opposition' to apartheid was highly contested. Furthermore, the changing nature of apartheid repression meant that what was seen as opposition at one time could be seen as legitimisation at another. Faith communities across the board spoke of opposing apartheid, although the language and practices through which they expressed this opposition differed widely. For the Zion Christian Church, instilling pride in black people and teaching them to stand up straight in their own institutions, was a strong repudiation of the treatment of its members in 'white' society. The Hindu Maha Sabha spoke of reaching into its tradition of passive resistance, especially the Gandhian model. The Church of England spoke of private meetings with government officials. For the SACC, the watershed came when it began to identify itself with the liberation movements.
- 82 It is perhaps helpful to speak of a 'continuum of opposition', which takes into account not only positions relative to the conflict in society in the post-1976 era, but also demonstrates historically the radicalisation of various strands within faith communities. This allows us to identify the particular path opposition took as it developed over time.

Alternative institutions

83 Among the oldest ways that black people expressed protest was through the creation of separate, black institutions, under black control and using black cultural resources. This is the heritage of the African Initiated Churches that dates back to the early part of the century. Although African Initiated Churches were originally concerned mainly with creating an alternative to white churches, the state responded violently by repressing early movements such as the Israelites. If nothing else, this demonstrates the state's awareness of the role of religion as a tool supporting or destabilising its grasp on the hearts and minds of its subjects. More recently, the African Initiated Churches addressed black needs by instilling pride and moral discipline – a position strongly stated in the submissions of the Zion Christian Church and the amaNazaretha. The engagement was not so much with state ideology as with subverting the symbolic support of white domination.

Petitions, letters and private appeals

- 84 Many churches and faith communities petitioned the government openly or privately on a wide range of issues. They were joined, towards the end of the apartheid era, by the more conservative churches (such as the Church of England in South Africa) which were less comfortable with direct opposition.³⁵ The Dutch Reformed Church, which remained tied to state structures, also met privately with state officials to “express its doubts” about state policies and their application. The Dutch Reformed Church admitted, however, that such meetings rarely called into question the policies themselves, but asked only that they be “applied with compassion and humanity.” Positioning itself as “politically neutral”, the leadership of the Baha’i Faith nonetheless also met with officials in private to present its philosophy of inclusivity.
- 85 Leaders of communities that were more public in their opposition issued open petitions. In the 1970s, the MJC issued a letter of protest to the government over human rights abuses during the 1976 riots. The SACC and other ecumenical Christian leaders adopted a stronger tone as well, warning the government of what might happen should change not occur.

Official statements and resolutions

- 86 The submissions spoke of numerous statements on apartheid that were issued by faith communities during the mandate period. Some of these demonstrate the variety of ways in which faith communities presented their opposition. The gradual radicalisation of statements – especially after 1976 – is also significant.³⁶
- 87 Of the Protestant churches, the United Congregational Church, the Presbyterian Church and the SACC made special mention of the ‘Cottesloe Statement’ and Conference (1960), set up in the wake of the Sharpsville tragedy. The statement “opposed apartheid in worship”, but also “in prohibition of mixed marriages, migrant labour, low wages, job reservation and permanent exclusion of ‘non-white people’ from government.” The fact that this statement - despite its paternalism in comparison with later documents - went beyond strictly ‘church’ matters in the eyes of the state is significant. Previously churches had only been able to unite against apartheid when their own congregations were directly affected, as with opposition to the 1957 Church Clause. The ‘Cottesloe Statement’ also featured in the Dutch Reformed Church’s ‘Journey’ document as “an important stop”. Not only did it result in the marginalisation of some of its representatives (including Beyers Naudé); it caused “a deep rift between the Dutch Reformed Churches and many other recognised Protestant churches in the country.”³⁷ More than this, it set a precedent for state interference, not

simply in the affairs of the Dutch Reformed Church (with which it already enjoyed a special relationship), but in those of the ecumenical churches.

- 88 The SACC submission stated that 'The Message to the People of South Africa' (1968) directly attacked the theological foundations of nationalism, saying that a Christian's "first loyalty" must be given to Christ, rather than to "a subsection of mankind". Christian groups began to engage in intensive social analysis in the early 1970s. The Study Project on Christianity in Apartheid Society (SPRO-CAS) was launched after the 'Message'. SPRO-CAS set up several commissions, covering educational, legal, economic, social and religious areas. Later the Special Programme of Christian Action in Society (SPRO-CAS II) was established to implement the report's recommendations.
- 89 Throughout the 1970s, the Council of Churches published materials expressing its opposition to apartheid and envisioning a post-apartheid society. In its submission, it highlighted the 'Resolution on Conscientious Objection' (1974) which, amongst other things, questioned the appointment of military chaplains to the SADF, and the 'Resolution on Non Co-operation' which urged Christians to withdraw from state structures. Two statements issued in the turbulent 1980s were notable. The first was the 'Call for Prayer to End Unjust Rule' which mobilised Christian symbolic resources against the 'Christian' state. The second was the 'Lusaka Statement' of 1987, which urged the churches to support the efforts of liberation movements, and occasioned "fierce opposition" from SACC members.³⁸ Theology was a battleground, and the term 'heresy' was used not only against those who contested classical dogma and its interpretation, but also against those who contested the meaning of such dogma in practice. The influence of Dr Allan Boesak, then President of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), in promoting the adoption of the resolution declaring apartheid a heresy by the WARC in 1982, and subsequently by the World Council of Churches (WCC) and many of its member churches, was of far-reaching significance in the struggle against apartheid.³⁹
- 90 The 'Kairos Document', another watershed statement, was produced by the Institute for Contextual Theology in 1985 and proved highly contentious. Some churches rejected its analysis and theology, claiming it was a 'sell-out' to ideology; others (notably the United Congregational Church) set up special study groups in local churches. While the 'Kairos Document' was accused of polarising the debate about the relationship between churches and liberation movements, it can be argued that it merely gave expression to existing polarisation. Not all anti-apartheid Christian leaders signed it, though it had an impact beyond the Christian churches and was also mentioned in the MYM submission.
- 91 Dissension in the ranks of the Dutch Reformed Church concerning its support of the government was expressed most notably in the '*Ope Brief*' [open letter] published by 123 Dutch Reformed Church ministers in 1982.⁴⁰ However, as admitted in its 'Journey' document, the Dutch Reformed Church's protests were limited largely to private meetings with state officials. The production of the 'Koinonia Declaration' in 1977 – a statement which opposed apartheid and its Christian justification – by scholars from the smaller Afrikaans-speaking Gereformeerde Kerke was significant. While the Gereformeerde Kerk declined to make a submission to the Commission, two of its members did so, drawing on the legacy of this statement.⁴¹
- 92 At a denominational level, discrimination in general and the policy of apartheid in particular was rejected as "intrinsically evil" by the Catholic Church in 1960 and as heresy by the United Congregational Church in 1982.⁴² In 1986, the Presbyterian Church and the United Congregational Church passed resolutions making rejection of

apartheid a matter of *status confessionis* [a situation demanding a new confession of faith], claiming in essence that the church in South Africa stood in the same relation to apartheid as did the German church to Nazism during the 1930s. In 1982, the Uniting Reformed Church, which admitted to a heritage of failing to pronounce strongly on apartheid, produced the 'Belhar Confession', the first church confession to be produced on South African soil.

- 93 The international dimension to church confessions was notable, and was characterised by conferences and statements by 'linked' churches in other countries. However, not all overseas structures were heeded by their South African counterparts. The Salvation Army in South Africa remained silent about apartheid crimes even after the condemnation of apartheid by its General, Eva Burrows, in London in 1986. The Seventh Day Adventist Church also confessed that their position on apartheid was "out of step" with its overseas body.
- 94 Theological resistance was not, of course, limited to the Christian churches. Shortly after the 'Cottesloe Statement' was issued, the 'Call of Islam Declaration' (1961) was issued by the Cape Town MYM together with the MJC, the Claremont Muslim Youth Association, the Cape Vigilance Association, the Young Men's Muslim Association and a number of individuals and leaders. This was a declaration that apartheid was contrary to Islam and condemned Group Areas, pass and job reservation legislation. A 1964 national conference called by the MJC protested about the impact of the Group Areas Act on mosque life and passed a series of resolutions urging that, under no circumstances, should mosques be abandoned. In the 1980s, the involvement of many prominent Islamic leaders and members in anti-apartheid structures intensified. Muslim leaders participated in the UDF 'Don't Vote' campaign, arguing that a vote for the Tricameral Parliament was *haram* (prohibited). Language particular to Islam was used to intensify Muslim involvement in opposing apartheid.⁴³ Achmat Cassiem established the pro-PAC Qibla Mass Movement and Farid Esack and Ebrahim Rasool established the pro-African National Congress (ANC) Call of Islam. The MYM was also significant during this period.
- 95 In addition to passing resolutions against the violent policies of the state, statements made by faith communities during the 1980s expressed general concern about the violence sweeping the country. Sometimes this required recognition of the tension between the faith community's solidarity with the liberation movements and its concern about the violence with which apartheid was often opposed (as in the United Congregational Church submission). "Whilst the United Congregational Church was concerned about the loss of innocent civilian life in guerrilla attacks," it wrote, "it never allied itself with the hysterical reaction against 'terrorism' that the apartheid government orchestrated". Communities differed on the degree to which anti-apartheid violence was 'justifiable' (not simply 'understandable'). The Uniting Reformed Church stated that "the ambiguous nature of the decision with regard to justified actions against apartheid was often left to the conscience of members."
- 96 While it has been suggested that those responsible for the 'Kairos Document' share guilt through their support of violent uprisings, it must be pointed out that (whatever their perspective on the armed struggle on the borders) they did not condone 'necklace' killings or 'kangaroo courts'.
- 97 There were those, too, who claimed a 'third way', who argued that all violence was equally wrong and whose statements condemned both sides of the struggle. The Church of England's 1985 national synod expressed its "abhorrence of all violence and all oppression". Interestingly, while the Church of England expressed the view that the "only solution" to the problem of violence was to deal with sin through "reconciliation to God", the United

Congregational Church claimed that the only answer (and here it specifically referred to the struggle on the borders between the SADF and the liberation movements) was justice for the people of South Africa.

Withdrawing from state structures

- 98 Another way that faith communities - and here in this ostensibly 'Christian' land we must speak of churches - expressed opposition to apartheid was by withdrawing from state structures in which they were complicit, particularly the military.
- 99 It is significant that the preamble to the Tricameral Constitution declared that South Africa was a Christian state, even though the structures it proposed aimed at co-opting groups with many Muslim and Hindu members. Opposition to the Tricameral Constitution was strong, and there was an "overwhelming consensus" amongst Muslims that it was "contrary to the spirit of Islam". Hindu leaders who participated were ostracised, the Maha Sabha told the hearings. The United Congregational Church urged its members to distance themselves from the Tricameral Parliament and removed such participants as the Reverends Alan Hendrickse and Andrew Julies - two former chairs of the United Congregational Church - from their ministers' roll.
- 100 While many churches drew upon the just war tradition within Christianity, others were opposed to combat as a tenet of faith. For Seventh Day Adventists and Quakers, to have served in the military (on either side) would have meant apostasy from their faith tradition.⁴⁴ Many leaders in the conscientious objection movement were Christians and objected on the basis of Christian principles.⁴⁵ Individual Catholic priests refused to act as military chaplains or marriage officers, as did some clergy in the Uniting Reformed Church.⁴⁶ The Quakers and the SACC issued resolutions in 1974 supporting conscientious objectors. The United Congregational Church spoke of its "constant support" for objectors, the principle of objection and the End Conscription Campaign. It also refused to be co-opted onto the SADF-sponsored Board for Religious Objection. The Presbyterian Church, which had supported the rights of conscientious objectors from 1971, spoke of how, in 1982, it had initiated a process "aimed at moving the denomination towards opposing service in the SADF." While it did not withdraw its chaplains until 1990 (underlining again the gap between resolution and action), it met in 1988 with delegations from the ANC and the PAC to discuss the possibility of appointing chaplains to their liberation armies. The United Congregational Church also supplied "pastoral care" to the liberation movements, including the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO), while the Church of the Province was in the unusual position of seeing its defence force chaplains providing succour to an army of occupation in Angola and Namibia and did so only 'unofficially'.

Civil disobedience and passive resistance

- 101 Another way in which faith communities expressed opposition to the policies of apartheid was through deliberate disobedience of state laws. From 1981, for example, the Presbyterian Church embarked on a campaign of defying laws on mixed marriages, group areas and quoting banned persons and publications. This followed the work of the Reverend Rob Robertson at a local level, whose multi-racial and multi-class congregations in East London and Johannesburg represented "the first move to take actual steps to reverse the segregating effects of apartheid on congregations and to set an example to the nation".⁴⁷

102 Other local congregations deliberately flouted laws by promoting mixed worship. The Baha'i Faith came under scrutiny for insisting that its members meet together across racial boundaries and the Ulama spoke of Muslims of different race groups worshipping and studying together. It can be argued that these were not always deliberate acts of defiance,⁴⁸ but were simply activities that conformed to the norms of the faith community's tradition - sharing a common faith across racial barriers. The fact that they flew in the face of the state only underlined the fact that the state's policy was wrong. Institutional resistance was expressed, for instance, in the Catholic Church's opening of its schools to all races in 1976 – something which engaged it in battle with the state until 1991.

Solidarity with liberation movements

103 While some faith communities (mostly at a local level) participated in protests and defiance campaigns from the outset, and others (specifically the Dutch Reformed Church) pledged loyalty to the 'Christian' state, most faith communities throughout the 1960s and 1970s attempted to find a middle path – choosing not to lend full support either to the liberation movements or the state.

104 The aftermath of Soweto resulted, however, in more radical responses from faith communities. In 1978, the Reformed Presbyterian Church said that its Moderator, Reverend DM Soga, declared that a 'Kairos' had arrived for the churches in South Africa. In that community's first public stance against the government, Reverend Soga spoke of the "daring" of the younger generation that was now rising up against oppression.

105 The UDF, launched in 1983, had strong representation from faith communities. One of its affiliates was the MJC, which saw itself as an oppressed community in solidarity with other oppressed communities.⁴⁹

*We are placed in a position of direct responsibility for declaring and living the truth in South Africa in a situation where untruth reigns supreme.*⁵⁰

106 As the 1980s wore on and the political climate became more intense, several church denominations came to realise that their loyalty commanded them to take a stand either for the liberation movements or for the state. There was contact between faith communities and liberation movements in exile throughout the 1980s, and the United Congregational Church assembly met with ANC leaders in Gaberone in 1987. In 1988, a number of Afrikaner academics from the University of Stellenbosch travelled north "in search of Africa", and while they were not permitted to meet officially with the exiled ANC, there was contact at an informal level. This dispelled some of the state-sponsored propaganda about the ANC, and helped foster debate in one of the bastions of Afrikaner nationalism.⁵¹ The World Conference on Religion and Peace also met with leaders in Zambia in 1988 to discuss religion in a post apartheid South Africa.

107 The Catholic church mobilised its own structures (Young Christian Workers, Justice and Peace groups and so forth) and opened its parish halls to popular organisations for meetings, gave refuge to activists on church property or helped them leave the country. It also participated in the Standing for the Truth campaign – an SACC initiative supported by other faith communities. Roman Catholic theologians, like Albert Nolan, were formative voices on the South African theological scene.

108 By 1988, the political activities of the UDF and COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions) became severely restricted and faith community leaders began to fill important leadership roles. The solidarity between these faith community leaders and the liberation movements intensified. It must not, however, be forgotten that such leaders and activists were minority voices within their own community structures. By the end of the 1980s, few communities had moved beyond cautious statements of concern.

The sanctions question

- 109 As the repression of the 1980s escalated, some faith communities and organisations joined the liberation organisations in appealing to international partners to press for economic sanctions.⁵² Many however opposed sanctions or were ambivalent on the question. Some, like the Church of the Province, confessed to its failure to support sanctions only as late as 1989.⁵³ The Catholic Bishops Conference, “fearing a great increase of poverty and unemployment”, supported sanctions with reservations. “History”, it said, “will be the judge”. The only English-speaking church to give unqualified support to sanctions from the outset was the United Congregational Church.⁵⁴
- 110 Many people (mostly white) voiced opposition to sanctions, ostensibly because they would ‘hurt blacks’ as well as themselves. This was no less true of members of faith communities. However, communities were also striving to voice what the majority wanted and to bring them into the debate. In spite of surveys used by liberals to argue that a large number of blacks opposed sanctions, surveys also concluded that the majority recognised the leadership of people such as Desmond Tutu and Allan Boesak in speaking for them on the question.⁵⁵

A voice for the voiceless

- 111 Faith communities have strong traditions that call on them to speak for the voiceless. But the leadership of the English-speaking churches failed to express adequately the aspirations of their constituents, the majority of whom were black. The English-speaking churches were concerned not to alienate their members, while the Afrikaans Reformed Churches promoted the interests of Afrikaner nationalism. It was left, said the SACC in its submission, to organisations such as itself, to act as the “legitimate voice” of South Africans. Indeed, the SACC became an internationally significant information centre, representing the oppressed before the world. It could do this, Bernard Spong told the hearings, because its network of churches reached every corner of society.
- 112 The policies of the apartheid state created turmoil not only in South Africa, but spilling over into other countries as well, as people were uprooted and removed from their homes and members of resistance movements were forced to leave the country. This created a refugee problem. The United Congregational Church's regional identity allowed it to express special concern for refugees both in South Africa and in neighbouring states.
- 113 South African faith communities have a rich tradition of expressing themselves in news publications, and it was in this important way that faith communities voiced the aspirations of black people, as well as creating space for discussion and debate. The Catholic Church started the *New Nation*, while the Muslim community started the *Muslim News* and *Al Qalam*. These publications went beyond sectarian interests to address the core issues of exploitation, and faced banning orders on numerous occasions.

• FAITH COMMUNITIES AND SOUTH AFRICA'S TRANSITION

- 114 The story of faith communities and their members who were involved in opposition to apartheid does not end with the unbanning of the liberation movements. As the 1980s drew to a close, some organisations began looking toward the future and preparing people for democracy. One example of the many that illustrate the way in which the transition was anticipated is Diakonia, an ecumenical group in the Durban area, which published 'The Good Society: Bible Studies on Christianity and Democracy'⁵⁶ - anticipating voter education programmes in the run up to the 1994 elections.
- 115 Faith communities were engaged in a number of ways during South Africa's transition. A large number of Muslim organisations joined in a national conference as the negotiations between the De Klerk government and the previously banned movements got underway. The WCRP played an important role with its 1990 conference, called 'Believers in the future', which issued a 'Declaration of Religious Rights and Responsibilities'. Together with the liberation movements, the SACC and the Catholic Bishops Conference formed the National Co-ordinating Committee for the Repatriation of South African Exiles in 1991. Amongst Christians, the 1990 Rustenburg Conference and Statement were of great significance and the confessions there anticipated those made at the Commission hearings.⁵⁷
- 116 The National Peace Accord was launched in September 1991, with heavy involvement from the SACC, with the aim of helping to create an ethos conducive to democratic transition. The Catholic Bishops Conference and the SACC, together with a coalition of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), launched Education for Democracy. This project worked at local levels to create awareness of constitutional governance and key political concepts. It was directed both at illiterate black people and urban white people. The latter had never experienced non-racial democracy and expected, on the whole, to retain their privileges in a new society. The Church Leaders Forum, representing a wide collection of denominations, met with government leaders and urged them on the path to a negotiated settlement. The group included traditional foes of the SACC, including Reverend Ray McCauley of the International Federation of Christian Churches and Professor Johan Heynes of the Dutch Reformed Church.⁵⁸ After CODESA broke down, this forum worked to restart the negotiation process. The WCRP, SACC and the Catholic Bishops Conference formed the Panel of Religious Leaders for Electoral Justice to monitor the elections. The WCRP also sponsored the forum which brought monitors from other countries.⁵⁹
- 117 Does all this mean that faith communities were engaged in South Africa's democratic transition? Sadly, it is not possible to generalise here. For, once again, it was not individual faith communities, but believers as individuals and ecumenical and interfaith coalitions that were engaged. The departure of religious leaders and activists into government has created a huge leadership vacuum at an ecumenical (especially Christian) level and testifies to the close links between the ecumenical movement and progressive political activism. But at a local institutional level (including church, mosque and temple) and a denominational level, communities remain hesitant about entering the fray. In its submission, the SACC spoke of how difficult it is to focus the churches' attention, as many now wish to enter into relations with the government on a denominational level.
- 118 The period from 1984 to 1994 was one of rich co-operation across the boundaries of the faith tradition around common opposition to apartheid. Religious institutions have benefited across the board as the new state has made a concerted effort to ensure that all religious groups are represented in any activity initiated by the state.

• FINDINGS ARISING OUT OF FAITH COMMUNITIES HEARINGS

The Commission finds that:

- 119 Christianity, as the dominant religion in South Africa, promoted the ideology of apartheid in a range of different ways. These included the overt promotion of biblical and theological teaching in support of apartheid, as was the case in the white Afrikaans Reformed Churches. Certain other denominations, historically established on racial lines, have for various reasons failed to unite – often because of residual or overt forms of racism. Most churches, the dominant English-speaking churches among them, practised ecclesial apartheid by appointing ministers to congregations based on race and the payment of unequal stipends. Religious communities in general, as a rule, failed adequately to support dissident ministers, priests, imams, rabbis and lay persons who found themselves in confrontation with the state. Many religious institutions also failed to provide economic support to those who were most severely affected by apartheid. The Commission acknowledges, at the same time, that some within the religious communities boldly resisted apartheid and paid a heavy price for doing so. It was further noted with appreciation, that all the religious groups who appeared before the Commission acknowledged their complicity with apartheid.
- 120 Chaplains, provided by the churches to serve the military, the police and other uniformed services, wore the uniforms of these services, enjoyed the rank of armed personnel and some carried side arms. They were part of the illegal cross border activities carried out by the military, and they accompanied troops into the townships and other internal situations of conflict on occasion. They were seen to be supportive of the offensive structures of the former state. As such, churches must accept moral accountability for providing religious sanction and theological legitimisation for many of the actions of the armed forces.
- 121 The failure by religious communities to give adequate expression to the ethical teaching of their respective traditions, all of which stand in direct contradiction to apartheid, contributed to a climate within which apartheid was able to survive. Religious communities need to accept moral and religious culpability for their failure as institutions to resist the impact of apartheid on the nation with sufficient rigour. The failure of the churches in this regard contributed not only to the survival of apartheid but also to the perpetuation of the myth, prevalent in certain circles, that apartheid was both a moral and Christian initiative in a hostile and ungodly world.
- 122 Religious proselytising and religious-based nationalism have not only sown the seeds of inter-religious suspicion, distrust and strife; but they have also contributed directly to religiously inspired conflict. This has occurred as a result of some forms of missiological teaching and manifestations of Christian imperialism and because of anti-Semitic as well as anti-Islamic theologically-based propaganda. Religious communities must take responsibility for the actions of their followers in this regard. The nation has a right to expect of them a commitment to mutual respect between religious groups, the building of communities that include people of different religious, racial and ideological persuasions and the promotion of peace and justice.
- 123 Missionary and colonial initiatives which undermined African culture and traditional religions – a practice that continues to be perpetuated in many circles today – require careful reassessment by all religious communities.

Christianity has, because of historical and power relations, a special responsibility in this regard. Religious communities need to share responsibility for the undermining of cultural and religious identity, not least among many urbanised African youth. The reaffirmation of *ubuntu*⁶⁰ – grounded as it is in traditional African culture and increasingly supported by other religious groups – requires other established religions to gain a new understanding of traditional African religious symbols and beliefs.