

## White Liberals and Black Aspirations

The liberal tradition was based on a humane and generous philosophy. Unlike the segregationists, liberals did envisage the eventual creation of a South African societal order in which all, irrespective of colour or race (to add gender would be a solipsism) would enjoy equal rights and equal access to political power and economic prosperity. For that very reason, liberalism never made much headway among whites, most of whom believed that any loosening of their grip on power could only be to their detriment. However, liberalism was never able to make much headway among blacks either. It is unlikely that blacks, with their concept of *ubuntu* – humaneness, love of one’s neighbour – rejected liberal philosophy as such. (No doubt, some did, just as many whites both in South Africa and in their countries of origin in the Northern Hemisphere, rejected it on philosophical as much as on pragmatic grounds). That blacks subscribe as much to Davenport’s ‘four fundamentals’ as white liberals, seems clear from the way South Africa developed as an open, tolerant and democratic society since the ANC attained power in 1994.

This was, no doubt, due to some extent to the influence of liberal thinking, which should not be underestimated. However, the fact

is that liberal organisations and political parties have never attracted significant black support. Of course, since white liberals comprised only a tiny minority of the population, they never had much opportunity to put their philosophy into practice in the secular sphere. Thus it is impossible to say to what extent political success might have broadened their appeal to black people. Yet, in the ecclesiastical sphere and particularly in the Ecumenical Bloc, liberals did enjoy a long period of dominance. That means that the bodies which form the focus of this study, namely the GMC and the CCSA, and the early period of the SACC, can be seen as a 'test bed' for liberal ideas in practice.

### *Missionary/liberal paternalism*

Both Elphick, and much earlier McCrone, saw missionary work as being one of the main contributory factors to the Cape liberal tradition.<sup>1</sup> In the face of white hostility, liberal missionaries in particular, saw themselves as 'friends of the Native'. While as pointed out earlier, revisionist historiography has demonstrated that many missionaries were also friends of the extension of white rule and economic control, revisionists have perhaps been guilty of going to the opposite extreme and too heavily discounting missionary commitment to what today would be called social justice. Mills describes missionary thinking as being based on 'postmillennial theology', in terms of which missionaries saw themselves as called not simply to 'save souls', but to 'strive, through political action, to eliminate social evils such as slavery, drunkenness and prostitution.'<sup>2</sup> However, missionaries had much wider concerns than this. In late twentieth-century terms, they can also be said to have had 'contextual' theology. In the words of the late, and very lamented, Professor David Bosch of the Theology Faculty at the University of South Africa (Unisa), contextualisation 'means relating the gospel message to the entire existential context of a group, . . . Contextualisation deals with the life issues of a given society.' He quoted the Latin American Orlando E Costas,

who defined contextualisation as 'theologians applying ethical standards to their own historical reality in terms of the political, economic and social circumstances in which they find themselves.'<sup>3</sup> A little less than a decade after Bosch had penned these words, another gloss on contextual theology burst on the South African scene in the form of the ICT, which was established in 1985. The definition of contextual theology put forward by those who founded and ran this organisation (in particular the Dominican Fr Albert Nolan) was rather less purely theological and much more focused on the particular apartheid context in which Christians found themselves at the time. In the words of Speckman and Kaufmann:

Contextual Theology . . . became one of the powers that applied pressure to the apartheid devil. It (together with other progressive forces) opposed the dehumanising political system that was legitimated by theology.<sup>4</sup>

It would, of course, seem to be an anachronism to apply this definition to the situation which existed in South Africa before 1948 when apartheid became official government policy. Probably the same holds true of the definition advanced by Bosch, since that type of contextual theology emerged only in the second half of the twentieth century, which was very late in the period covered by this study. None the less, the concept has become too useful to be discarded because of these chronological niceties and it will be used in this study to refer to any theology which provides, or provided, a basis for Christian socio-political activism aimed at furthering social and economic justice as well as bringing about human equality.

The circumstances under which the missionary movement arose and the directions it took led, especially the British-based churches and missions, to accommodate such a theology. While those missions had strong 'pietistic' elements and preached a spiritualised type of individual salvation, the British and American missionary

movement was also closely involved in the anti-slavery campaigns and the philanthropic movement which involved them in practical issues of politics and economics.<sup>5</sup> The same was true in areas into which they moved where the interests of their indigenous converts, and indeed of the inhabitants generally, clashed with those of European settlers. A prime example was South Africa itself where, as Macmillan observed in his *Bantu, Boer and Briton*, the British takeover of the Cape in 1806 was 'almost less of a fundamental shock than the arrival at the same time of missionaries to the Hottentots'.<sup>6</sup> The subsequent clashes between leading figures of the LMS and the white colonists, leading to incidents such as the 'Black Circuit' of 1812, hardly need recounting. While other giants of the LMS in the later nineteenth century such as Dr John Philip and David Livingstone extended the missionary tradition of acting as advocates of the rights of black people, as Hinchliff noted, 'even quite obscure representatives of the Society were willing to try their hand at a direct approach to government on behalf of those whom they regarded as oppressed'.<sup>7</sup> The obloquy these efforts drew on the heads of the missionaries from the white colonists caused them to assume a lower profile in the later nineteenth century. That they had by no means lost their desire to promote the social and political cause of the black peoples by the time the GMC was founded in 1904, is clear from one of the objects of its constitution, namely: 'To watch over the interests of the Native races and, where necessary, to influence legislation on their behalf.'<sup>8</sup>

It would be a mistake to make too much of this. The GMC was a loosely structured body meeting at irregular intervals, and while it had the interests of black people among its stated objects, it was at first mainly concerned with missionary and ecclesiastical affairs. At its first three meetings in 1904, 1906 and 1909, socio-political matters hardly figured on its agendas, although in 1906 it resolved 'to make representations in the proper quarters of the necessity for adequately securing the rights of the natives in

framing the new constitutions of the Transvaal and Orange River Colonies'.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, in 1909 the GMC urged those framing the constitution of the nascent Union of South Africa to ensure 'that some general provision be made for native representation with reference to matters specially affecting natives'.<sup>10</sup> The almost exclusively white character of the GMC (only 1 out of 70 people present at its 1909 meeting was black and only 6 out of 134 in 1912) indicated that it was out of touch with such weak impulses towards African nationalism as existed before the Union in 1910.

The creation of the Union of South Africa, composed of the four major territories in the subcontinent, did allow for the imposition of a common policy throughout the country. Concern over that situation led the thin stratum of educated and politically aware Africans to form the South African Native National Congress (SANNC), later to become the ANC, in 1912. As Kuper remarked, the movement towards Union 'heightened the tension, born of fear, that united European power over Africans would mean, if not open slavery, then something like economic strangulation'.<sup>11</sup>

That the missionaries of the GMC shared African fears to some extent was evident in the first post-Union meeting of that body, held in 1912. The Rev R H Dyke of the Paris Evangelical Mission asked in his presidential address what the coming of Union would mean 'for the Natives, to whom we are sent and for whom we are spending our lives?' His reply was in the form of an attack on a public speaker who had stated a few days previously that the Union was made for whites and not for blacks and that South Africa was destined to be a white man's country. That generally accepted doctrine, said Dyke, meant not only that the gulf between the races was being widened and deepened, but also that the 'Coloured races' were being forced into a union of their own 'which ere long (for good or ill) may shape itself into a stronger confederation'.<sup>12</sup> This oblique reference to the SANNC was explicitly taken up by the meeting at a later stage when it passed a motion recognising

that body as a 'moral, social and spiritual force' and welcoming its assistance in solving 'those problems with which we are grappling'.<sup>13</sup> This was an indication that their mutual resistance to the advance of racially discriminatory policies created the possibility of a congruence between the missionary movement and black political movements, even though a black churchman like the Rev John Dube, who had been elected president of the SANNC, appears to have had no contacts with the GMC before World War I. Dyke further recognised the advent of a new era for the GMC following Union when he stated:

Whether we will it or not, and however much we may dislike the idea of being mixed up in what may appear to be party politics, the purely social aspect of the Natives' case is so prominent that we cannot escape the responsibility of taking our legitimate share in the safeguarding of the welfare of the people.<sup>14</sup>

In line with this thinking, the 1912 meeting of the GMC paid much more attention to socio-political issues than its predecessors. For instance, it unanimously adopted a resolution condemning the proposed Native Settlement and Squatters Bill (forerunner of the 1913 Land Act) as wrong in principle, since it would operate 'most harshly and unjustly on the Natives', forcing on them a form of serfdom which would place a 'dangerous strain upon their loyalty'.<sup>15</sup> In response to increasing urbanisation, the conference also addressed a memorandum to municipalities asking them to establish black townships 'where opportunity for wholesome family life . . . fixity of tenure and a measure of self-government shall be secured'.<sup>16</sup> The executive was asked to consider in the intervals between GMC meetings, any legislation affecting blacks and to make representations to government on such putative laws.<sup>17</sup>

However, this stated concern for African rights must be balanced against the fact that as the records of the GMC show, missionary

liberalism was strongly paternalistic. As noted earlier, its first meeting in 1904 was composed entirely of white representatives and a suggestion that blacks be accepted into membership gave rise to what appears to have been a heated debate. The Rev James Dewar of the United Free Church of Scotland mission moved that 'the conference consist only of Europeans', since white missionaries had sufficient knowledge of the 'Native mind' to make the attendance of Africans unnecessary. 'We do not need them here to ask their opinion; we bring it with us. Although it would be a good thing for as many Africans as possible to attend meetings in a spectator role, that was 'in order that they may listen.' Among those who disagreed with Dewar was the famed Dr Stewart of Lovedale, a fellow Scots missionary. That there was this difference of opinion between two Lovedale figures indicates the lack of ideological uniformity among missionaries at that time. Stewart's opinion proved to be that of the majority and Dewar's motion was lost, the conference agreeing that its membership should be open to 'such ordained Native ministers as may from time to time be sent by Churches or Societies represented at the Conference by European missionaries.'<sup>18</sup>

The last clause was introduced to prevent a situation in which, in the eyes of Stewart, 'the whole of the Ethiopians might come down on us.' The reference was, of course, to the burgeoning AICs, and indicates that the missionaries were very conscious of them. The missionary attitudes to the AICs revealed at this conference are illuminating, not only from an ecclesiastical point of view, but also because of their political implications. One of the papers read at this meeting was entitled 'Ethiopian Movement and Other Independent Factions Characterised by a National Spirit' written by the Rev F Bridgeman of the American Board Mission. He dated the emergence of the AICs to only ten or twelve years before, attributing it to a new spirit among blacks which had produced a disposition to say to the 'white brother "Hands off, let us plan for ourselves"'. Knowledge of the AICs was extremely limited, said

Bridgeman, and the 'animus' of the movement had to be gathered 'largely from what we know of the native mind and incidental indications'. Missionary hostility to the AICs was summed up in Bridgeman's twofold charge that they promoted schism and that their members were guilty of 'low morals'. He also saw the AICs as placing an 'unhappy emphasis on the colour line' and stated the belief that the movement had an inevitable political trend which raised the 'horrid specter [sic] of a native uprising'. The emergence and poor record of the AICs, said Bridgeman, was acting as a retarding factor in the process of the euthanasia of missions, since 'to relax our hold upon the present work would not only be to leave the churches to an uncertain fate, but it would also involve the loss to the advance movement of the base of its campaign'.<sup>19</sup> A long resolution was proposed which was debated paragraph by paragraph because some missionaries thought it too mild. The final product is worth quoting in full.

In view of the importance of the Ethiopian movement as affecting the progress of God's Kingdom in this land, and remembering the wide spread [sic] public interest in this question, the first General Missionary Conference of South Africa deems it desirable to make the following statements:

The Conference understands Ethiopianism to be the effort in South Africa to establish native churches independent of European missionary control and hostile to it on racial lines.

The quickening power of the Gospel and the inevitable contact of the natives with European civilisation have produced an awakening among the natives throughout South Africa. Ethiopianism is largely a misdirected use of this new born energy. For the present at least it seems to require not so much repression as careful guidance.

This conference deplores: First. The fact that the Ethiopian bodies should so often display an utter lack of regard for the principles of Christian comity by entering a field already occupied and proselytising therein. Second. The lowering of the standard of Christian morals through lax discipline, and by encouraging schism in the Church of Christ. Third. The intensification of mutual distrust existing



between the two great races of this land and the emphasis of Ethiopianism on the colour line.

While not wishing unduly to minimise the impression of any danger arising from the Ethiopian movement, this Conference is of opinion that perhaps too great importance has been assigned to the political aspect of the movement.<sup>20</sup>

The resolution in favour of the establishment of 'native churches' given in Chapter Three needs to be balanced against this one. Although the support of GMC missionaries for the concept of the separate 'native church' seems surprisingly advanced for its time, it is clear that they envisaged such a church as being under their control and operating within their ethos; they showed nothing but hostility towards any indigenous church not established on those lines. It is noteworthy that Jacottet, whose paper gave rise to the resolution in favour of the establishment of 'native churches' quoted in Chapter One, disapproved strongly of the AICs. It was at his insistence that the words 'and hostile to it' were inserted into the second paragraph of the resolution above.<sup>21</sup>

The paternalism of the missionaries in matters ecclesiastical was also present in their attitudes towards secular affairs, where they arrogated to themselves the position of exclusive spokesmen for black people. The Rev Henry Dyke, in his 1912 address to the GMC mentioned earlier, was greeted with applause when he rhetorically asked:

Who knows the Native better than those who live among them? Who have their confidence, and who are best to voice their sometimes inarticulate desires? . . . Representation is denied them in the assemblies of South Africa. Their voices cannot be heard, but the missionary associations can.<sup>22</sup>

As has been argued earlier, that politically conscious and articulate blacks by no means shared this point of view was a source of deep concern to missionaries. Their resentment of African

'independentism' outside missionary control could hardly have endeared them to more the nationalistic segment of the black population.

In passing, it might be noted that the liberalism of the missionaries within the GMC was also characterised by an initial acceptance of territorial segregation as being in the best interests of the African people. This had been pleaded for by Philip himself, and that it continued to draw favour in missionary circles, is evident in the fact that the *Christian Express* (forerunner of the *South African Outlook*) supported the 1913 Land Act which gave 87 per cent of the land to the white minority and left the large black majority with only 13 per cent. Its reason for doing so was fear that those who were advocating the breaking up of the African reserves which comprised the 13 per cent and throwing them open to white settlement (a policy that the then Prime Minister Louis Botha had publicly advocated)<sup>23</sup> would succeed. This standpoint was out of line with that of the GMC's attacks on the proposed Squatter Bill in 1912 and, moreover, earned the *Christian Express* some bitter criticism from Sol Plaatje in its correspondence columns.<sup>24</sup> Like J T Jabavu, the *Express* based its support for the Land Act on the fact that it was piloted through parliament by the liberal J W Sauer and expressed what, in hindsight, was naïve faith in the good intentions of those who framed the Bill towards the African people.<sup>25</sup> That this view evoked criticism from within the GMC was another indication that there was by no means uniformity of opinion among the liberal missionaries on questions of racial policy.

However, apart from the specific issue of the Land Act, territorial segregation continued to be an accepted wisdom in liberal circles until well after World War I, as is evident in the views expressed by Dr Edgar Brookes in his *History of Native Policy* based on his doctoral thesis of 1923. Segregation was also accepted at two important church conferences called during the earlier 1920s to

discuss the racial issue. The first was convened in 1923 by the NGK and unanimously adopted a resolution favouring 'differing development of the Bantu'. Although complete segregation was pronounced to be neither possible nor desirable, 'partial possessory segregation (that is, segregation based on prescriptive and other rights of the occupation of land) . . . is a useful subsidiary measure tending to facilitate administration'.<sup>26</sup> In September 1926 another conference on the 'Native question', attended by leaders of the Anglican, Presbyterian and Methodist churches, as well as the NGK, agreed that 'it is not necessarily contrary to Christian principles to seek to develop and uplift Native life separate from European life'.

The acceptance by many in the GMC of segregationist thinking indicates that at this stage the divisions between them and the Dutch Reformed Bloc were narrower than the division between the Ecumenical Bloc and the AICs.

### *Post-war activism*

The tendency towards greater interest and involvement in socio-political affairs shown by the GMC in 1912 was strongly influenced after World War I by both theological and secular forces. As has been recounted, a worldwide trend towards post millennialism and socio-political activism among missionary organisations was evident in bodies such as the IMC. Those involved in the GMC followed this trend and were further influenced by both economic and political developments in South Africa. Under the influence of Dr James Henderson, principal of the Lovedale institution, the GMC paid particular attention to economic issues during the later 1920s. Henderson himself was influenced by evidence of increasing rural poverty, which he saw among the people living near Lovedale deep in the countryside of the Ciskei. In a major address entitled 'The Economic Life of the Natives of South Africa in Relation to their Evangelisation' delivered to the 1925 meeting of the GMC, he pointed out that eco-

conomic regression was evident all around Lovedale. Children who went without clothing throughout the winter were more in evidence than ever, while 'this Native rural area is vastly worse off for housing accommodation than the worst town slum'.<sup>27</sup> Such conditions were not only deplored by missionaries in their self-appointed role as the guardians of African rights but, as Henderson stated, were hampering attempts to Christianise the black population as well as undermining moral standards among those who professed Christianity.

By this time, differences within the GMC over the Land Act seem to have been eliminated and the meeting passed a strong resolution about the effects of the Act. The GMC professed itself to be 'grievously distressed' that after 12 years on the statute book provisions which might have benefited the African population had never been implemented while 'the suffering and injustice imposed on them by its restrictive provisions daily become more acute'.<sup>28</sup> The theme of the 1928 conference was *The Realignment of Native Life on a Christian Basis* under which major topics relating to African education and health were discussed while Henderson delivered an address expanding on the theme of rural poverty. In 1929 the executive committee of the GMC adopted a number of resolutions on this issue at Henderson's urging, asking the government to institute an inquiry into the economic condition of the African population as recommended by the Economic and Wages Commission of 1925.<sup>29</sup>

Its concern about economic conditions was one factor which made the GMC take a keen interest in the activities of African political and workers' movements, particularly the ANC and the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU). The concern about developments and activities among the black population was reflected in the fact that, whereas before World War I, blacks played a minimal role in the GMC, from 1925 not only did their numbers present at its meetings increase, but several black leaders of

the ANC including D D T Jabavu, Z R Mahabane and the Rev John Dube, first president of the ANC, delivered papers at these gatherings. In 1928 the president of the ICU, Clements Kadalie, addressed the GMC, which was remarkable in the light of the scorn he had earlier poured on missionaries and missionary efforts.<sup>30</sup> He told the meeting that the ICU was the fruit of black unrest and not the cause of it, and that his organisation's one aim was to secure living wages for black workers together with living conditions which promoted a healthy existence.<sup>31</sup> Further evidence of the interest with which the GMC viewed the black movements was reflected in the *Yearbook of South African Missions* published under its auspices in 1928. Included in that compendium was an article on African political organisations written by Dube, while Kadalie was also asked to contribute a chapter, although he failed to do so.<sup>32</sup>

This was one indication that the GMC never established the fairly close links with the leadership of the ICU that it had with leading ANC figures. Indeed, Walshe argues that it was its contacts with white-dominated organisations such as the Joint Councils with which the GMC was also closely associated, that blunted the appeal of the ANC among the African population in the 1920s.<sup>33</sup> Its leaders at that stage could hardly be called nationalists; they rather looked to the creation of a multiracial state based on the model of the pre-Union Cape Colony, in which blacks would gradually be absorbed into the political structure and so establish their right to their 'fair shares'. It was not a compelling platform and writing in the *Yearbook of South African Missions* Dube confirmed Walshe's argument about the lack of ANC appeal by painting a discouraging picture of division and weakness in its ranks.<sup>34</sup>

The interest displayed by the GMC in black political movements in the 1920s did not betoken any approval or support for them. It rather indicated a considerable degree of unease about their emergence and, as argued in Chapter Three, this was a strong con-

tributary factor to the formation of the CCSA as the successor body to the GMC in 1936.

### *Parting company with African nationalism*

The interest in African political movements as evinced by the meetings of the GMC was not duplicated in the deliberations of CCSA, which, in fact, lost touch with black political thinking to an ever greater extent over the next three decades. There were two major reasons for this. First, as has been argued, the CCSA was created as a platform for missionary liberalism; but in the very year that it was formed, militant black opinion began turning its back on the white liberals owing to their failure to halt the 1936 legislation which removed African voters from the common roll in the Cape Province.<sup>35</sup> There was no official reaction from either the GMC or the CCSA to this legislation, since all their attention and energy were directed at that time to the creation of the CCSA. Even when the latter was accomplished, it is probable that the strong NGK presence in its ranks would have prevented the CCSA from saying anything. However, that the churches of the Ecumenical Bloc emphatically rejected the abolition of the black vote in the Cape was clear from the strong reaction of particularly the CPSA and the Methodist Church. The equally strong feelings of the missionary liberals was expressed by the Lovedale-based *South African Outlook* which continuously attacked the proposed legislation before it was passed. When it became law in 1936 the *Outlook* commented bitterly that 'this was the price of fusion, and General Smuts has entered the arena committed to a policy of spoliation of the rights of citizenship, a policy which he had no real heart to defend'.<sup>36</sup>

At that time, General Jan Smuts was leader of the parliamentary opposition to the segregationist government under Hertzog, which had come to power in 1924. When in 1926 Hertzog's government first tried to disenfranchise those blacks in the Cape who had earned the right to vote, the refusal of Smuts and his South

African Party (SAP) to support the legislation deprived the government of the two-thirds majority it needed under the South African constitution to accomplish this. Yet, unlike the missionaries, Smuts was not committed to defending the Cape franchise at all costs. He stated that he had never been wedded to it and based his opposition to Hertzog's attempts to abolish it in 1926, 1929 and 1930 on the argument that no adequate platform for African views was being offered as a *quid pro quo*.<sup>37</sup> However, that stand implied a willingness to bargain and when Smuts entered a coalition government in 1933 to 1934 following the global monetary crisis caused by the Great Depression, Hertzog's position was much stronger since the merger offered new possibilities for gaining the two-thirds majority he had sought since 1926.

Still, when legislation was published in 1935 to remove Africans from the common roll in the form of two Bills, – the Natives Land and Trust Bill and the Representation of Natives Bill, – it was not clear what the attitude of Smuts would be.<sup>38</sup> The Bills offered an extension of the area of the African reserves demarcated under the Land Act of 1913, the establishment of a Natives' Representative Council and white representation for Africans in the Senate. The flaw from Smuts's standpoint was that it made no provision for African representation in the House of Assembly. This objection was overcome in February 1936 when Hertzog announced that after meeting a delegation from the All-Africa Convention, he would introduce a new Natives Representation Bill which provided for the election of three white representatives for Africans to the House of Assembly and two to the Cape Provincial Council. Smuts declared the necessary *quid pro quo* had been obtained, which meant that the passage of the Bill with a two-thirds majority through a joint sitting of the Assembly and the Senate was assured.

The difference between Smuts and the liberal missionaries on the issue was that between principle and pragmatism. As a pragmatic

politician, Smuts was aware that his position on the Cape franchise was crumbling. Even before the 1933 merger, the right-wing faction of his SAP with Heaton Nicholls of Natal as its chief spokesman, had argued as forcefully as Hertzog for the abolition of the Cape franchise.<sup>39</sup> Smuts realised that if he persisted with his opposition to the new Natives' Representation Bill in 1936, the United Party would split and that the Heaton Nicholls faction would be unlikely to follow him into opposition. With a diminished following he would find himself in a political wilderness from which any return would be difficult.<sup>40</sup> Thus politically he had strong motivations for colluding in the abolition of the Cape franchise, to the disgust of the liberal missionaries, although as will be related shortly, they later had reason to be thankful that Smuts did not take the 'wilderness option' in 1936.

### *Black nationalism on the rise*

Having been 'sold out' by Smuts in 1936, the weakness and political isolation of the liberals were starkly clear and thus black political organisations had little reason to repose any confidence in them. That blacks were ready to defend their interests on their own account had already been signalled in 1935 when the All-Africa Convention, which drew together several black organisations, including the ANC, had been formed to resist Hertzog's 'Native Bills'. For several years before that, African political activity had been minimal. Kadalie's ICU had collapsed as a result of power struggles and administrative chaos in 1931; the ANC had been hard hit by state action against several of its leaders a year earlier and was practically moribund.<sup>41</sup> Reaction to the prospect of the passage of the 'Native Bills' helped to resuscitate the organisation from 1936 onwards.

If those Bills were the spark that rekindled the flame of black political activity, changing demographic patterns resulting from increasing industrialisation provided the fuel to keep the fires burning. The ANC was destined to outlast the All-Africa Conven-



tion as the main vehicle of black nationalism and its increasing militancy must be seen against the background of a quickening tempo of urbanisation in South Africa. The point is argued by O'Meara in his studies of the 1946 mineworkers' strike, in which he underlined the significance of the fact that the black urban population trebled between 1921 and 1946, and the number of black workers in secondary industry very nearly equalled that in mining at the end of the period. African protest and mobilisation between 1936 and 1946, states O'Meara, 'occurred almost exclusively within the capitalist mode of production'. The 1940s saw a burgeoning of black trade unions, even though they had no legal standing and an interaction between them and the ANC was established. In 1941 the ANC convened a conference which led to the formation of the African Mineworkers' Union. That union played a leading role in the 1946 miners' strike; the swift and ruthless suppression of which provoked a militant reaction from even moderate Africans. This was most evident in the way the Natives' Representative Council set up in terms of the 1936 Natives Representation Act, adjourned itself *sine die*. That move reflected the anger its members felt about the refusal of the Smuts government to consider the African mineworkers' grievances. Thus, as O'Meara points out, there was a merger of 'most of the elements of African opposition into a class alliance articulating a radical nationalism' in the aftermath of the strike. With the virtual collapse of the trade union movement as a result of state action in 1946, leading African trade unionists moved into important ANC leadership positions.<sup>42</sup>

The significance of post-1946 developments in the ANC lay, as O'Meara says, in its move in the direction of a more definitely formed nationalism over against the mild nostrums and pleas for a 'fair go' of its earlier period. The formation of the Congress Youth League in 1943 was more significant in these terms than even the organisational reforms introduced by Dr A B Xuma after his election to the presidency in 1940, which gave the organisation

a much stronger structural underpinning. The adoption by the ANC of the Programme of Action sponsored by the Youth League in 1949, turned the organisation in the direction of seeking to establish majority rule at the same time as committing it to 'immediate and active boycott, strike, civil disobedience, non-co-operation'.<sup>43</sup> This paved the way for the Defiance Campaign of 1952 which, although halted by the threat of harsh punitive measures by the state, provided an enormous stimulus to ANC growth, the organisation reaching a peak membership of 100 000 after the campaign.

While the broadening base of resistance to the white regime was evident in the formation of the Congress Alliance which drew together the ANC, the Indian congresses, the Coloured People's Organisation and the white Congress of Democrats, and in the adoption by that body of the Freedom Charter in 1955, the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) saw itself in the vanguard of African militancy after its formation in 1958. In part a reaction to the dilution of 'pure' African nationalism in the ANC as a result of its participation in the Congress Alliance, the PAC demonstrated its militancy in both the anti-pass campaign of 1960 which led to the Sharpeville shootings and the violent Poqo uprising in Paarl, Cape Province, in the following year.<sup>44</sup>

The changing demographic patterns of the African population after 1930 which so fundamentally affected the ANC, form the second major reason for the divergence between the CCSA and black nationalism right up to the early 1970s. While the fast growth of Christian profession in South Africa was probably one of the results of the urbanisation process, the missionaries and churchmen who dominated the CCSA lost the close contact they had with African political leaders in the early years of the century. The liberal missionary 'heartland' was located in the rural Eastern Cape and while that area, rich in missionary educational and publishing establishments, acted as a matrix of modern African intellectual

life,<sup>45</sup> the centre of political gravity, as argued by O'Meara, had moved to the urban areas by the 1940s, leaving the missionaries in a relatively isolated position, both physically and psychologically.

Even though most militant younger black nationalists such as Anton Lembede, the leading thinker of the 'Africanist' wing of the ANC in the 1940s which resolved itself into the PAC in 1958, and Robert Sobukwe, president of that organisation, were devout Christians, they did not have the same close contact with white missionaries as the older generation of ANC leaders such as Dube, Calata, Mahabane and Jabavu had in the 1920s. Another factor in the growing gap between the missions and churches and the African political movements is that, apart from Dr Ray Phillips of the American Board Mission, there was never another clerical economist of the stature of Dr Henderson after he had died in 1931, and Phillips was never as closely involved in the GMC and the CCSA. While conditions continued to deteriorate in the reserves and urbanisation resulted in great social dislocation in the major centres, there was no one forcibly to draw the attention of the CCSA to this fact which was galvanising both the black trade unions and the ANC into action in the 1940s.

### *Liberal delusions*

The CCSA, increasingly out of touch with black political thinking, like other white-dominated liberal institutions during the early 1940s, were beguiled into thinking that the liberal gradualist formula was being accepted by the Smuts administration, which came to power in dramatic circumstances after the outbreak of World War II in September 1939. The missionaries in the CCSA – their organisation newly revived itself under the leadership of Archbishop Darbyshire – found the new administration to be open and friendly to their representations and thus their hostility to Smuts caused by the passing of the 1936 legislation, disappeared. The CCSA, led by British-born missionaries, was now inclined to

adulate Smuts and his administration, who had taken South Africa into the war against Nazi Germany, in the same way as the English-speaking population in general who formed the backbone of his United Party. Smuts and his government reciprocated these feelings. Not only did Smuts grant the 1943 interview with CCSA leaders recounted in Chapter Three, but in the following year the CCSA was euphoric about moves on African education announced by the liberal Minister of Education and Finance, J H Hofmeyr. In line with recommendations made by mission societies and other bodies, the government had accepted the principle of transferring the control of African education from the Native Affairs Department to the Union Department of Education and that, instead of being financed from taxes raised from the African population, African education would in future be paid for on the same per capita basis as for other population groups. These moves, stated the *Christian Council Quarterly*, constituted victories 'in the long campaign carried on by the missionary churches and others concerned for the welfare of future generations of Native people'.<sup>46</sup> In contrast to the 1920s when the missionaries were deeply disturbed by governmental racial policies, the CCSA in the 1940s expressed mostly uncritical admiration for the United Party administration. For instance, in July 1944 the *Christian Council Quarterly* observed of the recently published official review of the Department of Native Affairs:

It reflects the markedly sympathetic and helpful attitude of the Department towards its great constituency of African people which has characterised the administration of Native Affairs during recent years. In missionary circles keen appreciation of this attitude is often expressed.<sup>47</sup>

In similar vein, the *Christian Council Quarterly* wrote of Dr D L Smit, secretary for Native Affairs, when he was about to retire in 1945, that his period of office had been marked by 'wide sympathy and understanding of the needs of the people, and by astonishing progress in the promotion of Native welfare'.<sup>48</sup>

The liberal missionaries had reason on one account for their praise of the Smuts government. It undoubtedly made significant advances in the sphere of social services for African people who, during the war years, became the recipients, for the first time, of benefits such as old-age pensions and disability grants. The changes in the structure of African education in 1944 which prompted such rejoicing among missionaries have already been mentioned, while in 1946 Smuts was speaking of the extension of African political rights 'to a certain extent'.<sup>49</sup> The groping towards a new and more liberal direction of policy for the African population was embodied in the proposals of the Fagan Commission put forward early in 1948.

Yet there was another side to the picture. Margaret Ballinger, commenting on aspects such as the continued denial of bargaining power and the right to strike on the part of the rapidly expanding African labour force and the tightening of influx control which involved a wide extension of the pass laws, observed that while under the Smuts regime there had been impressive gains in the direction of social services for Africans, there were also 'dangerous losses' of personal freedoms and democratic rights.<sup>50</sup> The anti-pass campaign of 1944 and the reaction of the Natives' Representative Council to the mineworkers' strike of 1946 indicated that the African population was by no means as happy with the Smuts regime as the liberal missionaries. There is little or no evidence that the latter took proper cognisance of this dark side of the United Party's record. As already suggested, the missionaries were increasingly out of touch with African opinion, whereas Mrs Ballinger and the other Native Representatives were far more aware of African thinking. In contrast to their stand, the CCSA was silent about the mineworkers' strike of 1946 and said nothing about the crisis in urban housing which caused enormous shanty towns to proliferate around the urban centres of the Witwatersrand in the mid-1940s.

### *The CCSA and the ANC*

Although from the 1920s onwards the GMC and CCSA reacted vigorously to the actions of Afrikaner nationalism in government, it is also evident there was little or no positive feeling among liberal missionaries about African nationalism. Thus, what is absent from CCSA documents and statements during this period is as significant as what they contain. One such significant omission is any mention of black political organisation and particularly of the ANC. It is true that there is no mention of white political organisations either, but apart from Rheinallt Jones and Brookes in its early period, the CCSA did not have any leading white political figure on its executive committees. In contrast, leading black political figures such as Jabavu, Z R Mahabane, Calata and Dube were all closely associated with the GMC/CCSA, while in 1945, Chief Albert Luthuli was elected Vice-President of the CCSA,<sup>51</sup> a position he continued to hold until his banning in 1953. As already noted, Luthuli's associations with the CCSA went back to 1938 when he was selected as one of the delegates to the IMC's Tambaram conference. Yet in all those years there is not one mention in CCSA documents of his association with the ANC. His election as president of that organisation in 1952 passed unremarked in the CCSA and although the executive issued a strong protest at his banning, it again made no mention of his ANC connections.

However, the only recorded instance of Luthuli himself advancing the cause of the ANC in the CCSA and trying to enlist it as an ally was during the Defiance Campaign. In his autobiography *Let My People Go* he wrote that it was his insistence which overcame the doubts of the Executive about issuing the statement on the campaign given on page 138.<sup>52</sup> In the records of the CCSA there is no reflection of this, or of other, contributions he made to its deliberations. Even his speech to the 1949 conference of the CCSA, while attacking the concept of trusteeship, as recorded earlier, was characterised by views which would have seemed unremark-

able to his liberal audience, and it was out of discussion on his paper that the resolution supporting a qualified franchise arose. Luthuli and other blacks involved in the CCSA represented the 'old' ANC view, which leads Robertson to describe them as liberals themselves (although it might be said that this 'old' view indicated that the liberals by no means had a monopoly on liberal values).<sup>53</sup> The new Lembedist views of the 'Africanist' section of the ANC, which led to the PAC breakaway of 1958, were not represented in CCSA counsels.

The missionaries and churchmen involved in the CCSA were largely unaware of African nationalist developments in both the 1940s and 1950s. The one occasion on which the CCSA was forced to respond to these was during the Defiance Campaign of 1952, and even then it was not so much in response to internal pressures as to those from overseas churches. Thus, at its Biennial Meeting held in January 1952, the CCSA issued a statement 'in part to answer the question often asked by overseas Churches and Councils relating to matters of wide concern in South Africa: 'Why does the Christian Council of South Africa not speak forth on the issue?' The statement called for a national convention and, while recognising that this was not capable of immediate achievement, appealed to the authorities to refrain from legislation or administrative action which could aggravate racial tension and to 'all others to abstain on their part from exacerbation of feelings by anything in the nature of organised resistance'.<sup>54</sup> The last sentence was clearly a reference to the Defiance Campaign but was so obscure as to have been hardly noticed. Blaxall reported on his return from Willingen in 1952:

While the meetings were in progress the Passive Resistance campaign started in South Africa, paragraphs appearing in the columns of the English, Dutch, German and French newspapers. Interest aroused is astonishing, but once again it meant difficult questions. At Willingen, and subsequently in Holland and England, I was constantly asked why it is that churches do not come out solidly in

moral support of the resisters? In my replies I stressed the practical difficulties of our country in getting agreed expressions of views, but I said that probably most of the churches would make statements at their annual conferences.<sup>55</sup>

It should be noted that Blaxall made no reference to the January statement of the CCSA, issued with the full weight of the Biennial Meeting, its supreme policy-making body.

In January 1953 the Executive of the CCSA issued another statement, the background of which was described by Blaxall as having arisen from a feeling that the churches associated with the CCSA should express their views on the 'somewhat thorny subject' of the Defiance Campaign. After considering the views expressed by the churches themselves (which 'appeared to differ to some extent') the Executive stated that while it had 'profound sympathies with the non-European Christians' and understanding of the motives which had given rise to the Defiance Campaign, it nevertheless felt 'bound to point out that obedience to the law is a Christian duty, and that disobedience is only justified when such obedience involves disobedience to the dictates of conscience'.<sup>56</sup> Its last point, that there should be consultation between the government and representatives of the blacks, was reiterated in a statement on the Criminal Law Amendment Bill and the Public Safety Bill introduced to contain the Defiance Campaign through heavy punitive action. The CCSA Executive questioned whether a situation justifying such legislation had arisen and protested that the sentences to be imposed under the legislation were altogether too severe.<sup>57</sup> No reference was made to the situation which was a direct cause of the legislation, and nothing was said about the justification or otherwise of the Defiance Campaign.

Although Blaxall remarked on the differences between the statements on the Defiance Campaign issued by major constituent churches of the CCSA, in fact, its own statement represented a



fair reflection of the church statements. It is significant that only two Christian bodies, both black, came out in direct support of the Defiance Campaign. One was the Bantu Presbyterian Church, the ministers and elders of which issued a statement declaring that 'since our people are not in the possession of the political instruments which make for peaceful change . . . we are compelled to see a certain necessity in their choice of passive resistance as the only way open to them'.<sup>58</sup> Another statement was made by the Port Elizabeth African Ministers' Council and the Cape Midlands Non-Denominational African Ministers' Association, which were both affiliated organisations of the Interdenominational African Ministers Association (formerly Federation), the secretary of which stated that African churches in the Eastern Cape would take their stand in support of the campaign.<sup>59</sup> These unequivocal declarations of support for a directly political action were typical of the stands being taken by 'younger churches' in the Third World on the issue of nationalist movements, and contrasts with the ambivalence and contradictions of the statements made by the white-dominated and liberal-dominated CCSA on the same issue.

### *Liberal ambivalence*

Although during the remainder of the 1950s activities such as the 1955 Congress of the People and the 1958 Treason Trial continued to give the ANC a fairly high profile, the CCSA never again found itself being called on to take a stand in response to the rising tide of black nationalism. There is no evidence to suggest that if it had taken such a stand, its attitude would have been any less ambivalent than during the Defiance Campaign. There are two pointers in this direction, embodied in the outlook and actions of the last two survivors of the liberal missionary generation, Blaxall and Shepherd. As the secretary of the CCSA, Blaxall was obviously in a position to exercise a major influence on the thinking and direction of the organisation. Shepherd also played a crucial role both through his presidency of the CCSA between

1956 and 1960, and equally importantly through his editorship of the *South African Outlook* between 1932 and 1964. These two figures represented two poles of missionary liberalism with regard to its reactions and attitudes to African nationalism.

Missionary concern about the growth of black nationalism continued to be reflected with remarkable consistency during the period of Shepherd's editorship of the *South African Outlook*. It is not necessary to trace this over the whole period, but the trend of thought is immediately evident in the *South African Outlook* in the period from 1950 onwards. In that year it reprinted in full an article which had appeared in the daily Johannesburg newspaper, *The Bantu World*, deploring an attempt by the ANC to get Africans to stay away from work on June 26 in protest against the passing of the Suppression of Communism Act. *The Bantu World* was highly critical of the ANC on this point and in its introductory comments the *Outlook* wrote that the 'protest day' was chiefly notable for the 'sane reaction' of the African people, the vast majority of whom had refused to heed the ANC call because of a realisation among the rank and file that it was they and not the leaders who would suffer.<sup>60</sup> The May 1952 issue of the *Outlook* took a slightly different line with regard to the 'leadership' of the nationalist movements behind the Defiance Campaign, praising them for the orderliness of the gatherings which marked its launch, but also noting that in Cape Town 'a large, orderly meeting weakened the effect of its protest by passing resolutions in regard to the affairs of individuals such as Sam Kahn, Simon Zukas and Seretse Khama'.<sup>61</sup>

On the same page two other editorials appeared, one quoting the Rev P M Ibbotson, organising secretary of the Federation of African Welfare Societies in the then Southern Rhodesia who had pointed out 'the unwisdom and danger of extravagant African statements being made in Northern Rhodesia' which seemed to show 'undiscriminating distrust' of the government and of the whites

there. A second editorial depicted African Christian leaders as 'standing in the need of prayer' as they found themselves subjected to a double pressure of heathenism fighting a desperate last battle and 'the less familiar pressure of a vehement nationalism, which, as is the way of nationalism, would push religion into a secondary place, if not off the landscape altogether'.<sup>62</sup>

As already indicated, the *South African Outlook* tended to view the Defiance Campaign sympathetically in its early stages. In July 1952 an editorial deprecated 'any attitude of blind and stupid hostility in Europeans towards protesting non-Europeans';<sup>63</sup> it was the right of every man to protest against injustice which hampered him and the appeal for the understanding of the protesters' cause was repeated in September.<sup>64</sup> However, this attitude changed after a riot at New Brighton outside Port Elizabeth during which a white Catholic nun was killed. The assistant editor of the *Outlook*, Osmund Bull, in a special article wrote that the 'heartbreaking savagery' had shaken the country with its blind irresponsibility and vicious brutality, particularly in the light of the previous discipline and uncomplaining acceptance of penalties by those participating in the Defiance Campaign in the Eastern Cape. The tragedy was 'eloquent of many things to those who have ears to hear', wrote Bull. He continued:

it sends a clear challenge to the leaders of the resistance movement to call their present protest off . . . they must be frank and admit that their control over the people is not able to embrace all the elements which are to be found among them . . . We believe that a cessation of the protest would be a right and wise policy, as Gandhi himself proved on occasion.<sup>65</sup>

Disapproval of the ANC leadership decisions was again visible in the reaction of the *South African Outlook* to the call to boycott schools in 1955 in protest against the Bantu Education Act. The opposition of 'some African leaders', notably Dr Xuma, former

ANC president, of 'Bantu newspapers' such as *The Bantu World*, and of Dr D L Smit, secretary of Native Affairs in the Smuts government, were quoted to support the *Outlook's* own rejection of the boycott.<sup>66</sup> The opposition to the boycott by these figures indicated that the *Outlook* did not stand alone, but it would appear that while someone like Xuma was questioning the tactical wisdom of the boycott, the *Outlook* was hostile to the ANC *per se*. This may be deduced from its pronouncement, for instance, on another ANC boycott attempt in 1958 when the organisation urged African workers to support a call to stay at home at the time of the general election of that year. The *Outlook* attributed the failure of this call, as in 1952, to the 'good sense' of the workers 'who have been asking questions concerning those who benefit by such strikes and demonstrations'.<sup>67</sup> The ANC's own explanation of the failure of the strike, namely governmental threats and pressure, was dismissed as naïve; internal divisions among ANC leaders (a reference to the PAC breakaway) which had torn the organisation and made it almost powerless were more likely causes, said the *Outlook*.

The hostility to the nationalist leadership indicated how far the *Outlook* was out of touch with the black political organisations. In 1952 it did publish an article on 'African National Organisations' by R V Selope Thema, one of the early ANC leaders who was part of the African delegation that went to Versailles in 1919 to plead for the recognition of black rights in South Africa before the Peace Conference of that year. Later he became editor of *The Bantu World*. The founders of the ANC, stated Thema, were men of vision; however, at the emergency conference organised to fight the Hertzog Bills in 1935 a number of Indians and coloureds, 'mostly of the Left-wing school of thought' who were not so much interested in opposition to the legislation as in 'confusing the minds of African leaders in order to capture the minds of their followers for international organisations they represented, namely the Communist Party and the Fourth International', had come to the fore.

Although the Communist and Fourth International participants later quarrelled with each other, the former had gained and maintained a dominance of the ANC which, said Thema, had resulted in a rift and led to the formation of a 'National Minded Bloc', the main object of which was 'to save Congress from the clutches of Karl Marx, which is foreign to our way of life and traditions'. The 'communist takeover' was due to Africans, who were drowning in a sea of repressive laws, being willing to 'hold even on to sharks to save themselves'.<sup>68</sup>

The validity of this analysis was soon to be undermined by the revelation that the 'National Minded Bloc' of which Thema approved, was a government-sponsored front.<sup>69</sup> In any case, his accusation of Communist dominance was hardly supported by the election of the strongly Christian Luthuli as president of the ANC later that year. That the *South African Outlook* became steadily more out of touch with political developments among the African population over the next few years is indicated by its reporting of the Sharpeville shootings of 1960 which it described as a riot 'seemingly directed against the reference books which were recently introduced in an endeavour to minimise the nuisance of a multiplication of documents which had to be carried by Africans'.<sup>70</sup>

In contrast to Shepherd's hostility to African nationalism, Blaxall, at the other pole of Christian liberalism in the 1950s, was in closest touch with both the ANC and PAC. He was named by Luthuli as one of the few church leaders prepared to 'share our troubles with us'.<sup>71</sup> He appears to have become involved with the ANC in about 1954<sup>72</sup> and a year later was present at the 1955 Congress of the People at Kliptown when the Freedom Charter was approved. He was arrested and searched along with other participants and although released immediately, his briefcase was confiscated. At the end of his career after he had retired as CCSA secretary, he was arrested and brought to trial in October 1963 on charges under the Suppression of Communism Act. He pleaded guilty to

four of the charges, two of which related to his having received money from overseas sources and distributing it to members of the PAC in South Africa and also to the leader of that organisation, Potlako Leballo, in Lesotho.<sup>73</sup> Only his advanced age (73) and his poor state of health saved him from serving a seven-month prison sentence.

However, Blaxall's close associations with the black nationalist movement did not betoken an identification with them. In evidence in mitigation given at his trial, Bishop Alpheus Zulu, the first black CPSA bishop in South Africa, stated that Blaxall's motivation for becoming involved in the activities of the ANC originally stemmed from his pacifism since 'he wanted to impress upon the African leadership that non-violence was a method which could be used in resolving differences'.<sup>74</sup> Probably the best explanation for his involvement with the PAC is provided by a confidential memorandum he presented to the CCSA on 28 February 1961 after an overseas trip. On his way back he passed through Dar-es-Salaam where he came across numbers of black political exiles from South Africa. There is no hint of anything conspiratorial about these contacts in his autobiography, and in his memorandum, he mentioned several other exiles in London and Accra between whom he hovered 'like a moth caught in a glare of light, the only difference being that the moth is drawn irresistibly to its doom while I may still be permitted to be of some small use at a strictly humanitarian level'.<sup>75</sup> The last three words sum up his feelings about his relationship with the exiles, about whom he appears to have been somewhat naïve; at the trial he stated with bowed head that he regretted his actions.<sup>76</sup>

His ambivalence on this score in 1961 was entirely consistent with that of almost a decade earlier during the Defiance Campaign in which his approach was one of remaining detached from the black nationalist organisations while supporting their overall aims. In an article on the campaign which appeared in the *American*

magazine *New Republic* he stated that he was satisfied that there were ample grounds for peoples of all races in South Africa to defy various laws on the statute book. However, he was critical of the campaign because, he claimed, it had involved relatively few people and because in its published programme the ANC had included among the unjust laws against which it was protesting, legal regulations pertaining to cattle limitation 'which do not come into the same category of discrimination as other social and economic distinctions'. (The large numbers of rural blacks who relied on cattle as a form of wealth would have disagreed.) Rather than placing his hopes on the Defiance Campaign, he saw the best 'window of hope' as being the NGK conference on racial affairs planned for the following year (1953). There, he thought, it might be possible for church leaders to agree on a programme under which all parties would agree to refrain from 'provocative utterances and actions in the field of race relations'. He hoped the Defiance Campaign would be suspended since the situation was 'tense and fraught with danger'. As a pacifist he was not prepared to contemplate violence or radical actions.<sup>77</sup>

He stressed this point once more in 1958 in a memorandum on the ANC's campaign for a boycott of South African goods launched in that year. The memorandum was drawn up in response to a 'very difficult letter' he had received from L B Greaves of the Conference of British Missionary Societies who wanted to know what church leaders in South Africa thought of the boycott movement. Blaxall stated that the movement could not be considered in isolation because it was part of 'a desperate struggle by inarticulate people to make themselves heard at the bar of world opinion'. In considering whether the boycott would attain its aims, he stated it was unlikely to change the opinion of the whites and would probably harden them. However, as 'one of the most terrible weapons which can be used to co-erse [sic] people into following a programme which they fear' the boycott was an effective way to overthrow a government. Blaxall's fear was twofold: first,

the Prime Minister and his advisers should recognise that the only hope of producing a development programme acceptable to all would be to call an all-party conference. The congress leaders, should accept that the boycott movement had grown beyond expectations 'and is capable of producing a chaotic situation fraught with suffering, and that therefore they should officially call it off.'<sup>78</sup> The shrinking from radical action is, once again, apparent and on this point Blaxall was at variance, for instance, with Bishop Ambrose Reeves who wrote to him on 25 January 1960 that while he did not think any group should use the weapon of economic sanctions lightly

given the kind of situation we are now experiencing in South Africa, I believe that any such weapon is preferable to violence and bloodshed. Convinced as I am that everything must be done to avoid this, I find it difficult to see that there is any alternative to the course of action taken by the African leaders, and no alternative to the way in which in the present situation ordinary people overseas can make their attitudes known. It is for those who denounce such a step to find some practical alternative, for to fail to do this is tacitly to acquiesce in the present South African situation.<sup>79</sup>

Despite the implied rebuke in the last sentence, there is no record of Blaxall's having tried to suggest any alternative.

Whatever Blaxall's feelings about the black nationalist movements, he never attempted during his tenure of office in the CCSA to reflect his interest in them or to arouse sympathy and support for them. The lack of any reference to the ANC in either its documents or in the *Christian Council Quarterly* (which Blaxall edited while he was secretary) has already been noted. One of the very few comments on the subject of nationalism in the *Christian Council Quarterly* was written after he had attended the IDAMF conference called to discuss the Tomlinson Commission report in 1956, when he merely observed that 'it would be foolish to pretend that there are no Africans who think in terms of what is



called African Nationalism.<sup>80</sup> It was hardly a ringing endorsement of a movement that encapsulated some of the greatest and highest aspirations of black people. On this score, one may question Walshe's inclusion of Blaxall's name among those who represented 'prophetic Christianity' in South Africa.

### *Liberal resistance to black nationalism*

The figures of Shepherd and Blaxall, as has been explained, have been chosen as representatives of two poles of liberal thinking about black nationalism. There were, of course, many shades of opinion between Shepherd's outright hostility and Blaxall's cautious ambivalence, but it is true to say that liberals for too long failed to comprehend the nature of black aspirations as expressed through their nationalistic movements. Liberals, as a result of the anti-racist nature of their philosophy, deprecated nationalism of any hue because of the way it all too easily slips into chauvinism and intolerance. However, in those areas of the world which bore the brunt of colonialism, nationalism was given a different interpretation. For instance, a document of the first assembly of the AACC in 1963,<sup>81</sup> distinguished between four types of nationalism:

1. Nationalism working towards freedom and independence, as for example, in those countries still subject to colonial rule, or the rule of a minority group.
2. Nationalism working towards the creation of national cohesion (particularly important in newly independent nations).
3. Nationalism of older nations which, even when repudiated, manifests itself through the attempt to conserve the traditional way of life.
4. Nationalism which evolves into an ideology of totalitarian character, for example national socialism.

In terms of this definition, the striving for freedom from outside rule and the establishment of cohesion among peoples of newly independent countries meant that the new, anti-colonial nationalism was aiming at 'good' goals. The critique of older nationalisms in points 3 and 4, is based on its implicit support of racism ('the traditional way of life' being a favourite phrase of those supporting the racist status quo in South Africa) and its production of sinister forces such as Nazism.

The positive view of the 'new' nationalisms was affirmed by the general secretary of the WCC, Dr Eugene Carson Blake, when he addressed the second assembly of the AACC at Abidjan in 1965. There was a tendency among Western Christian leaders to attack nationalism at a time when new nation states in Africa needed the support of their peoples and churches to create stronger nations, he said. While nationalism could become chauvinist, that was not inherent in a proper national loyalty. 'It is clear to me as an outsider that nationalism in Africa where the nations are new is much more to be expected and accepted than nationalism in my country [the United States of America] or in Europe.'<sup>82</sup> In these terms, African nationalism was seen to be a positive force and thus worthy of support particularly by those churches whose contextual theologies made them proponents of human rights, freedom and justice. In other words, the new nationalisms of Africa and Christianity were seen by Blake, a spokesman for the WCC, and also by the AACC, to have strongly congruent values.

### *Assimilationist outcomes*

This kind of thinking was slow to penetrate the Ecumenical Bloc in South Africa, where white liberals continued to see all nationalisms in terms of points 3 and 4. One reason for that, of course, was that they were locked in a political and ideological conflict with segregationist Afrikaner nationalism which, in many respects, typified these 'older nationalisms'. Another reason can be found

in a comparison between the pattern of missionary development in South Africa and that of the international missionary and ecumenical movements. The latter had recognised the positive aspects of nationalism in countries subjected to colonialisation ever since the Jerusalem conference of 1928. This could only have been due to the 'new nationalism' being strongly represented by the emergent leadership of indigenous churches. Under the dominance of the liberals this trend was almost entirely lacking in the GMC/CCSA/SACC for a full four decades after 1930. On the face of things, this was surprising, because the number of blacks in Ecumenical Bloc churches was growing at a rapid, exponential rate. While, according to census figures, the black component of the CCSA church constituency rose from 63 per cent in 1936 to 82 per cent in 1970, this was not reflected in the leadership of that organisation. Table 3 demonstrates that the percentage of blacks serving on the CCSA executive between 1941 and 1961 never rose above 20 per cent.<sup>83</sup>

TABLE 3: *Blacks serving on the CCSA Executive*

Year	Number on Executive	Black members
1949	33	3
1952	24	4
1956	19	2
1958	26	5
1960	24	5
1962	18	4
1966	19	6
1968	16	5

It was not until 1966 that the first black president was elected in the CCSA. He was the Rev Seth Mokitimi who had been elected vice-president as far back as 1941. He thereafter served faithfully in the deliberations of the organisation, his name invariably appearing among those who delivered major papers at conferences

such as that at Fort Hare. However, he served on the executive for a full 25 years before being elevated to the presidency.

In these kinds of figures may be seen the liberals' fatal flaw: despite their 'colour-blind' trappings, liberal-dominated organisations remained so firmly under white control that it was difficult to see its termination. That, in turn, arose out of liberalism's assimilationist underpinnings, in terms of which people of 'inferior cultures' could be incorporated into the white societal ethos only when they had attained the 'civilised values' of the West. The onus was on non-Westerners to display an ability not only to understand and think in terms of white cultural norms, but also, as has already been noted, to operate Western bureaucratic structures. In the judgement of white liberals, few blacks were 'advanced' enough to enter, let alone take control of, those structures. What liberals did not comprehend, however, was that the black failure to 'become civilised' was due not to any innate inability, but rather because the great majority of blacks did not see acculturation to white, Western norms as something that was desirable in any case. Liberalism's 'colour-blindness' came at a price, and not many blacks thought it worth paying.

Thus, despite the dramatically changing statistical patterns of church memberships, the power structures of churches in the Ecumenical Bloc and of its ecumenical organisations continued to be white dominated. The anomaly was missed because, unlike in the earlier years of the twentieth century when missionaries were vitally interested in statistics relating to religious affiliation, there was little or no reference to statistical data in the CCSA after 1938, when the last *Yearbook of South African Churches* was published. The trends, however, were plain to anyone who investigated them. One such person was Maurice Webb, a Quaker who served on the CCSA executive and was president of the SAIRR in the 1950s. In an article in the *South African Outlook* of October 1953 he pointed out that the results of the 1946 census showed

that black Christians outnumbered white Christians by two to one at that stage. Although in typical liberal fashion, the first conclusion he drew from that was that 'the Christian Church in South Africa is emphatically multi-racial', he also went on to state:

It must be expected that the dominant non-European membership of the Christian Church will play an increasingly important part in the life of the Church and may be expected to make a contribution at least as vital as the contribution of the Negro in the Christian Church in the United States.<sup>84</sup>

It was a rather patronising prediction and when blacks did take control in the SACC, they quickly showed they were not going to be satisfied simply with 'making a contribution'. However, that did not happen as a result of the workings of assimilationist liberal gradualism; it was rather the final outcome of missionary church planting in South Africa.

## Notes

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5. E Kendall, *The End of an Era: Africa and the Missionary* (London, 1978), 49.
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  9. See further Chapter Three.
  10. *Report of the Proceedings of the General Missionary Conference, for South Africa held at Johannesburg, 5–11 July 1906*, 129.
  11. L Kuper, 'African Nationalism, 1910–1964.' In *Oxford History of South Africa*, ed. M Wilson and L Thompson, vol 2 (London, 1971), 424–75.
  12. *Report of the Proceedings of the Fourth General Missionary Conference of South Africa. Held at Cape Town 3 to 9 July 1912* (Cape Town, 1912), 37.
  13. *Ibid.*, 31.
  14. *Ibid.*, 37.
  15. *Ibid.*, 33.
  16. *Ibid.*, 31.
  17. *Ibid.*, 21.
  18. *Report of the Proceedings of the First General Missionary Conference*, op. cit.
  19. F B Bridgeman, 'Ethiopian Movement and Other Independent Factions Characterised by a National Spirit,' 162–77.
  20. *Ibid.*, 177–8.
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