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When missionaries set out to Christianise South Africa, they did not foresee that their efforts would be subject to the 'law of unintended consequences'. Among those consequences was the way their converts seized the ideology and institutions of Christianity and used them to undermine white racial dominance in both church and state. David Thomas, in relating this saga, traces how missions and churches that became active in South Africa had to construct new theories and practices relating to race relations. While much has been written about the errors of apartheid, which sprang from the segregationist ideology, his work brings to light new material on the liberal racial ideology of those churches and missions associated with the worldwide ecumenical movement. The paradox was that the segregationist ideology of the so-called Afrikaans-speaking churches was much closer to thinking in the international missionary and ecumenical movements than was the liberal, integrationist ideology of the 'Ecumenical Bloc'. In a grand and final unintended consequence, black Christians swept away both ideologies and moved to the forefront to establish the 'new South Africa'.

As the first writer of the news service of the South African Council of Churches, DAVID THOMAS was a first-hand observer of the struggles between the apartheid and liberal or assimilationist blocs of churches in the 1970s. He documented one of the first histories of the South African Council of Churches, Councils in the Ecumenical Bloc, 1904–1975. In his lively, readable but scholarly work, Christ Divided: Liberalism, Ecumenism and Race in South Africa, Thomas has broadened the chronology and coverage of the developments that he recounts. David Thomas obtained a Master's degree in history from the University of the Witwatersrand and was completing a doctorate in medical sociology at the University of Sydney, Australia, at the time of the publication of this book.