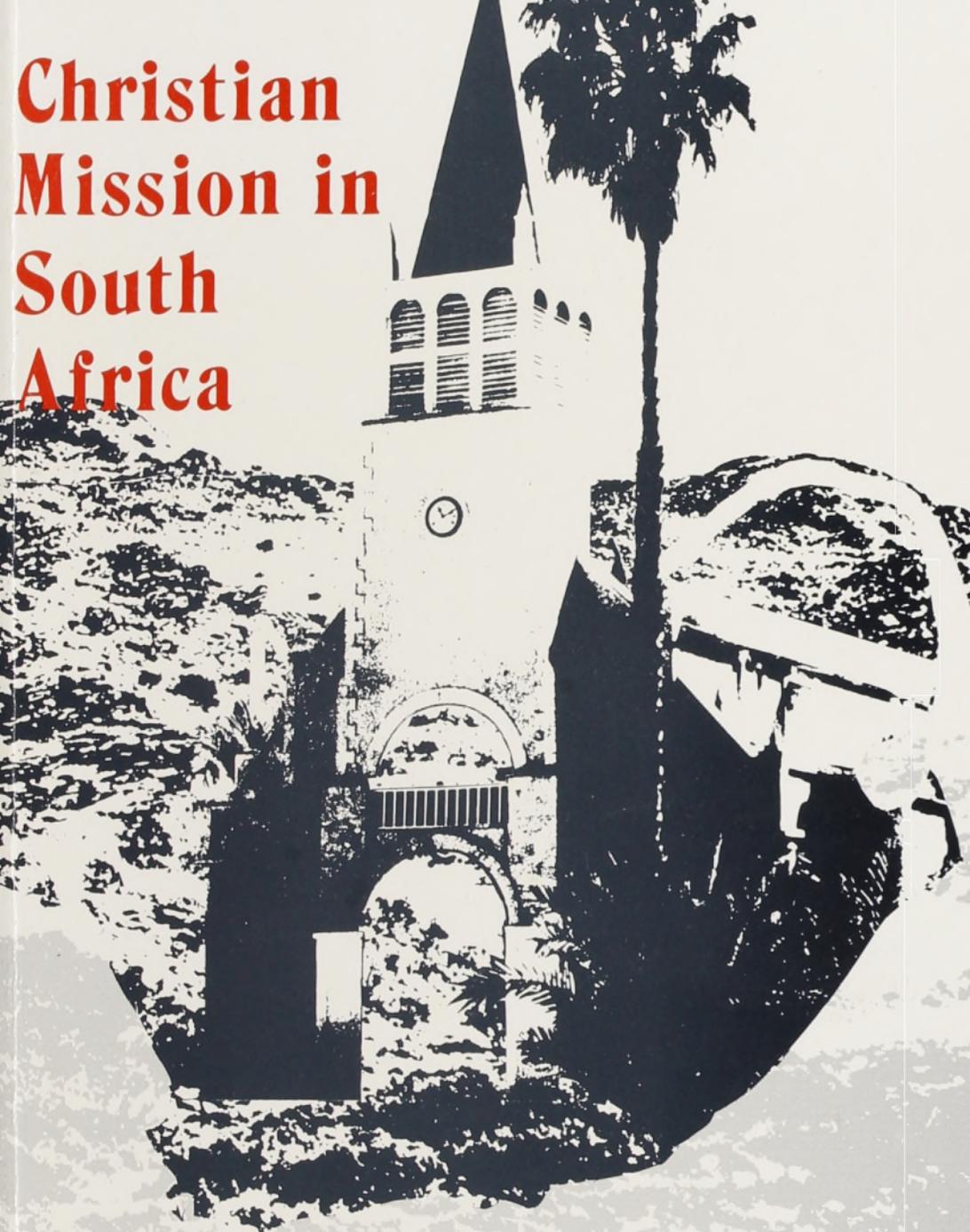


Christian Mission in South Africa



Willem
Saayman

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Christian Missions
in South Africa

Political and Economic

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FOREWORD

In this book, Willem Saayman scrutinises the mission of the Christian churches in South Africa from the perspective of the ecumenical and political dimensions of that mission. It is a critical scrutiny, but not a judgmental one; there is a continuous ambivalence in his evaluation of the mission of the churches and the missionary pioneers he studies. It is particularly his evaluation of the mission of three Black pioneers which is immensely valuable, as the contribution of these Black pioneers is largely unrecognised in the history of Christian mission in South Africa. His evaluation of three well-known White pioneers also opens new perspectives on their lives and work, especially with regard to their motivation within the context of their times.

This book is a missiological venture in the true sense of the word. According to the Concise Oxford Dictionary, a *venture* is 'a risky undertaking'. The author was courageous enough to undertake a risky attempt to 'redefine mission for our time and our situation in South Africa'. In his redefinition he concentrates on the political and ecumenical dimensions of mission. The time is long overdue for these dimensions of Christian mission in South Africa to be thoroughly scrutinised in order to point out to what extent mission, politics and the ecumene are inseparably interrelated. Any attempt to separate them, emasculates the mission of the church and turns it into religious propaganda. What is even more dangerous and tragic is that it neutralises the relevance of the church as an agent of change and liberation in the world.

I am personally very thankful that Saayman undertook this venture into the history of Christian mission in South Africa. Mission in South Africa has become in many ways a stagnant introversion. There is a desperate need for a new way of understanding and undertaking mission. This book opens attractive and challenging new venues towards such a new way of understanding and undertaking mission. It can evoke new enthusiasm for mission as a matter of life and death for the Christian church in South Africa. The historical reality of the fading and eventual vanishing of the Romanised church in North Africa early

in the Christian era should be a constant reminder to the Westernised church in South Africa at present that unless the church continuously finds new ways of relating to its context, the same tragic reality may befall it. Saayman's book is therefore to be welcomed as a serious call to the church in South Africa to become a site of struggle in order to keep alive the ideals of humanity, freedom and justice, and thus to contribute towards God's drawing of his creation towards its eschatological fulfilment.

Nico J. Smith
Pretoria
January 1991

INTRODUCTION

In this book I am going to study the Christian mission in South Africa from the perspective of its political and ecumenical dimensions - in other words, the *missio politica oecumenica* of the church in South Africa. The Christian church the world over, as well as the church in South Africa, always practised a *missio politica oecumenica* in some form or another. In chapter 1 I give a brief overview of this dimension of the Christian mission, as well as my understanding of the concept itself. In the meanwhile, I want to sketch briefly the development of this concept as a 'technical' term.

The concept of the *missio politica oecumenica* of the church has been developed in the ecumenical movement. It was especially the ecumenical missionary movement, specifically the International Missionary Council (IMC), that initiated co-operation in international affairs. After the merger of the IMC with the World Council of Churches (WCC) this co-operation was carried further in the work of the Churches' Commission on International Affairs (CCIA) (cf. Teinonen 1961). It was in this context that the concept *missio politica oecumenica* was developed. The Dutch Missiologist J. Verkuyl developed the concept further in his book *Inleiding in de nieuwere Zendingwetenschap* (1975). So far nobody has studied church and mission in South Africa explicitly from this perspective - something which I hope to do in this book.

Behind the concept *missio politica oecumenica* as developed in the IMC and CCIA lies the supposition that 'the political work of the churches belongs to their "mission". The Church is sent to all the spheres of human life, including the political one. The study of the co-operation of the churches in political affairs is, therefore, a subject which is common to both missiology and ecumenics' (Teinonen 1961:10). I will obviously have to spell out my understanding of the interrelationship in detail later on. For the purposes of this introduction it is sufficient to say that my understanding of the concept differs slightly from the

above, especially as a result of my living in the South African context. With *missio politica oecumenica* I understand that Christian mission in South Africa at this stage has a political responsibility as its central dimension, and this responsibility is carried out in communion with the Christian ecumene. By calling the responsibility the 'central dimension' instead of, for instance, the 'heart' of mission, I try to avoid any attempt at prioritising, which has so often in history proved to be the bane of Christian mission. I will give my definition of mission in chapter 1. Let me just note here that I do not accept that either evangelisation or healing or socio-political involvement or whatever has any inherent priority in Christian mission. It is the context in which mission is practised at any given moment that determines the central dimension for that situation.

I do not pretend to come to this task in a 'neutral' or 'objective' way. It has nearly become a cliché to say that theology is autobiography, yet it is necessary to state the obvious once more. I come to this subject as a middle-class, White, male, Reformed South African missiologist, with a conscious as well as an intuitive commitment to Africa - and all of these factors have influenced my perceptions. With this statement I also affirm that what I am going to write will of necessity be contextual. I therefore agree that 'theology is by definition contextual. Theology's formative factors include experience, revelation, scripture, tradition, culture and reason. Each of these reflect to a lesser or greater degree contextual insights' (Pobee in WCC-PCR 1985:35).

Why is a study such as this necessary? In general, one can point to Teinonen's remark (1961:ii) that the problems inherent in the *missio politica oecumenica* 'are so urgent and central for ecumenical theology that any contribution, however narrow and faulty, seems to be worth the risk of one's neck'. More specifically, I want to mention the crisis in Christian mission in South Africa. This crisis is related to the worldwide mission crisis: as Freytag pointed out at the Ghana Assembly of the IMC in 1958, at least since the fifties of this century, mission itself has become problematic (Bosch 1979:3). Much has already been written about this crisis, and I am not going to add to it here. The crisis is, however, also specifically related to the South African context, and I need to say a little more about that. Christian mission in South Africa, it seems to me, is in crisis for especially three reasons:

- Because of the history of entanglement between mission and colonialism, the victims of the colonial system, in other words especially Black South Africans, view mission unfavorably as a leftover from the colonial past. In an era of decolonisation, they feel that we no longer need Christian mission.
- Some White South African Christians doubt the validity of Christian mission for reasons very similar to this. Since Western culture has moved out of its aggressive, conquering phase, there is no need for something as aggressive as mission any longer. The church (and Theology) can therefore exist quite well without mission.
- Because of the crisis in mission, and because none of the proposed remedies so far have seemed to work, some South African Christians (both Black and White) have retreated into the laager of the well-known from the past: for them mission is simply evangelisation, saving souls for Jesus. For these reasons, therefore, mission is marginalised or its meaning reduced. I think this is a very unhealthy state of affairs, as mission should be central to the existence of the Christian community. We therefore have to reclaim mission for South Africa, and it seems to me that the place to start is with an attempt to redefine mission for our time and our situation in South Africa. I am, however, not going to attempt a comprehensive redefinition; I am going to concentrate on the specific aspect of the political and ecumenical dimensions of mission. I have chosen to use a historical approach as the best way to analyse the *missio politica oecumenica* of the church in South Africa. This seems to be the most promising way to go about the study, because 'for almost two hundred years, from the age of Dr Van der Kemp and Dr Philip to the age of Dr Banana and Dr Tutu, southern Africa has presented what we may well regard as a *locus classicus* for the relationship of church, state and mission - the complex and diverse interaction of politics and religion within a missionary context' (Hastings 1985:22).

It is obviously not possible to study the complete history of the South African church in a volume such as this. I therefore had to make further choices, which I hope can be justified. I have chosen three White and three Black pioneers from the period of the earlier history of the

church here. I think that subsequent events have already shown that all six of them played a significant role in laying the foundations of the South African church. For the more recent period of the history of the church I will examine three ecumenical documents. I am convinced that all three of them articulated vital issues for the continued existence of the Christian community in South Africa. I am aware that it can be argued that my survey is too fragmented. A kind of fragmentary survey like this remains cursory and controversial, but I have decided to embark on it nevertheless in order to raise these issues pertinently, aware of its importance for Christian mission in South Africa.

The first two chapters will be used to set the context for the examination of the *missio politica oecumenica* in South Africa. In chapter 1 I will spell out my understanding of the interrelationship between mission, politics and the ecumene. In chapter 2 I deal with the entanglement of mission and colonialism, as South African church history cannot be understood apart from an understanding of this entanglement. This is especially true of the *missio politica oecumenica*. In chapter 3 I deal with the White pioneers I have chosen (Philip, Colenso and Murray), and in chapter 4 with the Black pioneers (Ntsikana, Soga and Tile). Chapter 5 will be devoted to a study of three recent ecumenical documents (Cottesloe, The Message to the People and Kairos). In the final chapter I will attempt to spell out the implications of all this for the future of Christian mission in South Africa.

The bulk of this manuscript was written in 1989, before the momentous announcement by the State President on 2 February 1990 unbanning the ANC, PAC, SACP and other organisations, and the freeing of some political prisoners. The final revision of the manuscript did take place after these events. It is my opinion that the content of the first four chapters is not materially affected, but I rewrote sections of chapters 5 and 6 in the light of the change in context.

I make use of inclusive language throughout and reject sexist language. Where sexist language appears in quotations that I use, though, I leave the language unchanged as the continual pointing out of this fact in some way (e.g. by using *sic*) becomes boring and probably counterproductive.

1 MISSION, POLITICS AND THE ECUMENE

1.1 INTRODUCTION

It is clear already from the title that the three key words in the book are going to be *mission*, *political* and *ecumenical*. In the Introduction I have also described their interrelationship in a preliminary way, namely that Christian mission in South Africa in our day has a political responsibility as its central dimension, and that this responsibility is carried out in communion with the Christian ecumene. Before setting out in more detail my understanding of both the meaning of the words and their relationship to each other, it is useful to point out how, at various times in history, Christians understood what I am calling their *missio politica oecumenica*. I am not going to attempt a comprehensive survey. I am going to paint a few broad strokes only in an attempt to outline the history which brought us where we are today and helped form our convictions.

Let me begin with one of the first Christian congregations, that of Jerusalem. Very early on in its life one of its leaders, Peter, openly made some bold (political) claims about the injustice involved in the killing of Jesus (Acts 2:22-24; 3:13-16). He made these claims openly and as part of important public statements. When the inevitable happened and Peter and John were arrested, they openly claimed for themselves, on the basis of their faith, the right to civil disobedience (Acts 4:18-20). This decision of Peter and John was unanimously supported by the whole congregation (Acts 4:23-31). In this light it is interesting to consider also the characterisation of the early Christians in Acts 17:6-9: people who cause trouble all over the world, people who turn the world upside down, people who defy Caesar's decrees. It seems to me, on the basis of this account of the history of the early Christians, that political involvement through clear public testimony, as well as through their way of life, was a natural part of their life and being. Of course I am not claiming that it was the *only* dimension to

their lives; there were others. What I have set out to do, though, is to look at history specifically from the perspective of the political-ecumenical dimension.

The church in the Constantinian era, after the emperor Theodosius, in other words when the church became the state church, looked quite different as far as its *missio politica oecumenica* is concerned. Because of its increasingly cordial relations with the state, the church had to redefine its political responsibility. The kind of confrontational, even revolutionary, stance which the early Christians sometimes took, was no longer acceptable. The growing alliance between church and state called for a completely different political relationship. Thus the church increasingly adopted the responsibility for the cultural and religious extension of the empire. As the church benefited more and more from the growth of the empire, it felt the need to justify the political status quo and the reasons the church had for supporting it. In the Constantinian dispensation, therefore, the church understood the political dimension of its mission no longer as mainly critical and confrontational, but rather as providing the theological underpinnings to the ethos of the state. It also had its influence on the evangelising mission of the church, in that evangelisation became basically the incorporation of subjected peoples and the responsibility for their acculturation to the 'Christian' imperial culture. The way in which the Christian community understands the political dimension of its mission therefore clearly also determines its understanding of the evangelising dimension.

The Constantinian dispensation in the relationship between church and state was still in force when the era of Western colonialism began in the fifteenth century. The various Western powers, both Catholic and Protestant, worked on the assumption that a country had to accept the religion of its ruler. Very clear in this assumption is the Constantinian understanding that religion should bolster the state. The close entanglement between mission and colonialism (which I discuss in more detail in chapter 2) was therefore to be expected. The colonialist state expected that the missionaries would aid them in 'civilising' the 'natives'. Most missionaries accepted this as the political dimension of their mission - although there were exceptions (some of these exceptions are discussed in chapter 3). Another significant devel-

opment in theological thinking about the political and ecumenical mission of the church is reflected in the Social Gospel movement. This movement started in the nineteenth century. Impulses from many theological developments (Reformation, Pietism, Puritanism, the Great Awakening, etc.) were absorbed by this movement. Of special importance is the fact that proponents of the Social Gospel basically located the commonwealth of God in *this* world. This made the political involvement of God's people very important, for social evils such as poverty, unemployment, poor medical care, exploitation of workers, etc., couldn't be justified or tolerated in 'Christian' countries (that is to say, countries in which a majority of the people defined themselves as Christians and where the culture was broadly based on Western 'Christian' values). Proponents of the Social Gospel believed that the Western industrial powers had at their disposal the economic and technological resources to create the ideal society through development and progress. Christians had to be the conscience of the state to prod the state into the right direction. Christian mission meant therefore the joint involvement of Christians in actions such as rallies, protests, political parties, etc. They believed, though, that their political involvement should lead to evolution, not revolution. As far as their involvement in the 'mission fields' is concerned, it was coloured by an undeniable element of cultural superiority, and remained in the realm of charity rather than solidarity.

The twentieth century was characterised by great development in thinking about the involvement of the total body of believers in political affairs. I want to describe briefly just two of these schools of thought because of their relative importance for South Africa. In the first place I want to mention the group of Christians generally called Evangelicals. They are the heirs of movements such as Pietism and the Great Awakening especially, and were very closely and enthusiastically involved in evangelisation. Earlier they were often suspected of an anti-ecumenical stance, especially because of their opposition to the WCC, but since the sixties of this century they developed a very strong ecumenical vehicle of their own through organisations such as the Lausanne movement. The political dimension is not completely absent from their agenda, but it does not really have any priority either. They tend to what they call an apolitical or neutral stance, which unfort-

unately often turns out in practice to be supportive of the status quo (I argue this in more detail below). Generally they would propagate socio-political changes where there is injustice, but they argue that such changes will only come about as a result of a change in the hearts of converted or born-again individuals. It is therefore not the role of the believing community to propagate or participate in direct political actions. Christians who wish to see political change should work and pray so that those individuals with political responsibility are converted to Christ.

More or less on the other end of the spectrum is the group of Christians who have opted for a liberationist perspective. They have some common characteristics with the Social Gospellers, so that people sometimes claim that the liberationist perspective is simply the Social Gospel in new form. This is not correct, though, as there are radical differences between the two positions. From a liberationist perspective, there is no realistic possibility that the huge social, economic and political injustices will be rectified through evolutionary development. The gulf between rich and poor, the powerful and the oppressed, is so vast that only a revolution will be able to overcome it. Christian mission therefore means becoming politically active, moving among the poor and the oppressed in the form of a servant, expressing the love of Christ in the form of solidarity with them. Where possible, those who regard themselves as Christian missionaries may join in conscientising and organising the poor, but never in a superior way, as the poor will have to liberate themselves, for the poor are the real agents of the Christian mission in our day. Rich Westerners (and most Western missionaries, whether short-term or career missionaries, are rich in comparison with most inhabitants of the Third World) will not be able to do it for them. And it is only as the poor achieve a human standard of living, as they achieve the political rights which are their due, that they can also achieve their true standing in Christ, and so become truly human.

It is all these various understandings of the political-ecumenical dimension of the mission of the church which have gone into creating the context in which we are to consider our political and ecumenical mission. When I now try to articulate my understanding of the meaning of the terms and their interrelationship, it is these developments,

as well as my situation in South Africa at this time, which will be reflected in what I say.

1.2 DEFINING THE TERMS

Mission I want to define as the *missio Dei*, the great mission of the triune God in the world, and then especially as characterised in the mission of Jesus the Messiah (Luke 4:18-21). *Politics* I want to define in its simplest form as the practice and art of the government of human affairs in relation to the whole of life. *Ecumenical* I want to define as pertaining to those organisations and movements striving for the unity and renewal of the Christian church. Obviously these definitions do not go far enough. Neither do they clarify the interrelation among these three concepts. In the rest of this chapter I will therefore attempt to fill out my definitions somewhat and to establish my understanding of the interrelation among them.

1.2.1 Mission

I have already indicated that I regard Luke 4:18-21 as fundamental to my understanding of mission. I would go so far as to say that I find in this passage the most comprehensive and satisfying paradigm for the *missio Dei*. As Arias (1984) has pointed out, this passage can only be adequately understood in the light of the teaching about the Jubilee, and specifically the Jubilee as a paradigm of the kingdom action in the world. Nolan (1988:128-129) also finds in this concept one of the central ideas embodying the reign of God on earth. Mission understood in the light of the teaching about the Jubilee is therefore a comprehensive, encompassing mission. This comprehensiveness is illustrated by the range of activities of the Spirit-filled Servant of God (the Messiah): preaching good news to the poor, proclaiming liberty to the captives, restoring sight to the blind, setting free the oppressed - in short, announcing in word and deed the year of the Jubilee, the year of God's all-inclusive liberation (Arias 1984:44-45).

Perhaps I can illustrate my understanding of mission in the light of Luke 4:18-21 by using the image of a rainbow. The rainbow always reflects the full spectrum of colours, wherever we may be. These colours belong together, and if one were to be lacking, we no longer have a real rainbow. In the same way the various dimensions of the task of

the Spirit-filled Messiah - and therefore of those whom he empowers to be his followers (John 20:21) - reflect the fullness of the *missio Dei*. In correspondence with the tasks of the Messiah, I want to define these dimensions as an evangelising dimension; a healing dimension; and a dimension of striving for social, political and economic justice. These dimensions belong together, whether we are involved in mission in Berlin or Soweto or Pretoria. There is no inherent priority among them - the one is as important as the other, so that the context must determine the priority. Furthermore, if one of these dimensions is completely lacking from our mission, we are no longer involved in the mission of the Messiah of God. This does not mean that in every instance we must at the same time be *both* proclaiming liberty to the captives *and* restoring sight to the blind; *both* preaching good news to the poor *and* setting free the oppressed. It *does* mean, though, that if, at the end of the day, our mission is evaluated in its entirety, it must reflect the fulness, the whole spectrum of colours of the rainbow. And like the overarching rainbow, the *missio Dei* is the horizon underneath which the Christian community lives and works, the horizon spanning and illuminating every activity in the life and being of the church. Understood in this way, mission is not some peripheral idiosyncrasy which can be left to some little group of enthusiasts (or crackpots!), nor is it some quaint relic of the colonial past which, thank God, we can now lay to rest forever; rather it becomes, as it should be, central to the life and being of the church.

By defining mission in this way, as a comprehensive ministry with distinguishable but inseparable dimensions, I am attempting to overcome the dualisms and prioritising which have so often in the past led to polarisation in mission. Very often, for example, the relationship between evangelisation and social involvement is described in primary-secondary terms, leading to polarisation and a divided witness. Even where sincere attempts are made to overcome the polarisation, the widely-held view of mission as consisting of separate parts still prevails and prevents a holistic, integrated view from taking root. So, for example, the National Conference of Churches at Rustenburg in November 1990 defined mission thus:

The Church's work of mission is a *consequence* of its worship, prayer, fellowship and spirituality. We commit ourselves to deepen these aspects of the practice of our

faith. We resolve to fulfil the Great Commission and by evangelistic faithfulness to bring men and women to repentance and personal faith, new birth and salvation and to help them *to work this out* in a witness that engages the world (Rustenburg Declaration 1990:4.4.1; emphasis added).

I wish to draw attention especially to the two words/phrases which I emphasised. As long as we view mission as a *consequence* of our worship, fellowship, etc., we can express our faith separate from our mission, and mission remains an appendix to our faith. It is this view which prevailed at the beginning of the era of modern Western mission, which relegated mission to the interests of a few 'enthusiasts' in the churches, who had eventually to form mission societies because of the disinterest and inertia of the churches. As I understand the story of Jesus Christ, the Christian faith cannot be expressed apart from its expression in mission; indeed, in the words of Castro (1978:87), the church as the body of Christ has no other life than a life in mission. For this reason the Christian social witness is not something to be worked out subsequent to new birth and salvation. New birth and salvation can take place only in society, and are therefore in themselves a social witness. At the same time involvement in the social dimension of mission brings about ongoing conversion and a deepening of the understanding of salvation. These dualists can only be overcome by a holistic, comprehensive understanding of mission.

I therefore agree fully with Kritzinger (1988a:6) that 'Mission is ... the attempt to embody God's liberating presence in every human situation. It never takes place in a vacuum, but is always concerned with specific people in specific situations, and searches to discover the meaning of the Good News in each context.' Let me spell out clearly what this means according to my understanding of mission. In the first place, mission means *participating in God's liberating activity in the world*. God's liberating activity in the world therefore sets the agenda, so that no church or any group of Christians can ever be the author or subject of their 'own' mission. In the second place, mission means *human liberation in the light of the Jubilee*. In fact, mission can be characterised as humanisation, the restoration of the genuine humanity of the new human being, Jesus of Nazareth, in all human *and environmental* relationships (for the year of the Jubilee dealt also with the restoration of the earth).¹ In the third place, *mission cannot be anything*

1 For a fuller exposition of my understanding of humanisation, see Saayman 1984:41-42.

but contextual. It is therefore impossible for the church or a group of Christians to decide beforehand what their mission in a specific situation is going to be, or that it will be the same as someplace else. In the fourth place, *mission leads us to a new understanding of the Good News of Jesus of Nazareth.* Mission therefore does not simply mean the church *teaching*, but the church *learning*; the evangelisers must be evangelised. Evangelising people, healing them, working with them for full social, political and economic justice, therefore means growing with them into the full human potential which has become possible for us in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth - that, according to my understanding, is the *missio Dei*.²

1.2.2 Politics

I have stated that politics in its simplest form can be described as the practice and art of the government of human affairs in relation to the whole of life. It is not so much what is generally known as the *party-political* expression of that art which interests me, but rather the *ideological* expression of this science and art. It is necessary for me to say that I do not necessarily attach a pejorative meaning to the term *ideology*; I rather understand ideology to mean a blueprint of society which is designed in order to mobilise people to bring into being a specific kind of society. It depends on the kind of society that is being created whether an ideology should be evaluated positively or negatively. An ideology usually also implies certain strategies and methods which will have to be used in order to achieve the desired end. If such strategies are inhuman and unjust, obviously the ideology cannot be approved. Another important dimension of my understanding of ideologies is that ideologies are closely related to history. Indeed, as Verkuyl (1975:507) points out, all ideologies analyse the near past, interpret the reasons for the present state of affairs, and then give a blueprint of a different, better future which can be realised.

2 What I have given here is of course no more than a minimal definition of mission. In order to define mission fully one would have to dedicate a book just to that subject - something which is not my intention here. I hope I have given a minimal definition which will enable the reader to follow the narrative. As I progress, my understanding of mission should of course become clearer all the time to the reader.

My understanding of the term *ideology* therefore implies a neutral meaning until the specific ideology is tested against the humanising dimensions of the mission of Jesus as described in the previous section. If an ideology leads, either in its goal or strategies, to the dehumanising of people, then indeed it deserves a pejorative meaning. Taking the two definitions together then, what I mean when I write about politics will be concerned with the goal set for the government of human affairs, the strategies and methods envisaged, and the understanding of history implied in it. Because a political ideology in this sense usually implies also an economic system, I want to point out that there is no watertight separation in my understanding between politics and economics. The art and science of governing human affairs in relation to the whole of life by definition include the economic organisation of human life. Similarly, ideology as a blueprint for a specific kind of society by definition includes a certain understanding of economy. My discussion of the political dimension must therefore always be understood as relating also to the economic dimension.³

Some readers may perhaps object to such a neutral or even positive meaning of ideology. Many would argue that ideology is by nature partisan, while the Christian gospel and Christian theology should be neutral and objective in political matters. Theological neutrality in political affairs is, however, not such a simple matter, for

... in our liberal/conservative culture the socially established and dominant system of ideology can function in such a way as to present - and misrepresent - its own rules of selectivity, bias, discrimination, and even systematic distortion as 'normality', 'objectivity', and 'scientific detachment' (Mészáros 1989:3).

It is necessary therefore to recognise that "in our societies everything is "soaked in ideology" (*ibid.*), and that any claim, by a Christian theologian,

3 There is a well-known saying that theologians make notoriously bad politicians. I am fully aware that I face many dangers in attempting a political dimension in my evaluation. It has to be pointed out, though, that it is an illusion to believe that the political narrative is a complete and exhaustive system in itself. Theologians, like many others, can also *contribute* to the political narrative - please note my emphasis on the word *contribute*. Obviously I am not claiming that theologians have the last word; and equally obviously my argument implies that politicians can and *should* also contribute to the theological debate.

ogian or anybody else, to be 'supra-ideological', is untenable. I find the acceptance of the neutral meaning of ideology, given above, preferable. According to my view, Christians then have the responsibility to be fully involved in the articulation and implementation of a political ideology in harmony with the humanising dimensions of the gospel. Of course, what I said above implies that ideologies can indeed also play a negative role, viz. if they hinder or prevent the implementation of the humanising dimensions of the gospel of Jesus of Nazareth. I will have more to say about that in section 1.3 below.

As was the case with my definition of mission, this is also a very brief definition of politics and ideology. When in the next section of this chapter I define my understanding of the interrelation between mission and politics, I hope it will also give greater clarity to my understanding of politics and ideology.

1.2.3 Ecumenical

Finally, the concept *ecumenical*. This concept was derived from a Greek word (*oikoumene*) which signifies the whole inhabited earth. In terms of the Christian church it was used to signify the unity of all believers across the whole inhabited earth. Especially in the twentieth century we have seen the growth of a number of organisations striving for greater unity among Christians, a unity which would at the same time lead to the renewal of the whole Christian community. All these organisations are called ecumenical organisations (e.g. the World Council of Churches) and the whole movement is called the ecumenical movement. With *ecumenical* I therefore understand that striving for the unity and renewal of the church and all Christian believers. It is necessary, though, to say a bit more about my understanding of the form this unity needs to adopt. For many Christians, unity is exclusively a spiritual experience which has nothing visible or organic about it. For me, however, especially because the biblical metaphor for Christian unity is a *body*, a whole, living organism (cf. 1 Cor. 12), unity of necessity needs to be visible and organic. This does not mean that the only possible model for Christian unity is therefore one worldwide church structure. I would rather follow the definition of the Nairobi assembly of the WCC in 1975 of unity as *conciliar fellowship*. This means that

... the one church is to be envisioned as a conciliar fellowship of local churches themselves truly united. In this *conciliar fellowship*, each local church possesses, in communion with the others, the fullness of catholicity, witnesses to the same apostolic faith, and therefore recognizes the others as belonging to the same church of Christ and guided by the same Spirit (in Saayman 1984:106).

1.3 MISSION: POLITICAL AND ECUMENICAL - DEFINING THE INTERRELATIONSHIPS

Of my three key words, *mission* is central: the noun described by the two adjectives *political* and *ecumenical*. Therefore I am going to relate mission first to politics, then to unity, and eventually attempt to draw out the interrelation among all three.

1.3.1 Mission: political

The most common objection against getting mission involved in politics is that mission is or should be concerned about purely spiritual matters, whereas politics has to do with secular, worldly matters. But as Archbishop Temple pointed out already at the Jerusalem assembly of the International Missionary Council in 1928, the only purely spiritual matters are good intentions, and we know the road to which part of the universe is paved with them! No, mission and politics *are* interrelated and I would therefore agree with Shelley that 'there is no pure ecclesiastical [also missionary] neutrality, just as there is no apolitical theology; there are only those who are conscious of their political assumptions and consequences and those who are not' (in Sölle 1974: xiv). This true political nature of God's liberating mission is also revealed in the exodus. Having been freed from Egypt, the Israelites do not say, 'We worship the God who has liberated our souls'. No, they say, 'We worship the God who has delivered us from bondage in Egypt', in other words the God who has liberated them for a new social, political and economic existence in the world - they are no longer slaves of Pharaoh (cf. Cox 1965:26-27). Furthermore, because mission can be characterised as humanisation, as I have pointed out above, therefore mission is deeply involved with politics, which is supposed to bring about the best possible ordering of human society. De Gruchy (1985:17) is therefore correct in stating that the simple reality of our South African context enjoins us to take the political dimension of the Christian mission in South Africa seriously:

The church in South Africa is both an agent of just social transformation and a stumbling block in the way of such transformation. But either way the church and Christian faith is socio-politically significant, and this must be taken into serious account in attempting to understand what is happening in South Africa today.

I therefore also agree with Verkuyl (1975:534) that the confession 'Yahweh is God' (OT) and 'Christ is Lord' (NT) has always been both a faith statement and also a political credo which leads inescapably to political choices and tasks.

What I have done so far has been somewhat in the line of sloganeering. I have stated what I believe in generalised statements without really arguing my convictions more specifically. To this task I now turn my attention.

In my argument that the gospel and politics, and therefore mission and politics, are interrelated, I would begin with the meaning of the cross of Christ.

The cross of Christ was not an inexplicable or chance event, which happened to strike him, like illness or accident ... The cross of Calvary was not a difficult family situation, not a frustration of visions of personal fulfillment, a crushing debt or a nagging in-law; it was the political, legally to be expected result of a moral clash with the powers ruling his society (Yoder 1972:132).

Thus does Yoder state the central thesis of his book: that there is no way in which Jesus or his teaching can be divorced from politics.

There is a second reason for this interrelationship. The close identification of gospel and politics, mission and politics, flows from two dimensions of God's acts in the world: the decision for history, and the decision for the neighbour. The whole Bible, Old and New Testaments, resounds with God's acts in the history of this world, as well as his radical choice always for the other, the neighbour (cf. Robinson 1960:112-115). Because of this very basic choice for the other, and especially for the underprivileged and oppressed other, *justice* is so central to the church's mission - and binds it so firmly to the ordering of human society (politics) (cf. WCC 1967:118). Indeed, in the words of Shriver one can say "justice" is only one word in the Biblical description of God's saving will for human society, yet justice is indispensable to the description. *Outside of justice there is no salvation*' (1980:21, emphasis mine). This statement is crucial to my understanding of the political

dimension of Christian mission, and also to my understanding of the relationship between the political and evangelising dimensions. Emphasising the political dimension does not mean becoming hostage to some unrealisable this-worldly utopian model. On the contrary, the *missio politica* has everything to do with that eternal reality which Christians call salvation. Furthermore, this choice for the other, this striving for justice, is related especially to the humanising aim of mission, because it means striving to be a specific kind of person within a just and human society. Striving to do and be this is of course in itself an act of mission, an act of both proclaiming the good news and setting the captives free. Seen in this way, there is indeed no incompatibility between mission and politics; rather 'being a Christian may actually require one to be involved in the attempt to create a certain kind of human society' (Hincliff 1982:57). To put it in more general terms: not only is there a link between gospel and politics; this link is focused in the mission of the church.

Seen in this light, the denial of the political dimension of the church's mission, and the justification of this denial by pious statements that mission should be 'purely spiritual' and 'apolitical', is therefore more than a simple misunderstanding - it may indeed be sinful. It is the sin of apathy and slothfulness, and consists of 'not caring, not deciding, not taking responsibility [for the other] and of avoiding the issue by saying that it is not my business' (Nolan 1988:41). This ultimately implies that we are prepared to settle for being less than human - for a person is a person through other persons. Therefore 'the apathetic avoidance of politics is the sophisticated way in which we, like Cain, club our brothers [and sisters] to death ...'(Cox in Nolan 1988:41).

There is a point which I should perhaps clarify at this stage. By establishing such a close link between gospel/mission and politics, I do not want to leave the impression that I am of the opinion that there is only one, clearly agreed on 'Christian' political, social and economic system. Actually there are only a variety of Christian attitudes towards such systems. However, that does not relieve us of the responsibility of testing the claims and realities of such systems. Our missionary responsibility is especially to question whether a specific system will contribute concretely towards justice and humanisation (cf. Niebuhr 1957:253-254). This does not imply that the church must occupy a sort of 'middle

position' or posit a sort of 'third way'.⁴ There should be solidarity involved, which would have to be (self-)critical solidarity. But more about this when I discuss the ideological implications in the next section.

The essential link between gospel and ideology (in its neutral sense as defined above) is for me another reason why there is a strong interrelation between the *missio Dei* and politics. There is such an essential link between gospel and ideology especially because the gospel is always incarnational and therefore contextual. Being incarnational and contextual, the gospel thus articulates a specific set of 'ideas' to order human society in a just, orderly and free manner - it fulfils the function, in other words, of an open ideology as defined above. The attempts to bring about this specific society are focused in the mission of the church. Hence the link between gospel and ideology, mission and politics.⁵ Am I not, in positing this link, merely turning the gospel (and mission) again simply into yet another political ideology, such as the apartheid theology which for so long reigned in South Africa? Certainly the danger exists and many examples can be quoted from history to confirm it. Yet I would still argue that the interrelation *has* to exist and can be prevented from turning into such a closed political ideology. This is possible if we understand the true ideological, political sense of the gospel as *critique*. In the words of Villa-Vicencio (1980:75):

... gospel as an incarnational, contextual message is in dialogue with various optional ideologies or ideas for a peaceful society. It will side with one or other option from time to time and make its own independent critique and contributions toward a peaceful society. But it is never identical without remainder to a particular ideology.

Understood in this way, I think one can prevent the development of the gospel simply into a support for a closed political ideology. In those instances in history where this has happened, e.g. with the theological support for the apartheid ideology, it happened specifically because this essential critical essence of the gospel was suppressed or not realised at all. (A second reason why it happened was that this ideology was consciously developed in isolation from the ecumene - but

4 For a discussion of Third Way theologies in South Africa, see Balcomb 1990.

5 This is a very brief exposition of this link. For a more detailed argument, see especially Villa-Vicencio 1980.

more of this below.) If this critical heart of the gospel is maintained, the complete identification with a particular, party-political ideology, should be prevented. Yet Villa-Vicencio points to another important dimension: this critical distance is not to be understood as some 'neutral' position, somehow keeping oneself above the fray. This critique is to be conveyed from a position of solidarity with that option closest to the ideal of an open, just, orderly and free society, a society in which people can be fully human in the sense of the true humanity of Jesus of Nazareth. This is definitely not an easy or risk-free task. For what we are called to is something 'more than academic, unengaged judgment and also more than blind commitment to a specific political ideology'. Yet it is an urgent missionary responsibility, for 'faith which is not related to contextual reality by way of ideological commitment is abstract theory, while ideological commitments devoid of the critical renewing power of faith can become political tyranny' (Villa-Vicencio 1982:79).

There is still another dimension of the interrelation that needs to be addressed. That is the objection often raised against Christian involvement in politics because it is argued that the gospel is basically personal in nature. Mission should therefore be concerned primarily with personal salvation, and not with structural issues such as politics and ideology. It should be clear from my definition of *missio Dei* that I consider mission to be more than something purely personal. There is still another argument against this objection, however. In terms of the Christian gospel, that which is personal is never individualistic. According to both the Old and the New Testament, personal being is intertwined with the collective existence - very much like the African view according to which a person is a person through and with other persons. Even the most personal act (or even thought) therefore affects the communal well-being (cf. Costas 1982:25-26). My view therefore argues against an understanding according to which the gospel can be understood as purely personal in its essence. The structural dimensions of the life and being of Christians are clearly undeniable, and this provides another strong argument that the mission of the church should be politically involved.

Finally, the political dimension of Christian mission should always be understood in the light of eschatology. Eschatology implies that the longing for a more human, just, responsible and free society is some-

thing more than the evolutionary fulfilment of our expectations. For eschatology creates room for the unexpected, because it stands in the expectation of the unexpected, even revolutionary, breaking in of the kingdom of Christ. The eschatological dimension thus protects Christian socio-political involvement from being 'mere' romantic idealism or revolutionary fervour; rather, it infuses our political involvement with a special hope. By ending on this eschatological note I do not want to escape or deny the historical. Eschatology, as I understand it, takes history completely seriously, for, as Max Warren once remarked, history is the stage of God's greatest experiment.

1.3.2 Mission: ecumenical

I have not included the striving for unity as one of the dimensions in my definition of mission. I will therefore have to spend some time indicating the necessity of unity-in-mission and mission-in-unity.

My *first* argument in favour of mission in unity has to do with the acknowledgement of Jesus as Messiah and King. Neither church nor mission exists as an end in itself. Both are directed towards the coming of God's jubiliary reign (see 1.2 above) in the *world*, which is the object of God's love (Jn. 3:16). The crucial aspect of the coming of this reign on earth is the recognition of Jesus as Messiah and King. Jesus himself indicated how important it is that his followers should be united so that the world might come to this realisation (Jn. 17:20-23). This makes clear also that the unity with which we are concerned is not simply a pragmatic or functional unity, in other words it is not merely a question of mission in unity 'working better'. On the contrary, it is an essential (in the sense of belonging to the very essence) unity based on the unity between the three persons of the Trinity, which is, as I have said, the subject and origin of the *missio Dei*. One would be hard pressed to find a more convincing argument in support of the theological connection between unity and mission.

A *second* argument in favour of mission in unity is to be found in the nature of the church itself. According to some of the oldest Christian creeds, which are accepted by all Christians, two essential features of the church are its *catholicity* and *apostolicity*.⁶ *Catholicity* as an es-

⁶ *Apostolicity* can be understood in a variety of ways. Some, especially in the Episcopal churches, understand this term as indicating the apostolic succession which can be

sential feature of the church implies that the church is (has to be) universal, representative of the whole ecumene (that is, the whole inhabited world). It indicates in other words that Christians 'from every tribe and language and nation' are bound together into a single new community - the body of Christ. It is clear therefore that catholicity and apostolicity are intimately linked. For the church to be catholic, it has to be spread across the entire world and among all people. Where the church is so spread across the entire world by means of (apostolic) mission, the newly created communities may not exist in isolation, but must be united with believers everywhere by virtue of the inherent catholicity of the church. Hence the nature of the church brings the interrelation between unity and mission sharply into focus. It is therefore a contradiction in terms to confess an urgent missionary zeal but at the same time to display no zeal for the unity of the catholic church. Similarly, a zeal for the unity of the catholic church which is isolated from the essential apostolic mission of the church in the world is doomed to irrelevance and stagnation.

Mission is therefore rooted in the ecumene - the unity as it actually exists in Christ - and is directed at the ecumene; at a single church as at the world. Mission invokes the ecumene in a call to unity; the ecumene as a divine imperative gives impetus to mission (Jn. 17:21) (Durand 1961a:177; my translation).

A *third* argument in favour of mission in unity is to be found in the person and ministry of Jesus. The nature, as well as the task of the church, springs from him. Church and mission are therefore based on his person and ministry. As the final assembly of the International Missionary Council at Achimota in Ghana put it: 'The Christian world mission is Christ's, not ours.' Since this is so, since Jesus precedes both church and mission, there is a fundamental theological link between unity and mission. It becomes clearer still if we consider Jesus' ministry. This was

traced back to the apostles of Jesus. Others, especially in the Reformed and Presbyterian churches, understand apostolicity as the faithfulness to the pure doctrine of the apostles. A third possibility, held by many Roman Catholics, but refined and emphasised especially by the Theology of the Apostolate, is to understand apostolicity as indicating the basic 'sentness' (apostle - one who is sent) of the Christian community in the world. It is in this third sense, especially as understood by the Theology of the Apostolate, that I am using the word in this book.

made very clear in the Rolle statement of the Central Committee of the WCC in 1951. They pointed out that the interrelation rests upon his finished work upon the cross, upon his continuing work through his body and Spirit, and ultimately upon his promised return, when there will be one flock with one shepherd.

Thus the obligation to take the Gospel to the whole world, and the obligation to draw all Christ's people together both rest upon Christ's whole work and are indissolubly connected. Every attempt to separate these two tasks violates the wholeness of Christ's ministry to the world. Both of them are, in the strict sense of the word, essential to the being of the church and the fulfilment of its function as the Body of Christ (in Saayman 1984:15).

A *fourth* argument for the theological interrelation between mission in unity lies in the various *charisms* or gifts worked in Christians by the Holy Spirit. It is made clear in various places in the New Testament that the Spirit grants various *charisms* to various Christians (e.g. 1 Cor. 12; Ephes. 4). These *charisms* are however not given to be exercised and enjoyed in isolation, in an individualistic way. It is made very clear that these gifts are given to serve the welfare of the whole body (e.g. 1 Pet. 4:10). A gift for evangelising, or for working to establish justice and peace, or for healing people, is therefore meant to serve the whole body; mission can thus not be undertaken in isolation. The gift for evangelising must be supported by the gift to work for justice and peace. And the fruits of this mission (if any) belong in the whole body. In this way the charisms Christ has given to his followers presuppose mission in unity.

A *fifth* argument in favour of mission in unity has to do with the political and ideological dimension of mission. Mission which takes its own context seriously and gets involved politically and ideologically, runs a great risk of becoming introverted, self-satisfied and self-sufficient. Mission can in other words easily become captive to the political and ideological environment in which it is practised. In order to prevent this from happening, self-criticism is essential. For healthy Christian self-criticism to take place, the ecumenical community has to be closely involved in our local mission. Yoder (1979:370) stated it in these words:

The discernment of God in history [or, in other words, mission] demands ideologically ecumenical conversations ... at the best we must pledge that as we each read all

history from within our own ideological skins, we must juxtapose to that reading those of churches in other worlds and in other times.

To prevent mission from itself becoming a captive to a negative, closed ideology, it has therefore to be self-critical and the process of becoming self-critical is greatly aided by, indeed demands, the involvement of the wider (ecumenical) body of believers. I am convinced that a study of such closed, captive ideological systems, for example the doctrine of the German Christians in the time of Hitler, and apartheid theology in South Africa, will reveal that both these elements, the self-critical and the ecumenical, were lacking. Mission, according to my understanding, need therefore not become ideologically captive because of its strong political involvement and critical ideological solidarity - on condition that self-criticism and ecumenical interaction are nurtured.

1.3.3 Mission: political and ecumenical

Having articulated my understanding of the interrelation between mission and politics and mission and unity, it remains to be stated more specifically why I consider mission to be necessarily both political and ecumenical.

One reason has already been stated in the previous paragraph. In fulfilling its political dimension, mission runs the risk of ideological captivity. The necessary self-critical dimension to counteract this captivity can only originate in close contact with the wider body, the ecumene. Mission must therefore of necessity be *both* political *and* ecumenical.

A second reason for this interrelation is to be found in the purpose or goal of mission. According to my definition of mission given above, one can say that the goal of mission is erecting signs of the coming reign of God. But in other terms this can also be described as the establishment of *shalom*, the Old Testament concept of well-being, wholeness, peace with justice. However, in the words of Hoekendijk (1966:43),

... shalom is not a something which can be objectified and set apart; not the *plus* which the haves can serve out to the have-nots; nor is it an intra-human quality ('peace of mind') that someone could enjoy in isolation. Shalom is a *social happening*, an event in inter-human relations, a venture of co-humanity.

What Hoekendijk is saying is that we cannot establish *shalom*, we cannot erect signs of God's reign in isolation - *shalom* cannot be established in sectarian terms, nor can it be some individualistic happening. We can carry out our task of establishing *shalom* only in interaction with other human beings. In other words, we can achieve the goal of the social, political and economic dimension of the *missio Dei* only in fellowship and solidarity with our fellow human followers of Jesus. Thus mission has to be both political and ecumenical.

There is also a pragmatic or functional reason for this interrelation. Already the Stockholm Conference on Life and Work in 1925 realised clearly this pragmatic need for the necessity of united action if political, social and economic justice were to be established. Therefore the report of this conference stated, 'The sins and sorrows, the struggles and losses of the Great War [World War I] and since, have compelled the Christian churches to recognize, humbly and with shame, that "the world is too strong for a divided church"' (quoted in Abrecht 1988:149).⁷ The practical realities of the difficulties encountered by Christians in trying to establish political, social and economic justice in the face of dehumanising and oppressive ideologies therefore enjoins them to united action - hence mission which is both political and ecumenical.

Finally, the very nature of Christian ecumenicity places on us the necessity for mission which is both political and ecumenical. As I have stated above, *ecumene* is derived from the Greek *oikoumene*, signifying the whole inhabited earth. These roots of the concept *ecumenical* mean that we can never be satisfied with an understanding of ecumenism as that pertaining to 'churchly unity' only. According to its roots, *ecumenical* must signify a relation to the total affairs of the one inhabited earth. Such a wider understanding of *ecumenical* places on us therefore the responsibility for mission both political and ecumenical.

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⁷ My use of this quotation can be easily misunderstood. I do not wish to place a 'holy' church over against a 'sinful' world; neither do I wish to place them in some competitive relationship in which the church is triumphant. My interpretation of this quotation, which makes it possible for me to use it, is that the harsh social, political and economic realities of our day require a commitment of all available Christian resources.

Having articulated my understanding of mission, politics and the ecumene, as well as the interrelations among them, I can now turn more specifically to the context of mission in South Africa. But this specific context has to be evaluated against the wider context in which it had its birth. In the next chapter I propose therefore to deal with the entanglement of mission and colonialism, for it was in the context of colonialism that the Christian mission came to South Africa.

2 MISSION AND COLONIALISM IN SOUTH AFRICA

2.1 INTRODUCTION

As I see it, any attempt to understand the present context of church and mission in South Africa, and especially the political and ecumenical dimensions of that mission, has to begin with an analysis of the entanglement between mission and colonialism. This entanglement had lasting influence on both older and younger churches in the whole world, both South and North. As far as politics and the ecumene are concerned, the foundations for the political attitudes and actions were laid during this period, while this era was also responsible for the transferring of all the denominational differences from the old world to the new. As such the situation in South Africa was part of the worldwide phenomenon of both the missionary and the colonialistic outreach. When discussing the entanglement between mission and colonialism in South Africa one therefore has to keep in mind the worldwide as well as the specific dimensions. Undoubtedly the phenomenon of colonialism was not monolithic in nature - there were specific differences of time and space as well as the different approaches of the various imperialist powers. I will be dealing mainly with the influence of British colonialism in South Africa, as I will be concentrating on developments which took place since the second half of the nineteenth century, when both mission and British colonialism started flourishing. British colonialism furthermore had a more lasting influence, especially on political developments and race relations in South Africa, than Dutch colonialism.

Perhaps I need at this stage to deal with a question which might be raised: is it really necessary to deal with this subject? Has this specific horse not been flogged to death already? I have already referred to one reason why I do consider it necessary. One cannot speak sensibly about the *missio politica oecumenica* of the church in South Africa without dealing with the consequences of colonialism. For, as Krit-

zinger (1990:55) points out, 'it was under the pious gaze of the "universal" and "orthodox" theology that the whole system of colonialism and capitalism was established in South Africa' (my translation). The consequences of this entanglement are still very much alive in the minds of those who were on the receiving end of both mission and colonialism, that is, in the minds of the Black 'objects' of mission. In the words of Magubane (1979:70):

It is important, therefore, to see the present in terms of the past. Since the Africans have been subjected to settler rule, they have been born into a world where alienation awaits them. But present alienation is the result of outrageous violence perpetrated by the agents of the settler state.

While White South Africans therefore may claim that the colonial era belongs irrevocably to the past (although many Afrikaners still vividly remember the Anglo-Boer War, and some of them still base their actions on the consequences of the colonial past), for Black South Africans colonialism is much more immediately part of everyday life. In the words of Motlhabi, to be Black in South Africa means to be an 'object of colonisation, disinheritance and exploitation' (in Kritzinger 1988a:125). Because colonialism is still such a reality for the majority of Christians in South Africa, any attempt to study Christian mission in our country will have to deal as honestly as possible with this entanglement.

I cannot and do not claim to write as a representative of the 'objects' of mission and colonialism, as part of the Black 'underside' of history. I can attempt though to write as someone who has become aware of this specific dimension of the problem and who therefore attempts to write about the entanglement in dialogue with that point of view. Seeing the present in terms of the colonial past is in itself reason enough why the entanglement of mission and colonialism should be addressed. A very specific aspect of the colonial past which still causes very serious problems today for church and mission is the institutional racism which originated as part of the economic exploitation inherent in colonialism. Although a start has now been made in abolishing institutional racism in South Africa, its effects in many areas of life will last for generations, and the Christian church will have to deal with them in its mission.

So far I have simply taken for granted the existence of an entanglement between mission and colonialism. Can such an entanglement be taken for granted? Various studies such as those of Neill (1966), Hinchliff (1974), Williams (1978) and Boer (1979) clearly indicate the entanglement. By taking the point of view that such a relationship existed, I am not saying that missionaries and colonialists deliberately set out to create an empire in collusion with each other. On the contrary, as Cochrane (1987:37) clearly points out in relation to the situation in South Africa:

The matrix of forces which characterised colonial conquest and economic penetration did not represent self-conscious missionary ambitions. Yet these forces did enfold the missions and to them, in the stamp of Victorian self-assuredness, they made their contribution. They did so not because they were scheming, half-witted or malicious, but because they were of their time, of their place, and in an advantaged position in an expanding political economy increasingly characterised by a capitalist hegemony.

The fact that some of the consequences of the entanglement were not consciously sought by the missionaries does not alleviate the detrimental effects of those consequences. Indeed, it can even be argued that the missionaries bear greater responsibility for the consequences than the colonialists. The colonialists had more limited ends in view, aimed mostly at external ordering and domination. Of course it was not always so easy to limit domination to external factors only - obviously they also had psychological and cultural consequences, especially in Africa with its holistic world-view. But the missionaries consciously aimed also at 'colonising the mind', at changing whole systems of belief and practice. According to Beidelman (1982:5-6) 'missionaries demonstrated a more radical and morally intense commitment to rule' and therefore bear an even greater responsibility for the detrimental effects of the entanglement between mission and colonialism.

So far I have only spoken about detrimental effects. Did the entanglement of mission and colonialism have no positive effects at all? Of course it had - the fact that the Christian church became a worldwide body in a relatively short space of time, is one. If I had been writing a book about mission and colonialism I would have had to argue carefully both the positive and negative effects of the entanglement. For my restricted purpose, viz. setting the scene for a discussion of the

missio politica oecumenica of the church in South Africa, I have chosen not to do this.¹ As will become clear below one can argue that, from this specific perspective, the negative consequences so clearly outweighed the positive that one can ignore the latter. What then were the causes of these negative consequences?

2.2 COLONIALISM AND CAPITALISM

Perhaps the outstanding negative effect of the entanglement between mission and colonialism proved to be the role of capitalism. Colonialism was meant mainly to increase the wealth of the capitalistic 'mother countries'. This could be achieved especially by gaining access to the unexploited natural resources in the colonies. These resources could only be 'profitably' developed by making use of the vast pool of cheap labour available in the colonised areas. Capitalists therefore had a direct interest in the process of colonisation. So strong was this interest that Max Warren (1965:83) could state that the Western nations (in co-operation with capitalist financiers, industrialists, etc.) did not hesitate even to use naked force in their subjection of colonial people to gain this increase in wealth wherever it was available. Another commentator on this era, Guy (1983:347-348), finds in 'the changes brought by capitalist advance and the strategies required if capitalist production was to progress' the ultimate reasons for the tragic destruction of the Zulu kingdom in the 1870s and 1880s. It should not come as a surprise, then, that for those on the receiving end of mission and colonialism it seemed as if missionaries were part and parcel of this capitalist exploitation. So, for example, Majeke (1952:4) is most critical of colonial missionaries exactly because of their role in this collusion between colonialism and capitalism:

It is against this background of vast economic forces that the influx of missionaries to the colonies acquires meaning. The missionaries came from a capitalist christian civilization that unblushingly found religious sanctions for inequality, as it does to this day, and whose ministers solemnly blessed its wars of aggression.

It is therefore furthermore understandable that she finds in mission the *method* by which the ultimate *aim*, the introduction of capitalism, was to be achieved (1952:18). The economic exploitation involved in

1 For a more positive evaluation of colonialism, see Sanneh 1989.

colonialism (because of its capitalist origins) thus has, to this day, a detrimental effect on mission.

There were specific theological and economic reasons for this role of capitalism. According to Boer, it was 'a fatal combination of pietistic dualism and class blindness' (1979:472). The pietistic theology which by and large formed the theological basis of the Protestant missionary movement during the colonial era reduced the gospel to little more than the salvation of individual souls and salvation from (neurotic) feelings of guilt (Nolan 1988:108-109). One can call to mind here the injunction of Von Zinzendorf (father of Pietist mission) to his missionaries that where political problems made it impossible for them to continue their mission, they should rather retire than try to influence political structures in any way.

It was the 'spiritualisation' and privatisation of religion that enabled the system of exploitation and colonialism to be justified, enabled it to expand through the world and to cause the most barbaric excess of suffering in the history of humankind. This religion is, without doubt, the opium of the people (Nolan 1988:110).

As far as class is concerned, colonialism was the economic and political expression of the restlessness of especially the upcoming middle classes in industrial Europe. This same restlessness expressed itself in the missionary enterprise (Boer 1979:81). As far as British colonialism in South Africa in particular was concerned, it should furthermore be remembered that 'the clergy was an integral part of the English ruling class, and the ideas that they propagated were part of the ideology through which that class defended, and attempted to maintain, its position within the upper reaches of the social hierarchy' (Guy 1983:183). For both theological and economic (class) reasons, therefore, colonialism became a function of capitalism. This capitalist motivation of colonialism meant that economic exploitation of the colonies became the rule rather than the exception. It was unavoidable that mission would therefore come to be seen by the colonised people as the religious justification for this economic exploitation. This view is expressed in the oft-quoted saying of Africans, 'When the missionaries came they had the Bible and we had the land [in other words, the wealth]. They said, "Let us pray", and when we opened our eyes we had the Bible and they had the land.' This is what most missionaries, even the most philanthropic among them, never realised - that all their high-sounding,

idealistic defences of colonialism (which they used in order to justify the entanglement between mission and colonialism) would shatter themselves on the hard rock of capitalist economic exploitation.

2.3 COLONIALISM AND RACISM

The serious disadvantages of the entanglement between mission and colonialism are aggravated by the reciprocal relationship between colonialism and racism. It has been pointed out that racism can be seen as a product of colonialism, and vice versa (Ross 1982:2). That is why Magubane (1979:54) considers racism in South Africa not an 'incidental detail', but rather 'a substantial part' of colonialism. Indeed, he says, one can argue that racism 'is the highest expression of the colonial capitalist system and one of the most significant features of the conqueror's ideology'. Mosala also is of the opinion that racism was a necessary ingredient of the capitalist core of colonialism in South Africa. The development of apartheid can therefore be traced back to the British colonial period, for 'apartheid as a political structure of oppression is the soul of the particular form of capitalist accumulation found in this country' (in Kritzinger 1988a:143).

This is not to say that the relationship between mission and racism was a simplistic or one-sided result of the entanglement between mission and colonialism. What about missionaries such as Van der Kemp and Philip and their tireless efforts to establish equality between the races? It is clearly an over-simplification to regard missionaries in this respect simply as the agents of the capitalistic colonisers. One should therefore also consider this relationship in the light of the long-term effects of mission as 'the moral rationalisation of the colonial enterprise as a whole rather than the immediate selfish interest of settler or planter' (Ross 1982:210-211). In this light, the link between mission, colonialism and racism, as well as the role of individual missionaries, can be explained. (My evaluation of Dr Philip in this regard will be found in the next chapter.) Moorhouse (1973:282-283) is therefore not overly cynical in his evaluation of missionaries towards the end of the nineteenth century:

... the racialism which had never been far from the surface whenever a white man contemplated a black one in Africa, was beginning to flow more freely than ever before. Missionaries had generally been no more exempt from this feeling than

traders, though their professional ethic had given them a vocabulary and gestures which allowed them to camouflage their racialism with unlimited euphemism.

Again one is compelled to ask what theological factors made possible the transfer of the link between colonialism and racism also to mission and racism; or, to use McDonagh's terms, how political exclusivity could be allowed to dominate the inclusivity of faith and salvation. He finds a number of reasons for this state of affairs, among them the dominant theological thinking of the time about the (pietistic) separation of religion from 'politics', and the cultural arrogance which considered African political systems as totally inferior, and which therefore regarded the introduction of European cultural and political systems as patently to the Africans' benefit. Furthermore it should be remembered that missionaries often depended on the colonialists to create the necessary political atmosphere in which mission could 'successfully' take place. Ultimately all of this reflects the missionaries' belief that 'the divine inclusivity vastly exceeded in importance and effect any human and political exclusivity and in its eternal fulfillment more than compensated for the suffering and privations of this world' (McDonagh 1980:106). A typically pietistic understanding of Christian eschatology, which has a fundamentally pessimistic outlook on this world, transferring the expectation of most of the good things which God has promised to the next world, therefore helped make this development possible. Together with capitalism, racism thus became an essential ingredient of colonialism and both were responsible for most of the detrimental effects of the entanglement between mission and colonialism.

2.4 COLONIALISM AND THE OWNERSHIP OF LAND

I guess it is by now a well-known fact that the Western concept of individual ownership of land was mostly foreign to Africans. African tribes 'owned' land communally and, according to their pastoral and nomadic lifestyle, regarded land as 'theirs' also while they might not have been occupying it at a given time. There is a Herero saying which expresses this view well: Wherever our cattle's feet have trodden, there is Herero land. Western capitalist colonialists with their concept of individual ownership of land, of individuals being able to buy and sell tracts of land, which then excluded the original African 'owners' of the land,

were therefore unavoidably set on a collision course with Africans about this issue. Missionaries became directly involved in the issue through the fact that large tracts of land were alienated and 'given' to missionary societies or churches, generally after they had made an appeal to the colonial authorities. Indeed, owning land became an important foundation stone on which the system of missionary values was erected. Once the missionaries 'owned' the land, it became a foreign enclave within the African environment - and on this land an African very often became a foreigner in his or her own country. To understand the profound influence of this event one should keep in mind the very intimate link between African people and their land. Certain places on this land are holy, either because they are places where God speaks to his people, or else they are places where the guardian spirits of the land live and where they can be revered or consulted. Also on this land are the graves of the ancestors, the living link between the generations, guarantors of present and future well-being. This is the land which was summarily dispossessed, generally without any awareness of the meaning of the deed. In this estranged enclave missionaries, like other settlers, could now rebuild 'a home away from home', which enabled them to live according to their own cultural norms and standards. They thus minimised the amount of adaptation to the African culture. Indeed, 'the missionaries in fact became settlers ... whose example would show the Africans how life should be lived' (Murray 1986:185).

Apart from the profound effect this alienation of land had on African culture, it also fundamentally changed African economic life. In the words of Villa-Vicencio (1988:51):

The traditional, communal, pastoral structure of African life was, for better or for worse, giving way to a dependent African peasantry and rural proletariat compelled to look to white bosses and ecclesiastical benefactors for survival. The acquisition of manufactured goods became the accepted mark of civilization and progress, often to the neglect of a sound economic and political infrastructure as a basis for self-reliance and esteem.

Again the dispossession of land did not come about by accident. There was a good economic reason, according to the capitalist system being introduced, why Africans had to leave their land. The exploitation of the Colony depended on the availability of cheap Black labour. As long

as the Africans had land (and cattle), they could exist independently by way of successful subsistence farming. As soon as they were dispossessed of land, they became dependent on the colonists (and missionaries) for their livelihood. Black South Africans were therefore increasingly forced off their land to supply the cheap labour needed by the growing capitalist system (cf. Bruwer 1988:59-62). Because the missionaries owned land just like the settlers and apparently (in the eyes of the Africans) lived according to the same foreign cultural and economic norms, it must have been very difficult for the Africans to make any distinction between mission and colonialism. Missionaries are therefore today held equally responsible for the profound religious, cultural and economic change forced on the Africans, a change which they basically ascribe to the alienation of their land. The missionaries reinforced the idea that they were co-responsible for the economic changes brought about (albeit sometimes unconsciously). They did this by inculcating in various ways the typical work ethic, variously typified as Western, Protestant or Calvinistic. Black South Africans 'heard' this injunction to work as a call to provide the farmers, miners and developers with cheap labour.

In South Africa this dispossession of land gave rise (together with other factors) to a whole series of border wars between colonists and colonised, wars in which the missionaries also became embroiled, sometimes as chaplains, but always on the side of the colonial government. One has to mention here in all fairness, in mitigation of the missionaries, that these wars caused at least the directors of the London Mission Society to protest:

The Kaffirs are charged with robbery and encroachment; but whose lands have they sought but the lands of their fathers? What soil have they claimed but the soil that gave them birth? Why should the love of home and the love of country be eulogised as the virtues of patriotism in the civilized, and be branded as crimes and rebellion in the savage? (In Groves, vol. II, 1954:133.)

Apart from the typical contemporary cultural arrogance reflected in their words ('civilized/savages'), it unfortunately did not give rise to a consistent policy of protest against the systematic alienation of land also by the missionaries - neither from the side of the LMS, nor from the side of other, less critical societies and churches. As will become clear in the next chapter when I discuss the role of LMS director John

Philip, the LMS made good use of colonialist policies and practices when it suited them.

2.5 COLONIALISM AND DECULTURATION

The process of colonialism was accompanied by an intense process of cultural domination. (I deliberately do not use the term *cultural exchange*, because the power structures were so unequal that no real exchange could take place.) This process of cultural domination was introduced for the well-known reason that missionaries generally tended to have a very negative opinion about African culture - although, according to Sanneh (1989), the fact that the missionaries translated the Bible into the African languages reflected a basically positive attitude towards culture. I think the negative attitude was predominant, though, for as Sanneh also points out, the missionaries did not realise that Christian mission 'implies not so much a judgment on the cultural heritage of the convert (although in time the gospel will bring that judgment) as on that of the missionary' (1989:25). It is surely unnecessary to mention examples here - missionaries disapproved of African dress, music, religion, housing, etc. (cf. Kritzinger 1988a:105-106 for a fuller discussion). They therefore actively sought the introduction of 'superior' Western cultural norms as an inherent dimension of Christianisation. Actually the attempts to Christianise Africa could not fail to have enormous cultural consequences. This was so because the African social, religious, political and economic system was such an integrated whole that any attempt to change one dimension of the system unavoidably influenced all the other dimensions. To illustrate this, the image of a spider's web can be used: any contact with one strand of the web sets the whole web quivering. From the missionary side the process is often described in positive terms as *acculturation*. However, this is not how it was experienced by Africans. Indeed, as Magubane (1979:65) points out, 'Westernised' Christian Africans were not *acculturated* but *deculturated* and therefore alienated. Biko saw it in these terms:

Their arrogance and their monopoly on truth, beauty and moral judgment taught them to despise native customs and traditions and to seek to infuse their own new values into these societies (quoted in Kritzinger 1988a:107).

When the whole process of Christianisation is examined from this perspective, this seems indeed to be a more correct and honest way to describe the process. As Freund (1984:156) makes clear, there was a direct link between political and cultural conquest of Africans and the number and degree of conversions taking place. It was actually only after such conquest that conversion followed on an intense scale. This truth was realised by most missionaries in South Africa by the second half of the nineteenth century: that real Christianisation would take place only if the hold of the traditional African system could be broken. The only power which could really break this system (and thus bring about deculturation) was the colonial authority. Of course this could not be so blandly stated. That is why the 'Missionsberichte' of the Berlin Mission Society for 1861 stated it in more pious terms (the BMS was one of several German mission societies at work in South Africa at that time):

... it was certain that in a country where God's judgment has broken the people politically the seed of evangelism is most conveniently sowed, that is where the missionaries enjoy the legal protection of the colonial government (in Delius 1983:118-119).

Missionaries therefore mostly actively supported the political and cultural conquest of the African people - indeed in some cases they actively helped the process along. This can be very clearly seen in the case of the Griquas. So strong did the missionary influence in their social and political system become that Galbraith (1963:56) can describe the Griquas as a 'client kingdom' of the missionaries. Again the entanglement between mission and colonialism therefore caused missionaries to become involved in the negative process of deculturation.

Was it then such a terrible thing to introduce modern Western culture to South Africa? I think it should already be clear from what I have said above that the introduction of colonial culture had many negative effects on the African people. Perhaps the most damaging effect needs to be spelled out clearer still: that when the wholeness of African culture was broken by the dualistic view of the colonial missionaries, somehow the wholeness of the African perception of themselves was destroyed, to be replaced (in most of them) by the perception of themselves as abject, colonised human beings. Because of a wrong perception of culture, and a lack of sensitivity in intercultural

communication, understandable as it was against the social and religious background of the late nineteenth century, mission became part of colonial deculturation and thus did not contribute to humanisation in colonial South Africa.

2.6 COLONIALISM AND NATIONALISM

So far my evaluation of the entanglement between mission and colonialism has been overwhelmingly negative. However, with this paragraph and the next one I want to end on a more ambivalent note. This ambivalence is highlighted in the relationship between colonialism, mission and nationalism. So, for example, the great Albert Luthuli could describe the White colonial conquest in very gloomy terms. But amid the gloom there was 'a shaft of light' - and this shaft of light had its origins in the lives and deeds of missionaries such as Livingstone, Philip and others (1964:14). There is therefore a clear dichotomy here in the consequences of the entanglement between mission and colonialism. While on the one hand mission acted as the agent of imperialism, thus causing subjection, the loss of land, deculturation, etc., on the other hand Christianity was, as Oliver calls it, 'the religion of nationalism and revolution' (1965:183; cf. also Sithole 1968:85-86). Thus, in a paradoxical manner, mission prepared the way for the eventual demolition of the whole colonialist structure. Perhaps the most revolutionary idea of all to come out of missionary Christianity 'was the notion that all Africans were one people, regardless of tribal origin. Every missionary society which regarded its operation in south-east Africa as a jumping off place for the conversion of the whole continent subscribed to this idea.' This lay 'an essential ideological foundation for African nationalism' (Etherington 1978:172-173). Although not necessarily consciously done, missionary Christianity did therefore provide a vehicle and some opportunities for the idea to grow that Africans belong to a supra-tribal community. Despite this positive consequence, one is left with an ambivalent impression, though, because missionary Christianity was also 'the religion of a White race that threatened the African way of life in many ways, and claimed land which the African regarded as his own' (Williams 1970:380).

2.7 AN AMBIVALENT CONCLUSION

I have consciously described very clearly the negative effects of the entanglement between mission and colonialism. In its *missio politica oecumenica* today these negative consequences form an important dimension of the South African context and they therefore have to be taken very seriously. Yet, in concluding this chapter on mission and colonialism I want to end on an ambivalent rather than on a strictly negative note. What I want to say is therefore that we cannot simply convict the missionaries for their entanglement with colonialism. That would be very easy to do today, with our benefit of hindsight. But we have to evaluate this phenomenon within its own historical context, and then we come to the conclusion (in the words of a statement which I have already quoted) that the missionaries did what they did 'not because they were scheming, half-witted or malicious, but because they were of their time, of their place, and in an advantaged position in an expanding political economy increasingly characterised by a capitalist hegemony' (Cochrane 1987:37). Sometimes they used exactly this privileged position to the advantage of the colonised peoples. In the words of Neill (1966:68):

Yet where the Amerindian or the Negro had a friend in almost every case that friend was a churchman, one who acted in the name of Christ, and in the light of a vision of the love of God which was denied to most of his contemporaries.

Even the truest element of philanthropy, though, was undeniably paternalistic. For Majeke (1952:26), therefore, this philanthropy was nothing more than an attempt of the missionaries, in the classical liberal sense, to act as intercessors for the Blacks with the government, as intercessors between oppressors and oppressed (1952:26). I find this judgment at the least a bit too unkind, however, one which is easily made from the benefit of our vantage point. Most probably that was not the light in which the South American Indians would have seen the acts of Las Casas, or the Khoi-Khoi the acts of John Philip. I opt therefore rather for an ambivalent evaluation, one which I think does more justice to the historical circumstances.

There is another reason why I think ambivalence is the correct evaluation. From what I have said so far it should be clear that the missionaries were agents of the colonial authorities - at times con-

sciously, at other times unconsciously. Again, though, there is still another facet to the picture. As Wilson and Thompson (1982:401) point out, a crafty and wise king like Moshweshwe also made use of the missionaries for *his* own purposes, using them to procure training for his people and placing them on exposed frontiers to act as agents for the expansion of his authority. 'He made it clear that the missionaries were *his* white men, utterly dependent on his goodwill' (cf. also Galbraith 1963:95).

Does what I am saying now not stand in total contradiction to my earlier negative evaluation? Would a positive evaluation not be necessitated by these arguments? Taking into consideration all that I have said, I stand by my largely negative evaluation with a clear ambivalent note to qualify it. The essence of my point of view has been very well stated by Freund (1984:157):

It was not unusual for missionaries to fight the settler interest where this was a factor, which enormously increased respect for them among Africans. Even then, with rare exceptions, they did not oppose the essence of the colonial system: segregation, land alienation and migrant labour. Few if any missionaries challenged the political and economic imperatives of colonial domination, as opposed to specific policies, and they usually accepted the racist aspect of it fairly easily.

I feel that my ambivalent conclusion is justified, therefore, when I am evaluating the missionaries in terms of their own socio-historical context. I feel that there is little ambivalence, though, when I am evaluating the entanglement of mission and colonialism from within our present context. This entanglement had extremely damaging effects on Christian mission in South Africa, many of which still endure today, and which must therefore be urgently addressed in the *missio politica oecumenica*.