

6 SOME FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

On the basis of this very brief historical and theological analysis, I now want to indicate some future perspectives, some themes which (to my mind) the South African church will have to engage in its *missio politica oecumenica*.

6.1 DECOLONISATION AND MISSION

I have tried to indicate the intertwinement between colonialism and mission. This entanglement had an adverse effect on mission in general, and specifically on mission in its political and ecumenical dimensions. Unfortunately, as far as mission in South Africa is concerned, the entanglement with colonialism is not a problem which belongs to the past. The problem still exists, because in fact a colonial situation still exists in South Africa. Although colonialism in its classical Western form can be said to have ended with the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910, since then colonialism continued to exist in a special form. This special form has to do with the fact that colonisers and colonised make their home in the same geographical area - something which was not the case in classical colonialism. However, the typical social, political and economic relationships between coloniser and colonised continued to exist, so that I feel myself warranted to state that a colonial situation in fact still exists. As Kritzinger (1990:59) rightly points out, 'White colonial consciousness was created and is sustained by the material circumstances of economic and political power of White people over Black people' (my translation). The implication is clear: unless these material circumstances change, the colonial consciousness will continue to exist. Some of these circumstances are the following:

- ° The ownership of land: During colonial times, the land of the indigenous Black majority was dispossessed, either through war or through treaties. With the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910, the status quo was maintained, and since then the acquisition of land was mainly regulated by the Land Acts of 1913 and

1937, as well as the Group Areas Act. These historical circumstances led to a situation in which Black South Africans (74 per cent of the population) had free access to only 13 per cent of the land, whereas White people (26 per cent of the population) had free access to 87 per cent of the land. The government has announced its intention to scrap all these laws during 1991, which will mean that all South Africans will have legal access to land. Because of the economic realities of South Africa, however, especially the fact that the lack of land made acquisition of capital very difficult, the repeal of these Acts, though laudable in itself, will have very little material influence on land ownership. As long as a minority can thus hold on to land which was originally acquired through colonial conquest, they make indigenous people into foreigners in their own land (a typical feature of colonialism). This state of affairs supports my contention that a situation of internal colonialism still exists.

- Indirect rule: Eighty years after the formation of the Union, indigenous African people generally still do not rule themselves, but are ruled by bodies imposed on them by the White power structures. It is true that some 'co-operative' Blacks have been co-opted into these bodies, but the real power lies in the hands of the White power structures (as was clearly illustrated by the failed coup in Bophuthatswana and the successful coup in the Ciskei). This system of government is also typical of a colonial system and therefore further confirms the claim that a colonial situation still exists in South Africa. The fact that the government and the ANC have started talks has so far not substantially altered this fact. Indeed, the government insists quite strongly that Black city councils (widely regarded as co-opted bodies) will not be abolished. Unless this power-structure changes considerably, the policy of indirect rule will also continue to bolster the colonial consciousness.
- The fact that White privileges in South Africa were guaranteed by the existence of a White power structure which was jealously guarded over. This was (despite some contradictions) similar to the power and privileges which the erstwhile White colonial bloc appropriated for itself while denying them to the original Black inhabitants. The Separate Amenities Act, which provided the legal

framework for this situation, has now been abolished. As is the case in the previous two points, the scrapping of the legal framework has not yet changed the material circumstances. White local authorities have found various ways in which to safeguard White privileges, or at least to share them only with the richest Blacks.¹

It comes as no surprise therefore that Black South Africans experience their situation as one of colonialist oppression. In the words of Gwala (quoted in Kritzingler):

The white minority is colonialist in character no matter how violently it seeks to prove its permanence. If whites want permanence on this continent, they shall first have to decolonize us.

If what I have said here about the continued existence of colonialism in South Africa is accepted, then the very important task of decolonisation in both state and church is still ahead of us. It seems as if this reality was indeed realised by the National Conference of Churches which took place at Rustenburg in November 1990. In one of the paragraphs in which the churches' guilt is confessed, White participants confess their 'colonial arrogance toward black culture', and take this confession as point of departure for a Christian ministry of justice (Rustenburg Declaration 2.6). What we need is even more comprehensive than this, though: we need the 'decolonising [of] theology in South Africa' (cf. Kritzingler 1989). As far as the *missio politica oecumenica* of the Christian community in South Africa is concerned, two important areas need urgent attention. In the first place, mission which is political and ecumenical is also thoroughly historical (as I tried to point out above). We are therefore urgently in need of a demythologising of White history, especially in regard to Whites' position *vis-à-vis* Black South Africans. In this respect Miller has pointed out how the Christian missionary can act as an agent of secularisation (Miller 1973). With secularisation I understand a prophetic critique of the idols a specific group of people erected for themselves to sacralise their historical position of privilege over against other people. Various authors (e.g. Bosch 1984; Butler, Elphick & Welsh 1987) have pointed out how

1 I cannot argue the case fully for the existence of internal colonialism of a special kind in South Africa. For a more extensive treatment, see *Africa Perspective* 1983 and Kritzingler 1989.

a mythological understanding of Afrikaner history, in terms specifically of the intervention of God in favour of the Afrikaner, has come to dominate Afrikaner self-understanding since the end of the nineteenth century. To mention one concrete and important example: the Battle of Blood River between the Afrikaner pioneers (Voortrekkers) and the Zulu army in 1838. Thompson points out how a whole mythology grew around this event especially since 1881. As a result, Afrikaners regard themselves as the Covenant people, God's chosen ones. This justifies their privileged position over against Black South Africans (Thompson 1985:144-188). This understanding of the event must be demythologised, the idolatrous nature unmasked, in other words it must be secularised.

Can this be regarded as part of our missionary responsibility? I believe so, for the decolonisation of history will serve to unmask its mythological idols and to liberate both White and Black participants in this history to become more fully human. In order to bring this about, we need a rewriting of the mission history of Southern Africa. Such a rewriting will have to take as point of departure the stories of the colonised-and-christianised people themselves. In order to understand this story better, we need to pay greater attention to the contributions of pioneers such as Ntsikana, Tile and others who are still living in the communal memory of Black Christians in their struggle for full freedom and humanity. In order to fulfil the political and ecumenical dimensions of its mission in South Africa and the world today, the Christian community here will have to be made aware of the slanted picture of Christianity in South Africa, brought about by the entanglement of mission and colonialism. New Christian role models will have to be found, especially in the White, but also in the Black community.

My reference to (amongst others) Ntsikana and Tile implies that a tradition of anti-colonial theology already exists in South Africa. As the histories of, for example, Tile and Colenso indicate, it was very difficult to give form and content to this anti-colonial tendency within the mainline churches. As Kritzinger (1989:6) points out, though, 'during the twentieth century it [anti-colonial tendency] spread to all the "mainline" denominations, mainly as a result of the steady politicisation of the black community through the activities of the African National Congress (ANC) and later also the Pan Africanist Congress

(PAC).⁷ This process of conscientisation found theological expression in the growth and development of Black Theology since the late sixties and early seventies. Some Black Theologians² have already addressed the issue of the decolonisation of the Christian faith in South Africa. So, for example, Mosala writes:

The task now facing a black theology of liberation is to enable black people to use the Bible to get the land back and to get the land back without losing the Bible (in Kritzinger 1989:7).

Decolonising the mission of the church in South Africa, tracing anew the roots of its growth, finding new role models to inspire and lead *all* Christians, are therefore not entirely new tasks. In some respects people have been involved in these tasks for more than a century. It is only in the recent past, however, that South African Christians have become more widely aware of their contributions, and have started to appreciate them. This is also not a 'missionary' task in the traditional sense of the word, in other words a task which takes place somewhere on the margins of the 'church', which concerns only a little isolated group of 'enthusiasts', and which deals mainly with 'evangelisation'. It is rather a task which is central to the life, being and continued existence of the Christian community in South Africa. It therefore faces *all* Christians and concerns not only the missiological dimension of theology, but *all* of it.

Let me, in conclusion, point out two important items on the agenda for the decolonisation of mission.

6.1.1 Decolonising the mind

Steve Biko once wrote that

... the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed. If one is free at heart, no man-made chains can bind one to servitude, but if one's mind is so manipulated and controlled by the oppressor as to make the oppressed believe that he is a liability to the white man, then there will be nothing the oppressed can do to scare his powerful masters (in Kritzinger 1989:8).

2 When using the term 'Black Theologian' I am not referring simply to a specific skin pigmentation. I am rather referring to theologians who have consciously opted for a specific approach to the study of theology, an approach which is characterised by taking its point of departure in a liberationist and Black Consciousness perspective.

The decolonisation of mission will therefore have to start with the decolonisation of the mind. It is indeed both the Black and the White mind that must be decolonised. The racism and economic exploitation which were an integral part of the process of colonialism (see chapter 2) resulted in a very destructive self-image being imposed on Black people. This self-image has resulted in an impotent passivity in the face of misery and oppression. It also makes it impossible for Black South Africans to regard themselves as *subjects* of their own history and not merely as *objects*. In the words of Tutu:

Black Theology has ... a burning and evangelistic zeal necessary to convert the black man out of the stupor of his subservience and obsequiousness to acceptance of the thrilling but demanding responsibility of full human personhood (in Kritzinger 1989:8).

In accordance with its humanising aim, mission has a very important conscientising and empowering function to fulfil here. This must definitely not be understood in some patronising or paternalistic way; no, mission has more to learn than to teach. To fulfil this mission, Christians will have to struggle *with* the poor, oppressed and colonised ones, not perform acts of charity *for* them. Not performing acts for them, but rather struggling with them, is very important. Through their own actions, they develop 'a new sense of power, a new capacity to take responsibility for shaping society'. It aids conscientisation, as 'conscientization comes through the struggle for, and exercise of, power' (Dickinson 1983:153,152). This further implies that the leadership of the poor, oppressed and colonised in the struggle is accepted - something which does not come naturally to Christians who often have a strong sense of their own vocation and thus expect to be followed, rather than to be led.

Equally important is the mission of decolonising the White mind. For more than three centuries, most Whites in South Africa regarded themselves primarily as Europeans. 'For Europeans only' meant for Whites only. In maintaining this strong link with Europe, White South Africans confirmed their own position as foreign colonisers in the country. Part and parcel of this Europeanism was the enjoyment of all the privileges set apart for the colonisers only (free access to land, capital, and the right to govern, etc.). White children were and are taught

that the history of South Africa and its people basically started with the arrival of the first White colonists. This colonial position confirmed the distance between Black and White, but, even more seriously, it served to create and perpetuate in the mind of (most) Whites the idea that the colonised Black people were and are less than human. From what I have said so far, it is clear what an important task conscientising and converting the White mind poses for Christian mission. The conversion I speak of here must not be taken to mean some spiritual process only. Kritzingler (1989:11) points out that

... since the colonial consciousness of white superiority flows from the material conditions of economic and political power over black people, there is not much hope of widespread change in white attitudes until black people begin to exercise power.

'Conversion' means therefore also practical devotion to the transformation of the remaining colonial structures in South Africa. Only by removing the structures which perpetuate for Whites the possibility of a colonial existence in South Africa, will it become possible to decolonise White South African minds on an appreciable scale.³

6.1.2 Decolonisation and social change

Colonialism seems to inculcate the belief that only the colonisers can be *subjects* of history and social change. As such it is quite natural that colonists claim for themselves the right to determine the socio-historical, economic and religious agenda (to name but a few fields). In South Africa this meant in practice that Whites have always set the agenda. This can be illustrated from the content of history books, the curricula of theological seminaries, etc. In the past the (mainly) White leadership of the mainline churches in South Africa were often accused of doing just that, namely controlling the agenda. Indeed, one can argue that the secession of many Independent churches was a rejection of the White, colonial agenda. In the documents that I have studied here, it is only the Kairos Document that can be said to give pride of place to the Black agenda. We are therefore still waiting as South African Christians for the church as a whole in our country to adopt a Black agenda. Mission will have an important catalytic role to

3 I will have more to say regarding White conversion when I address the theme of re-evangelisation below.

play in the process, especially in two areas: (i) As facilitator of intercultural communication, mission will have an important *translating* role to fulfil. This translating role should not be understood in some neutral way. It must rather be aimed very specifically at *conscientisation* - at creating an awareness of each other's situation, providing the opportunities and the means for reliable information to draw the two worlds in South Africa closer together and begin to provide at least the possibility of communication. (ii) Mission in its function of reading the signs of the times, pointing to God at work in the lives of human beings and in nature, can make an important contribution in setting the priorities of the agenda for us all.

Let me conclude this section with a quotation from Kritzinger (1989:19):

The colonial stereotype of mission as something which heroic white people do to (or amongst) black people needs to be finally buried. Black Christians have already taken the initiative to preach the Gospel (in the way that they have discovered it for themselves) to black and white people in South Africa. White theologians can only be stripped of their colonial pretense of being 'experts on Christianity in Africa' by exposing themselves to the critique of black theologians and African Independent Churches. A whole new missiology (and indeed a whole new theology) needs to be written by assimilating the creative impulses emanating from these two black theological initiatives.

I have indicated in chapter 2 that colonialism introduced a set of new social relations into South Africa (racism), but also a new economic system (capitalism). The rise of a class of landless, extremely poor Africans, can be attributed directly to colonialist economics (Bruwer 1988; also De Santa Ana 1979:xv-xvi). In this section I have mainly dealt with the social consequences of colonialism. In the next section I now wish to deal with mission's relationship to the poor as a consequence of colonialism.

6.2 MISSION AND THE POOR

Some years ago Christians pointed out that a new relationship was imperative between the poor and the church. Theologians expressed this relationship by indicating that the church needs to make a *preferential option for the poor*. This expression has become somewhat of a cliché, but the need it indicated is more urgent than ever in South Africa, and,

indeed, in the world. There are various reasons why the South African church (and indeed many other churches elsewhere) became a middle-class church rather than a church of the poor. It was brought here by colonial missionaries - and both colonialism and mission were thoroughly middle-class phenomena in the capitalist system (as I pointed out above). When missionaries started their work, they attempted to gain as their first converts the leaders and opinion-makers among African peoples, as they needed the leaders' permission to evangelise, and as they, from their perspective, linked Christianity and political power. Whatever the reason, the fact remains though that these people could easily be integrated into the developing middle class. Christian mission in Africa spread very much in conjunction with education, to such an extent that in some African languages the words for 'Christian' and 'student' are the same. This education enabled (Christian) Africans to enter the middle class created by colonialism (teachers, clerks, nurses, etc.). Many more can be mentioned, but I think these are enough to give an indication of some of the historical and economic reasons why the church, also in South Africa, is such a middle-class institution. Today, though, the middle class still represents only a minority of the South African population; the vast majority of our people are peasants and labourers. And as Raymond Fung pointed out so eloquently at the Melbourne meeting of the CWME in 1980, a middle-class church in a sea of peasants and labourers makes no sense. There is therefore a pressing pragmatic and sociological reason why the church must make this option for the poor.

But the problem goes even further: there is also a pressing *theological* reason why this must be done. As one result of the entanglement between mission and colonialism, the new Christian communities in South Africa came to be identified with the rich and/or powerful. The strong gospel emphases on God's option for the poor, his promise of justice for the oppressed, and healing for the sick, which can be so rich in meaning especially in a new Christian community suffering from poverty, sickness and oppression, came to be spiritualised in the colonial setting. The colonial missionaries could not be too concrete in condemning an unjust social, economic and political system, as they depended to a large extent on that system. This inevitably led to a dualistic, spiritualised understanding of the gospel, both among colon-

isers and the colonised. This misunderstanding can lead people dangerously astray, comforting the comfortable and pacifying the poor and oppressed with all kinds of 'spiritual' promises. But more and more over the past years Christians have come to the realisation that such a spiritualised, dualistic understanding of the gospel is not correct. For, as Gutiérrez (1983:18) says:

Love and its antithesis, sin, are historical realities. They are lived in concrete circumstances. Hence it is that the Bible speaks of liberation and justice as opposed to slavery and the humiliation of the poor.

A spiritualised, dualistic understanding of the gospel is therefore a dangerous temptation which can easily become prejudicial to the Christian community. Indeed, there is a strong case to be made that Western powers deliberately fostered such an understanding of the gospel in order to subjugate the colonial people that much more easily. Be that as it may, the fact remains that the middle-class church needs the poor to unfold the full meaning of the historical reality of liberation.

If the poor are to do that, we will have to read history through their eyes. I have mentioned above that colonial history has been written by the colonisers. History in South Africa has therefore been written (in Gutiérrez's words) 'by a white hand'. This is of great importance for Christian mission, for as I understand Christian mission, God is at work in history, indeed, mission means discerning where God is at work and joining him there. If one (privileged) group of Christians therefore has the authority to write South African history, it gains a stranglehold over the understanding of the gospel and of mission. There is still another reason why it is of the utmost importance to read history through the eyes of the poor. The Christian community has, basically as a result of a number of disasters, rediscovered in our century the importance of understanding God not in the first place as almighty and omniscient, but as the weak and suffering God. In the words of Bonhoeffer (quoted in Gutiérrez 1983:180):

God lets himself be pushed out of the world and on to the cross. He is weak and powerless in the world, and that is precisely the way, the only way, in which he is with us and helps us. Matthew 8:17 makes it quite clear that Christ helps us, not by virtue of his omnipotence, but by virtue of his weakness and suffering.

Of course, the poor never lost their own history completely; they kept part of it alive in oral tradition, in songs and parables and plays. But because they were segregated from the colonisers both by language and through political, social and economic barriers, very few of the powerful were aware of this history. It is our missionary task now to help as far as we can in the recovery of that history, in recovering the memory of the scourged Christ of Africa (Gutiérrez 1983:21); it will be our task to listen very carefully to the interpretation of the gospel and the meaning of mission in the light of that history; and it will be our privilege to join the poor in our task of being catalysts of liberation in our land. When this happens, it seems to me we will also be able to fill the evangelising dimension of the gospel with a new, compelling content in a world which regards evangelising as irrelevant or with a jaded or a hostile eye. The true stumbling block of the gospel in our South African situation will then be revealed in the place of the false stumbling blocks (race, class, a code of morality, etc.) which have been erected over the years by a rich, middle-class church. In other words, reading the gospel through the eyes of the poor will hopefully enable the Christian community to restore the weak, crucified Christ as the foundation of our liberation. In this process, 'the cross rips the mask from the face of all political idolatry, [depriving] the powers that be of the justification "from above" they thought was their refuge' (Gutiérrez 1983:184). This serves to illustrate once again what a thoroughly *missionary* task this preferential option for the poor entails.

Is this a totally unrealistic expectation? Is it not asking far too much of comfortable, rich and powerful Christians to expect that they should renounce all that and look at reality through the eyes of the poor? Perhaps not, for, in Villa-Vicencio's words (1988:41),

Deep within their common [Christian] memory lies a restlessness which disturbs their complacency and obliges them to recall a theological obligation to live justly, to show mercy and humbly to submit to the declared will of God as made known in the scriptures. From within this memory emerges a will that requires the church to show a special concern for widows, orphans, those who are in distress, prisoners, the poor and the oppressed - the marginalised people in any society. It is this that has constituted a disturbing reality in even the most domesticated and self-satisfied churches in history, making for resistance amid conformity.

I would agree with this hopeful view, provided the barriers which divide South Africa so successfully into Black and White worlds, rich and

poor worlds, are breached. The dramatic announcement by the State President on 2 February 1990, and the events which followed, set this process in motion. But as I have pointed out in 6.1 above, the material circumstances which confirm the existence of Black and White worlds, rich and poor worlds, have not yet changed. They will only be changed by conscious and direct action and in this action Christian mission may play an important role, not in a patronising, prescriptive way, but as a servant of the poor, translating and communicating between the different worlds.

It is, however, not only the colonised and the poor who call for the special attention of the Christian mission. There is a third, very important group.

6.3 MISSION AND THE LIBERATION OF WOMEN

I pointed out at the beginning of chapter 3 the absence of recognition of the role of women in Christian mission in South Africa. Everything that I have written since confirms the patriarchal domination of the wielders of power in the Christian community in South Africa, also the power to write history (cf. Landman 1984:16; Ackermann 1990a:11). Some observers may at this stage protest that my opinion is too negative and does not give credit for the wide recognition that women such as, for example, Botie of Magwero indeed enjoyed and still enjoy. It is indeed true that some women were honoured, but they were honoured exactly in terms of the hagiographical stereotypes that a patriarchal, male-dominated society and church ascribe to them. In the same way that White church leaders for so long set the agenda for the South African church and its involvement in the struggle against racism and for Black liberation, 'male domination of religious institutions militates against women having the space to express their concerns in terms of praxis' (Ackermann 1990a:2).

A question that needs to be addressed at this stage is the following: Granted that women have been oppressed in a patriarchal church, does that necessarily imply that the issue of the liberation of women forms part of the *missio politica oecumenica*? In terms of my understanding of mission as humanisation (described fully in chapter 1), I have no doubt that women's liberation does indeed belong fully on the

agenda of mission in South Africa. As long as the full personhood of women is stunted and warped by oppression and injustice, as long as sex is a factor dividing the Christian community into 'first-class' and 'second-class' members (e.g. in determining who can be ordained), a *missio politica oecumenica* which does not address this issue is patently incomplete and insincere. The oppression of women (both Black and White), the injustices inherent in their situation, have been well documented (cf. Ackermann 1990a:119-133). And the divisiveness of sexual discrimination within the church is illustrated by every meeting of (nearly exclusively male) church leaders - whereas very often women predominate in meetings of parishes and congregations.

The Christian community in South Africa therefore needs to address the liberation of women as a priority item on the agenda of its political and ecumenical mission.⁴ At least some of the dimensions of what it will mean in practice for the Christian community to decolonise, to opt for the poor and to work towards the liberation of women, will be spelled out in my next section on re-evangelisation.

6.4 MISSION AND RE-EVANGELISATION

I think it is fair to say on the basis of this study that the Christian *missio politica oecumenica* in South Africa has fallen far short of its goal. In some respects the mission was distorted already before it came to South Africa; in other respects it was precisely the South African context which caused the distortion, and in some instances the mission was genuinely misunderstood. Whatever may have been the reason, and whoever may have been responsible, it failed in important respects and therefore leaves us now with the important task of re-evangelisation. Re-evangelisation implies, first of all, a process of *conscientisation*, of becoming aware and of making others aware of the injustice and oppression caused by a system which often prided itself on being 'Christian', and of the good news that God in Jesus totally rejects such injustice and oppression. Then it implies *empowerment*, the courage to be fully human, to overcome the inhumanity of being either oppressor or oppressed. This power springs not from the usual human power

4 For an excellent study of liberating Christian praxis in South Africa from a feminist point of view, see Ackermann 1990a.

structures, such as a powerful military or economic system, but from the Spirit who enabled Jesus to overcome every inhuman power, even that of death. And finally re-evangelisation implies *liberation*, the freedom to be fully human, demonstrated for example in the exodus events and in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. This must not be taken to mean the freedom to be human only in an individualistic way - it means especially the freedom to be human in and with a community. The struggle for freedom is therefore also, in some cases primarily, a struggle against structures. A final comment: from what I have said here, it should be clear that re-evangelisation is not the 'task' of a select body of 'clergy'. It is in the first place the responsibility of the poor and oppressed who have 'heard' the good news of Jesus, and who now work with others for their liberation. It seems clear from what I have said that the missionary message of the gospel in its political and ecumenical dimensions needs to be re-interpreted by the total Christian community in South Africa, in such a way that people's idols can be unmasked and they can appropriate and experience the glorious liberation of the children of God in every dimension of their lives. I think one can best deal with this subject by differentiating between the re-evangelisation of the White church, that of the Black church, and that of the patriarchal church.

6.4.1 Re-evangelising the White church

It will be very difficult for most White South Africans to accept that they need re-evangelisation. They may ask: 'Are we not heirs to centuries of Christian tradition? Did we not introduce Christianity to this dark, heathen continent? Do we not attend church regularly, do we not speak in tongues, do we not give generously for missions?' These (and many similar) questions do not necessarily arise out of arrogance, bigotry or racism. To a very large extent they illustrate the demonic success of apartheid in creating a separate world for Whites, indeed, maintaining the colonial structures of privilege and power. Any information which entered this world was carefully ideologically screened so as to confirm the myth of White benevolence, power and privilege. In this process White Christianity often proved to be a valuable ally in maintaining the (colonialist) status quo. So, for example, 'our boys on the border' were fighting until the other day to maintain 'Western Christian civilisation'. Furthermore, the worldwide Reform-

ed community had to point out to the biggest all-White church in the country, the DRC, that its support of the policy and practice of apartheid constituted a heresy. One cannot simply argue that such occurrences and viewpoints belong to the past, that now we are on our way to a new South Africa, and that therefore these things can be forgotten. The DRC has still not clearly and unconditionally rejected apartheid in all its forms. And while the government announced its intention to abolish the fundamental laws which keep the colonialist apartheid structure in place (the Land Acts, the Group Areas Act, and the Population Registration Act), the material circumstances created by these acts still exist. Where such a colonial situation still exists, where the majority of the South African people are still struggling to attain full political, social and economic rights, the need for re-evangelisation undoubtedly exists. Though, as I have stated above, White South Africans may resist the notion that this is indeed the case, the reality of our daily lives proves that the need does exist.

I stated above that I understand re-evangelisation to be concerned especially with conscientisation, empowerment and liberation, with unmasking the idols in White people's lives and setting the people free to be as human as Jesus of Nazareth showed us that we can be. If this is to be achieved, at least three important areas of their lives need to be addressed.

- *Humanisation:* White South Africans need to be made aware how the centuries of oppression of Black South Africans has led not only to the dehumanisation of Black people, but also to the dehumanisation of Whites. To create, in the course of three centuries, a sophisticated, but totally soulless system such as the system of apartheid, to define and treat human beings simply as units of labour, to refuse to share in Christian fellowship with other human beings (as the majority of White South Africans did, and a large number still do), cannot but warp extensively what is left of one's humanity. White South Africans need to be made aware of this serious shortcoming. But it is only Black South Africans who can actually lead them along the way to recover their humanity, for it is a (for the Whites) new humanity they have to recover: their *African* humanity. Many White South Africans share a crisis of personal identity. For a long time they regarded themselves as Euro-

peans, but they aren't really at home in Europe any longer, and European nations in any case rejected their White South African counterparts more and more. Yet many also cannot regard themselves as Africans, for to them Africans are despised and dehumanised people. That is why Kritzing (1988a:320) says:

From this situation of alienation and uncertainty, white people need to be evangelised and converted into an African community life, not conceived of in some static or romanticised way, but as a communal existence where people live for the sake of others. This 'homecoming' in Africa will be a slow and even painful process ... but this is an essential part of the church's mission if it is to minister to this fundamental human need of whites.

It means therefore that the colonialist identity will finally have to be laid to rest, as Black and White South Africans struggle together to discover what mission as humanisation means in their African context.

- *The idols of power and wealth:* If White South Africans are to be re-evangelised so that they can recover the right image of humanity, it is as important that they be re-evangelised to recover the right image of God. (The two images are of course indissolubly connected.) In order to achieve this, it seems to me there are especially two idols that have to be unmasked. They are the idols of power and wealth. Because there was such a close entanglement between colonialism and Christian mission, the God of the Christian mission was identified with the colonial conquests. Colonialists therefore tended to see their conquests not simply as the victory of better arms or strategy, but as something God-given (cf. the Voortrekker interpretation of the Battle of Blood River). This is a very dangerous tendency, for it is very easy to equate everything the rich and powerful achieve with the will of God (cf. Kritzing 1990:60-61). It comes as no surprise, therefore, that White South Africans interpreted their position of power as a God-given right, and that ministers and chaplains provided the 'theological' justification for it. Political, economic and military power thus came to be (as it were) expressions of the being of God. It is this interpretation of reality which made (and makes) it possible to claim that White power is an essential precondition for the survival of Christianity in South Africa. This blasphemous idolatry has to be unmasked and White

South Africans have to be re-evangelised in the name of God the servant, God the despised, God the crucified. *This* God they will probably only find in the community of their Black fellow-believers.

- *Participation in the struggle:* White South Africans have to be re-evangelised so that they may become active participants in the struggle for justice and freedom in South Africa.

Humanisation does not mean becoming human in some abstract or static sense. The humanisation of white people, just as the humanisation of black people, means being mobilised for the liberation struggle (Kritzinger 1988a:207).

Re-evangelisation here will have to deal especially with two aspects. Most White South Africans are convinced that they live in a free country. They therefore do not see the necessity of engaging in a liberation struggle. It is a very important dimension of Christian mission to des-troy the walls the White community built around themselves in order to maintain the illusion of freedom and justice. Having enlightened them on the real state of affairs, mission is still left with the task of convincing them to participate in the struggle. This will probably only be possible by convincing them that freedom and humanity are indivisible. As long as Black South Africans are not free, White freedom is a dangerous illusion. As long as Black South Africans are not treated justly, White South Africans cannot walk humbly with God. Of course this does not mean that they (Whites) must be convinced to do this for selfish reasons. No, it means that their idolatrous misunderstanding that they can continue their service of God despite their involvement in a diabolical system, is exploded.

6.4.2 Re-evangelising the Black church

Let me now turn to re-evangelisation in the Black community. I believe that for social, political and theological reasons the primary responsibility for Black re-evangelisation lies with Black Christians and especially Black theologians themselves (cf. Kritzinger 1988a:171-172). According to my understanding of the *missio politica oecumenica*, however, contextual theologies (such as Black Theology and a yet to be fully articulated theology of White liberation) need to be in dialogue with each other to help prevent ideological captivity and to maintain the

catholicity of the ecumene. For this reason I dare to reflect also on Black re-evangelisation. It seems to me that Black re-evangelisation will have to deal with the following important areas:

(a) Western culture invaded Africa in a two-pronged assault in the form of colonialism and Christian mission. Because of this close alliance, mission became co-responsible for the destructive impact of Western culture on African life. The impact was particularly severe in the area of the Africans' sense of humanity and self-worth. Every dimension of the 'superior' Western culture (technical, spiritual, intellectual, etc.) seemed to testify that Africans were inferior human beings. This inferiority was reinforced by the racist structures created by the colonists (also in the churches), giving rise to a sense of powerlessness, despair, and even self-hatred. Several Black theologians therefore refer to the need that Black Theology will assist in radically changing Black people, as it were, converting them out of their passivity and subservience to empowerment and liberation (cf. Kritzinger 1988a:173).

Through re-evangelisation, Black South Africans need to become aware of the reasons for this self-image, need to become aware to what extent this has been imposed on them through colonialism, and need to become aware how a new humanity becomes possible for us all through the Man of Nazareth. It seems to me that the discovery of self-acceptance, based on a positive anthropology, is very important here, because the anthropology which was introduced to South Africa by the missionaries and the Dutch Reformed Church (and later by other churches) conveyed basically a very pessimistic view of humanity, proceeding from the assumption that human beings are mainly capable of evil. This cultural, political and religious conditioning of centuries has to be combatted, and through its *missio politica oecumenica* the Christian community in South Africa has to be a servant of the recovery by all South Africans of their infinite worth in Christ. For in the words of Boesak (in Kritzinger 1988a:174):

To ask blacks to love themselves is to ask them to hate oppression, dehumanization, and the cultivation of a slave mentality. It is to ask them to know that they are of infinite worth before God, that they have a precious human personality worthy of manifestation. It is to ask them to withstand any effort to make them believe the opposite.

(b) In the light of my understanding of re-evangelisation, it seems to me that it also means presenting the Christian message as an *empowering* gospel, not a *subduing* gospel. In the study of the intertwining of mission and colonialism, as well as in the study of Philip and other missionaries, it became abundantly clear to what extent the mission of the church in South Africa was harnessed for the task of colonial subjugation. Later on Afrikaner nationalism also employed a subduing gospel in confirming White hegemony in South Africa. This continued subjugation in the long run breeds what the National Committee of Negro Churchmen in the USA once called 'a race of beggars'. It is the more objectionable because it is the 'Christian' message which is employed to achieve this. In the light of all this, it is the duty of the Christian community through re-evangelisation to aid the recovery of the age-old Christian tradition that the story of Jesus of Nazareth has served as a motivating force for people to overcome inhuman situations.

What makes Black Theology an evangelistic *missionary* theology is the fact that it does not leave black people in their beggarly powerlessness, but calls on them to be empowered by the Spirit and to take the courage to become human subjects, even while the oppressive social structures are still in force around them (Kritzinger 1988a:179).

It seems to me that what will be very necessary in this process will be the discovery that the gospel does not empower only to change *people*, but that it empowers the Christian community specifically to change oppressive *structures*. It is quite possible, indeed to be expected, that the oppressor will allow an empowering understanding of the gospel to be disseminated, as long as the empowering is strictly limited to individuals. It is the collective empowerment, the empowerment to overturn structures, that provides the real challenge and which therefore has to be suppressed. In other words, it is in this context that it is urgently necessary to remember that mission is both *political* and *ecumenical*, that it is indissolubly linked to structures, and that the resources of the whole Christian community are necessary for it to prevail.

(c) What I have said above about re-evangelisation among Black South Africans implies that re-evangelisation must take place in terms of their African heritage. According to African writers, their worldview had been characterised by a very high view of the value of each human being. African anthropology generally therefore has a much

more positive view of the human person than that held by the missionaries. In the same way, African Traditional Religion provided a holistic, integrated view of life, and served as the source of power for every aspect of daily existence. Christian mission, as well as the whole Western way of life, tended to estrange Africans from their African heritage. Re-evangelisation will therefore mean a recovery and re-evaluation of this heritage in the light of a humanising and empowering gospel.

6.4.3 Re-evangelising the patriarchal church

The patriarchal church is both Black and White, and has showed itself to be very reluctant to accept the need for women's liberation in church or state. So, for example, even the Kairos Document still failed to address the crucial issue of the oppression of women in South Africa. In Landman's words (1984:24), 'In South Africa sexism is alive and well - and even more sly than racism. Some men who are known for their anti-racist sentiments and activities, will flee when feminist issues are introduced into the conversation.' Even worse than fleeing from the issue, though, is the fact that many Christians and churches do not even make the connection between racist oppression and sexist oppression. Ackermann (1990a:230) is correct therefore that churches 'which have recently been voluble in their opposition to apartheid and their demand for human rights, justice and peace, are often undemocratic and hierarchical in their structures and discriminate against women'. Re-evangelisation, with its functions of conscientisation, empowerment and liberation, is therefore undoubtedly necessary. Only a minority of South African Christians seem to be aware that sexually exclusive language is used as a matter of course in worship services, statements, etc., and that this use of language confirms the thoroughly patriarchal nature of the South African church. We do not only need to switch to non-sexist, inclusive language, though - we have to restructure completely our religious symbols and models. As Landman (1984: 11-13) points out, the long patriarchal history of the church has led to the 'androgynizing' of religious thought and language, so that 'God is only known to humanity as a man' (Daly, as quoted in Landman 1984: 11). As long as being male is therefore widely understood as somehow being a bit more divine than being female, women cannot achieve/are not allowed to achieve their full stature as human beings in Christ.

Breaking down the false patriarchal consciousness and replacing it with a new *human* consciousness, according to which people are not ascribed characteristics or attributes according to their sex but rather according to their humanity, is an important dimension of re-evangelisation.

As far as the empowering dimension of re-evangelisation is concerned, the concept of *sisterhood* may be employed. Sisterhood here is taken to indicate 'women bonding together for social, political and psychological aims' (Ackermann 1990a:227). Given the huge differences in the material circumstances of rich and poor women, Black and White women, the question arises whether such bonding is possible. Hooks (quoted in Ackermann 1990a:228) indicates that it is, provided that 'rather than bond on the basis of a shared victimization or in response to a false sense of a common enemy, we [women] can bond on the basis of our political commitment to a feminist movement that aims to end sexist oppression'

In the light of my understanding of Christian mission, sexist oppression will only fully end if women have the freedom to attain and express their full humanity in Jesus of Nazareth, he who made possible this 'new way of being-in-the-world'(Ackermann 1990a:231). This can therefore be the ideal of bonding together in the sisterhood of the faith, working towards the liberation of all women and men. Does this imply that there is no role for men? Certainly not. For a long time men were comfortably settled in the structures and practices of the patriarchal church, and most certainly they cannot now claim that the re-evangelisation of this church is the responsibility of women only. Most certainly women will have to set the agenda, as they have suffered the pain of oppression. For men, therefore, the first deed that is necessary is most probably the whole-hearted acceptance of the political commitment of a feminist movement aimed to end sexist oppression in the name of Christ. The second is working sincerely for relationships between women and men which are worthy of his example.

A final point needs to be considered: I have dealt here with the re-evangelisation of the church or the Christian community. Does this not mean that Christian mission becomes completely introverted, inward-looking? And is mission not precisely characterised by its extroversion, by its being outward-looking? Does Christian mission not in this way

abandon the world? I think the answer to all these questions is negative. In the first place, as was clear from my definition of mission and my analysis of mission throughout, I do not operate with a very sharp dividing line between church or Christian community and world. Christians have no other existence than an existence in, and as part of, the world. People are therefore not evangelised in some way separate from the world, but in and for the world. Christians therefore do not withdraw from the world to be re-evangelised; on the contrary, they can only be re-evangelised if they are sharply aware of their world. In the second place the answers are negative because the re-evangelisation of the Christian community is essential for the restoration of the credibility of Christian mission in South Africa. It should be clear from the previous chapters to what extent and for what reasons Christian mission has lost its credibility. If therefore the Christian community concentrates on rebuilding itself, rectifying injustice within its own life, listening to the poor and oppressed to recover the authenticity of its message, relating to its context to become truly relevant - only then can it begin to incarnate among all the people of South Africa the gospel of the Man from Nazareth.

It is clear from what I have said so far that I am not satisfied with the traditional role of the Western church, which is by and large the role which was transplanted to South Africa. I am convinced that the church, especially in its mission, must play a completely different role. In Liberation Theology this role of the church is expressed by referring to the church as a site of struggle. In the next section I will try to explain what this means for the *missio politica oecumenica* in South Africa.

6.5 THE CHURCH AS A SITE OF STRUGGLE

If the Christian mission in South Africa is to become truly political and ecumenical, we will need a clear vision of the church as a site of struggle.⁵ I use the term *site* here not to indicate a physical locality, but to

5 Much of what I say in this section is based on a lecture delivered by Chris Langeveld at a workshop on 'A liberating ministry to whites', arranged by the ICT at Lumko in Germiston in June 1989. The lecture is not available in published form, so that my writing here is based on my own notes. It may therefore differ from what Langeveld said, as my notes obviously reflect my own interpretation.

indicate a common set of social practices which brings people together (working, playing, studying, praying, etc.). With this characterisation I wish to say that the church is to be regarded as a possible ally in the struggle for liberation. Before the church can become an ally, though, the social practices in the church have to be restructured and reorganised so that their orientation can be towards humanisation. In a sense all the lines flow together in this paragraph. Mission as decolonisation, mission as empowerment of the poor, mission as re-evangelisation - taken together they mean reclaiming the church, restructuring and reorganising its social practices, turning it into a site of struggle. To put it very simply, therefore: we have to struggle to make the social practices of the church (which obviously depend on its understanding of the Christian gospel) into what they should be - hence the church as a site of struggle.

In order to determine the value of the church as an agent of change, we have to be very honest and realistic about both the limits and the potential of the church. Since the beginning of the Constantinian dispensation in the fourth century, the church has basically been politically and socially conservative. As far as the period covered in this study is concerned, the entanglement between mission and colonialism, as well as the easy co-option of the church in support of the White status quo, illustrates the innate conservativeness of the church. Yet this does not mean that the church therefore has to be written off. Throughout history the church always contained a prophetic minority who rejected and struggled against the conservative nature of the church (e.g. Colenso, Tile, the Kairos Document). To put it in other words: there seem to be two processes at work in the church: a dominant one (striving to retain the status quo), and a subordinate one (striving to bring about change - cf. Villa-Vicencio 1988). In order to fulfil the *missio politica oecumenica* in South Africa, this prophetic dimension, this subordinate process, must be mobilised to reclaim the church as an agent for change.

Before one embarks on such a process, one needs to consider whether the church is really worth all that trouble. Is there any realistic possibility that the church can become an ally for change? According to my point of view, it is indeed worthwhile trying to reclaim the church. This is so because the church is primarily a site of ideological

social practices. The church is not a political site in the way that the state is, or an economic site in the way a factory is. The church deals with ideas, beliefs, culture, faith and prayer. Therefore the nature of the church as a site of struggle means that it will be a site of ideological struggle, in terms of my definition of ideology and its relation to the *missio politica oecumenica*, a very important site of struggle. In relation to this ideological struggle, the church therefore fills an important function in society as one of the sources of the production of meaning. Meaning can empower people for the struggle for justice, or it can obscure that struggle. If the church fulfils its role to empower people, it assists them to interact meaningfully and consistently with other sites of struggle in the community (e.g. labour unions). A word of caution, though: this kind of production of meaning, namely empowerment, is not something which will come about in a haphazard way. On the contrary, it requires organisation, strategy, education and mobilisation. Furthermore, it is not simply the producing of isolated ideas; the production of meaning as empowerment takes place in community, where an adult critical faculty can be given free reign because of a shared sense of belonging. It should be clear, therefore, that the production of meaning which will empower people to struggle for freedom and justice will of necessity be a long-term project. It is aimed not simply at the attaining of some short-term political goals, no matter how desirable these may be. Once the church has been turned into a site of struggle, it should remain so - even after 'secular' liberation has taken place - in order that, with other sites of struggle, it can keep alive the ideals of humanity, freedom and justice. It should also be clear that defining the church in these terms means that the Christian community is not simply another political party or pressure group, a weak imitation of a liberation movement or a labour union. As one of the sources of the production of meaning, meaning especially in terms of religious social practices, the church has an important and unique role. I am therefore convinced that reclaiming the church as a site of struggle is integral to the *missio politica oecumenica*.

So far in this chapter I have written much about a struggle, about conscientisation and secularisation, about political involvement. Is this the only task of the Christian mission? After all, Christian mission is part of the Christian life, which is supposed to be a life in the Spirit. Can all this not be achieved by secular organisations without any

reference to Christ and the Spirit? In what way does spirituality enter into consideration at all? To this question I now turn my attention.

6.6 A SPIRITUALITY OF LIBERATION

I most certainly maintain the spiritual dimension of Christian mission. This I do not simply to forestall the kind of questions I asked above. I maintain spirituality because liberation and the struggle for liberation is deeply spiritual, as anyone who has witnessed the faith of the poor will confirm. There are two conditions, though. In the first place *spiritual* must not be understood in terms of the old dualism between spirit and flesh, so that to be spiritual means withdrawal from the world, ascetic rejection of the created. The way I understand it, true spiritual life is only attainable by way of historical mediation - the transcendent, in other words, is not directly, immediately (that is, without mediation) accessible. In our context in South Africa the historical mediators are the poor and the oppressed. Only after we have made a preferential option for the poor, only in communion with them, does a true spirituality of liberation become attainable (Sobrino 1988:2-4). True spirituality therefore exists not in withdrawing from people and their historical processes such as politics - this results in alienation, not holiness. True spirituality grapples intensively with the historical, for it means 'keeping faith with reality' (p. 18). In the second place, *spiritual* must be understood in communal terms, not in terms of individualistic holiness. Experiencing the true holiness of Christ, getting to know the length and the breadth, the height and the depth of his love, is a historical experience of shared living, not some personalistic rapture of the senses.

Spirituality, understood thus, has an important part to play in South Africa in our struggle to be liberated from the idols created by colonialism, racism and capitalism. For if our lives come to be controlled by that which is *not* God, in other words by idols, we are *not* spiritual (Gutiérrez 1984:58). To put it very concretely: Christians who have given themselves (actively or passively) to the false god identified in Kairos, despite their spirituality expressed in Bible study, prayer, etc., are essentially *not* spiritual, for the service of that god led to dehumanisation and oppression, not to full humanity and liberty. On the other hand, Christians who give themselves to the God of Jesus

Christ, the God who wants us to have abundant life, also abundant political life, are acting essentially spiritually despite their apparent secularism. For true spirituality is 'a dynamism that leads to life' (Gutiérrez 1984:64).

Speaking about the spirituality of liberation, therefore, implies that the meaning of liberation is not exhausted by its social, political and economic dimensions. The praxis of Jesus of Nazareth infuses these dimensions with something more - not some intrinsic 'holiness' that Christians exclusively possess and dispose of, but the greater hope and love, justice, freedom and peace which Jesus made immanent and freely gives to those who join him in setting the captives free, proclaiming good news to the poor, and restoring sight to the blind. Liberation, therefore, provides the historical material which can be 'inspired' by Christian spirituality - a spirituality which, divorced from historical (in-history) liberation, becomes stagnant introversion (cf. Sobrino 1988: 26-27).

6.7 CONCLUSION

One of the accusations most often made against proponents of an explicit political role for the Christian community is that such political ideals are utopian. Christians, it is said, must be hard-nosed realists who can live with the reality that 'we will always have the poor with us'. Freedom, justice, harmonious race relations - those are ideals which will only be fulfilled in heaven. Here on earth we have to be satisfied with the imperfect, broken reality of human sinfulness. The best role the church can play in such a situation is to bring people to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. If any socio-political improvements follow, they are a bonus.

I have pleaded for a completely different understanding of the role of the Christian community. I am quite willing to be accused of utopianism. Why should one not, in the light of the story of Jesus of Nazareth, harbour utopian ideals? What can be more utopian than praying, like he taught us to do: 'Your will be done on earth *as it is in heaven*'? If the Christian community had listened with greater care to the so-called utopianists, might Western society (the 'Christian West') not perhaps have displayed less inhumanity, injustice and oppression?

It must be clearly stated, though, that I use *utopia* in a specific sense, namely that of *critical idealism*. I use *idealism* neither in the Platonian sense, nor as the opposite to the Marxist concept of materialism. With *idealism* I mean something attainable, something more human, to which we are called by the story of Jesus of Nazareth, a story which inspires us to work and pray for the establishment of God's kingdom here and now, but which also reminds us that this kingdom eventually will be established by God's revolutionary intervention on behalf of the poor and those denied justice, and against the inhuman and idolatrous powers of evil. It is a *critical idealism*, though, because it is critical of any social system which is presented as the best that is attainable despite the fact that the poor and the oppressed are denied justice and life. Because it is critical idealism, therefore, it refuses to acquiesce, but keeps on being driven by the Spirit. This does not imply an element of hypocritical self-righteousness, though, because this utopianism is also, at all times, *self-critical*. Let us be bold enough then to articulate and to strive for our utopian ideals. For 'only in the utopian ideal do we glimpse, in the distance, the fulfilling reconciliations of all the disparate elements of historical liberations' (Sobrino 1988:28). The meaning of what I am trying to say here for the *missio politica oecumenica* in our day is expressed well in the call of a great South African to the people of South Africa:

We must continue to be tormented by the ideal [in human and structural relations]. Its possibility must be there for peoples to attempt to put it into practice, to begin over and over again, wherever in the world it has never been tried, or has failed ... Without the will to tramp towards that possibility, no relations of whites, of the West, with the West's formerly subject peoples can ever be free of the past, because the past, for them, was the jungle of Western capitalism, not the light the missionaries thought they brought with them (Gordimer 1988:237).

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