

THE ROCKY ROAD TO UNITY: THE WORSHIP QUARREL AT FEDSEM IN THE 1980s

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Abstract

This paper describes the painstaking, controversy-ridden and only partly successful attempts made to harmonise worship life at the Federal Theological Seminary of Southern Africa in the 1980s. Established at Alice in 1963, this ecumenical seminary relocated to Imbali, Pietermaritzburg, in the late 1970s after being expropriated by the apartheid state. In 1974 the constituent churches (Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregationalist) declared their intention to seek unity. As time went on, the denomination-based colleges gradually moved towards a more unified structure and started to worship together. This proved rather difficult. To celebrate the sacraments in the same chapel despite century-old liturgical, theological and ecclesiological differences was no easy matter. The road to unity ended up being much rockier than the protagonists of the ecumenical movement had anticipated.

1 INTRODUCTION

On Sunday, 24 November 1974, six South African churches, representing the Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational traditions solemnly ratified the Declaration of Intent whereby they committed themselves to seeking agreement on a common form of worship, to admitting each other's communicant members to communion and to working toward increasing co-

operation in all areas of church life. Nearly a million Christians held “services of commitment to the search for union” throughout the country. This demonstration of the desire for unity was the culmination of a four-year process of negotiation, at the end of which (at the invitation of the Church Unity Commission (CUC)) the courts of the churches concerned had adopted, one by one, the Declaration of Intent.¹ George Swarts, the Anglican bishop of Kuruman and Kimberley, later recalled that, “in 1974, there was much euphoria among the churches about church unity”.²

This event was good news for the Federal Theological Seminary of Southern Africa, the midwife of the still-to-be united church. With one exception - the Presbyterian Church in Africa, a church of Ethiopian origin - all the seminary’s constituent churches ratified the Declaration of Intent. From then on they developed the habit of calling themselves ‘CUC churches’. Since January 1974, the driving force behind the Church Unity Commission was Joe Wing, the secretary general of the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA) whose students were trained at Fedsem. It was during the presidency of ‘Mister Unity’ (as he was called by many) that the seminary became a unified institution fifteen years later. In the middle of a discussion on the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, Simon Qqubule typically commented in 1983: “We are repeating the work of the Church Unity Commission”.³

Two days after the celebration (on Tuesday, 26 November 1974) Hendrik Schoeman, a representative of the Minister of Agriculture, served a notice of expropriation on the chairman of the Seminary Council – allegedly to make additional land available to the nearby University of Fort Hare.⁴ This triggered a painful exodus, from Alice to Umtata, and from there to Edendale and Imbali. Fedsem became widely known as a victim of the apartheid government’s rancour.

The quasi-coincidence of the two dates, albeit accidental, is meaningful. Unwittingly, the South African government accelerated the CUC churches’ move towards unity and contributed to the ‘euphoria’ mentioned by George Swarts. There is nothing better than a common enemy to forge a bond of unity. As the Russell Report would later note: “what was characteristic of the debates around the

[expropriation] was that College or Church affiliation receded into the background".⁵

But for how long? This article will describe the painstaking, controversy-ridden and only partly successful attempts made to harmonise worship life at the seminary after the move to Imbali in 1980. It is one thing to sign a declaration of intent and another to celebrate the sacraments in the same chapel despite century-old liturgical, theological and ecclesiological differences. The road to unity ended up being much rockier than the protagonists of the ecumenical movement had anticipated in 1974.

2 SHARING THE SAME WALLS

Worship was hardly a matter of dispute in Alice because of the simple reason that the students did not often celebrate the liturgy together. Fedsem was a truly federal institution, with four colleges - St Peter's for the Anglicans, John Wesley for the Methodists, St Columba's for the Presbyterians and Adams United for the Congregationalists - that were separated by a few dozen metres. The seminary building only comprised the administrative offices, the classrooms and the library.

Initially, worship was conducted separately in the College chapels where both morning and evening prayers - complemented by daily Eucharist and evensong in St Peter's case - as well as sermon classes were held. Later, evening prayers were said in common in the seminary hall. On Sundays the colleges worshipped with the students of their own denomination at Fort Hare or in their own chapels. An ecumenical Sunday afternoon service, held in the seminary hall and open to the public, was introduced in the 1970s. It soon became a prominent part of the seminary's worship life. Each college had a communion or Eucharistic service in its own chapel. Joint Eucharists were celebrated four times a year in the seminary hall until the signing of the CUC Covenant in 1974, after which a weekly celebration took place.⁶

The expropriation had the unintended consequence of squeezing the four colleges - reduced to three with the merger of St Columba's and

Adams United into what became known as Albert Luthuli College in March 1977 - into a common space. At first they shared accommodation at St Bede's College in Umtata in 1975; then at the Ecumenical Lay Centre in Edendale from 1976 to 1979. As the Russell Report noted in 1981: "in the Umtata situation and more particularly at Edendale a new pattern emerged mainly because the Colleges were thrown together and no longer had individual chapels".⁷ In Umtata, the Anglicans from St Peter's and their hosts from St Bede's celebrated the Eucharist together every morning in the St Bede's chapel, but on Wednesday mornings the other colleges joined them and each denomination took turns to lead the celebration according to its own tradition. On the other days of the week the Methodists, Congregationalists and Presbyterians held common prayers in one of the classrooms. In the evening, St Peter's and St Bede's held evensong in the St Bede's chapel, and the two other colleges held evening prayers together in a classroom. On Sundays the Anglicans celebrated the Eucharist, while the other denominations joined in the worship of the local congregations. Occasionally, the other colleges held services in the St Bede's chapel.

In Edendale, the pattern of morning worship that was adopted in Umtata continued. The venue was a portion of the hall which was arranged as a chapel. The Anglicans celebrated the Eucharist before breakfast, except on Wednesdays when the other denominations joined them in a joint Eucharist. The pattern of evening prayers changed. The Anglicans joined in evening prayers three times a week. Twice a week, they held evensong at an earlier time. The Sunday services followed the Umtata pattern, with the addition of a monthly Sunday afternoon service that was open to the public.⁸

John Aitchison, who joined the staff when Fedsem moved to Edendale, pointed out that the lack of space created a sense of 'togetherness' which would never be found again. "When it was very crammed," he remembered, "it was a sort of refugee situation. I got a sense that the community was much more together."⁹ Fedsem's exile was a blessing in disguise. The ecumenical relationships were strengthened. There was no talk, during that period, of tensions about liturgy.

3 A NEW CONTEXT

A change in the composition of the seminary staff introduced an element of instability which was to cause a fair amount of disturbance in the long term. In January 1977 Sigqibo Dwane, a member of the Order of Ethiopia, became the principal of St Peter's College - a responsibility which had been entrusted to the Community of the Resurrection (CR) until then. In December of the same year, the last three religious left Edendale, ending the 75-year-old association of the Community of the Resurrection with St Peter's College.¹⁰ The 'Fathers', as they were fondly called, left a deep mark - not only on St Peter's College but on the entire seminary. To use Bishop Michael Nuttall's phrase: "With them, Fedsem had 'the best of two worlds'."¹¹ Their commitment to ecumenism was unquestionable and, at the same time, due to the fact that they were monks, deeply rooted in prayer. They inspired confidence in the Anglican leadership, as if their presence was a guarantee that the Anglican identity would always be preserved. They represented the best that the Anglo-Catholic tradition had to offer. It was at their instigation that the daily office became an integral part of the Anglican ordinands' training programme. The candidates for the priesthood followed a strict pattern of monastic observances - just as Benedictines or mendicant friars would have done in the Roman Catholic Church. The presence of the CR fathers enriched the life of the seminary considerably. Their departure left a void which was never completely filled. Their successors took to heart the affirmation of the Anglican identity, but they did it in a way which antagonised the other churches. The polarisation between Anglicans and non-Anglicans, which later characterised Fedsem, would probably never have developed to the same extent if they had remained involved in the seminary for a few more years.

The growing success of the Charismatic Renewal in the Anglican Church may also have contributed to the estrangement of the Anglicans within the seminary community. This movement emerged in the early 1970s as a reaction to the uncertainties of the previous decade. The Anglican Church in Grahamstown became its focal point

after the local bishop, Bill Burnett (future archbishop of Cape Town) was baptised in the Spirit while praying in the chapel of his official residence.¹² The Charismatic Renewal tended to be politically and theologically conservative. The Anglican bishops who were involved in it expressed disquiet at certain aspects of the curriculum taught at Fedsem (for example, the emphasis on black theology and liberation theology which they regarded as too secular).¹³ The issue of the renewal was identified as an element of the crisis which hit the seminary in the 1980s, although the point was never elaborated. "The Seminary needs to have a revival from time to time", a group from the Albert Luthuli College suggested in 1982.¹⁴ "What about renewal worship?" somebody asked at one of the meetings of the spiritual task force that was chaired by Bishop Nuttall in 1983.¹⁵

4 WHO WON THE CHAPEL?

The Seminary Council approved the plans for a new chapel in August 1976.¹⁶ Due to administrative delays¹⁷ construction only started two years later, in June 1978. The brief to the architect had been that the design of the building, while recognising the denominational differences, should reflect as much unity as possible.¹⁸ After 'considerable discussion'¹⁹ it was agreed to build only one chapel which would be placed under the jurisdiction of the principal of St Peter's College, even if it was to be used by all the colleges. The Council followed the recommendation of Crispin Harrison, a member of the Community of the Resurrection who was the principal of St Peter's College at the time.²⁰ He argued that, in order to be faithful to their liturgical tradition the Anglicans needed the full use of a chapel. They were prepared to pay for the costs of its construction.²¹ It was felt that the seminary would no longer need other places of worship as it had done in Alice. For major liturgical events, the hall would suffice. As a result, the 'memorandum of agreement' between the respective colleges and the seminary which was approved two years later included a clause (art. 4) stipulating that "the Seminary Chapel, which is under the oversight and management of St Peter's College, may be used by the Seminary or any of the constituent Colleges of the Seminary in consultation with the Principal of St Peter's College".²²

The ambiguous wording of this clause had devastating consequences for the ecumenical relationships within the seminary. At the time of its drafting, the bond that had been forged in exile was regarded as sufficient for the three colleges to share harmoniously a chapel which only one of them would own. But that was an illusion. When Fedsem moved into its new campus at the beginning of 1980, exactly the opposite happened. A bitter fight divided the seminary community - with the Anglicans on one side and the other three denominations on the other side - for half a decade until a truce was eventually concluded in November 1984. Even after this time, ill feelings continued to plague the atmosphere of the seminary.

The leadership style of Siggibo Dwane, the principal of St Peter's College and (in 1980 and 1981) the president of the seminary did not help. He was a man of stature who was known by his peers as an able theological scholar²³ and a black English gentleman.²⁴ This grandson of James Matta Dwane (the founder of the Order of Ethiopia) advocated closer links between African traditional religion and Christianity, a topic which fascinated his audiences.²⁵ But he was very rigid in his dealings with the students, prompting them (in June 1981) to call a seven-day class boycott that was covered by the local newspaper.²⁶ His aloofness led them to believe that they were treated like children.²⁷

Dwane displayed the same attitude in his handling of the chapel issue. When the Imbali campus opened, he insisted that the chapel be reserved for the Anglicans. With an altar in the middle of the chancel, an ebony cross from Tanzania behind it, candles on both sides and the sacred reserve in a side chapel, it was designed and furnished in the Anglican fashion. Twice a day the students from St Peter's would walk from their rooms to the chapel in their cassocks and back again.²⁸ The other two colleges were forced to conduct their services in the seminary hall, a building that was ill-suited for the celebration of the liturgy. Dwane's colleagues protested, negotiations took place and (after some time) the other denominations received permission to use the chapel when the Anglicans were not conducting their own services.²⁹ This was a compromise which left all

the parties unsatisfied – as the report of the Spiritual Task Force, to which we now come, made clear:

It is clear that the chapel presents a difficulty. It is officially the Seminary chapel, but in practice, because of its geographical position and its daily use by St Peter's College, it gives the impression of being the chapel of one College only. The furnishing and adornment of the chapel, together with the existence of a side-chapel where the sacrament is reserved, also leaves this impression. The chapel would not be able to accommodate the whole of the Seminary, if all came with their families.³⁰

5 THE SPIRITUAL TASK FORCE

In their response to the Russell Report, a document advocating the introduction of a unitary structure in the seminary, the Anglican bishops expressed their conviction that “the first step towards the attainment of a united Seminary must take place between the members of the Seminary community, particularly those in leadership position, namely the Staff”.³¹ By then, the Imbali campus had been in existence for two years. Behind the diplomatic language of the bishops, one could read that the relationships between the staff members of the seminary were not as good as they should have been.

The terms of reference of the ‘Task Force on the Spirituality Life of the Seminary’ or ‘Spiritual Task Force’ (which was set up by the Seminary Council on 26 March 1982, following a recommendation of a sub-committee known as the Jacob/Russell Commission) made fewer efforts to disguise the ‘strain’ imposed on the seminary by its ecumenical setting and the institution’s need for ‘healing’. The brief of the task force was:

- To investigate and propose steps to effect healing in the Seminary Community and the building of relationships in the Lord, for the attainment of unity and co-operation among the

staff, and for frequent meetings of the staff for fellowship, prayer and Bible study.

- To investigate and report on the effect of the strain imposed on members of the community by the multiple loyalties to which they are subject.
- To investigate and make recommendations on the worship life of the Seminary.

Chaired by Michael Nuttall, the local Anglican bishop, the Spiritual Task Force comprised five members and held fourteen meetings (on its own) with the Academic Board or with the staff and students of the three colleges. The minutes of these meetings³² and the report submitted to the Seminary Council on 22 August 1983³³ constitute a rich source of information on the crisis about worship in the early 1980s.

As was the case in the Edendale Lay Centre, the seminary community met for prayer four times a week. They held a common prayer service on Monday mornings and on Tuesday and Thursday before supper. They jointly celebrated the Eucharist on Wednesday mornings except for the last Wednesday of the month when the service took place in the afternoon in order to enable the ancillary staff to attend. The colleges took turns in leading the service. Students at John Wesley College and Albert Luthuli College were expected to attend morning and evening prayers. When there was no joint service, the two colleges prayed together. At St Peter's there was a daily pattern of Eucharist, office and meditation which the students were required to attend. On Sundays, the students from John Wesley College and Albert Luthuli College attended the services in the local churches to which they were attached, while those from St Peter's had a sung Eucharist and evensong on campus.³⁴

The biggest tensions, the task force was told, related to two services: the common worship on Monday mornings and the joint Eucharist on Wednesday mornings:

In the course of discussing worship, the question of Monday worship was raised as the crux of the problem. St Peter's College has Monday worship and invites the other Colleges to attend. This was in the form of an experiment because of St Peter's insistence on a daily Eucharist, and it was agreed to by the others who attend and don't plan anything else. A lot of students no longer attend. St Peter's liturgy is used, so the others find it difficult. This causes tension. Most tensions are between St Peter's and other forms of worship. Wednesday worship is also a point of tension. Some of St Peter's students don't attend when others are worshipping and vice versa.³⁵

In its report the Spiritual Task Force acknowledged the existence of tension between St Peter's College and the two other colleges in the area of worship. 'Criticism', they noted, "was offered more readily than a positive appreciation. Criticism is mutual, based sometimes on prejudice or misunderstanding and sometimes on deep differences of theological conviction." The Spiritual Task Force was struck by the "strength and force of these differences, more particularly by the fact that it seemed that they were not being discussed in a frank or systematic way with a view to achieving a greater measure of understanding".³⁶

6 THE DEBATE ON THE REAL PRESENCE

What caused the problem? According to the report, the tension resulted from differences regarding liturgical style, sacramental theology and ecclesiology, combined with a broader problem of attitude. The Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational students complained about the 'sense of superiority' displayed by the Anglicans and their 'rigid' attachment to a particular form of liturgy. For their part, the Anglican students complained about "a lack of order and discipline in the other students' approach to liturgy". Both groups complained about the non-attendance of students and lecturers when members of another church led the common liturgy.³⁷ For example, the Methodists would boycott the Anglicans and, in return, the Anglicans would boycott the Methodists.³⁸

The Anglican liturgy was at the centre of the dispute. The fact is that, under the influence of the Community of the Resurrection, St Peter's College followed a high church liturgy. Anglo-Catholicism reigned supreme with "genuflections and the wearing of robes, and incense, and candles, and high Mass, and the bells and everything" (as Rod Bulman, the registrar, put it).³⁹ Tinyiko Maluleke, a Presbyterian student at the time, remembers how strange people who used 'incense and things like that' and were 'bowing every three minutes' seemed to him.⁴⁰ The wearing of vestments also caused problems. Anglican priests would not celebrate the Eucharist without a stole - a practice which has since spread to the other churches, but was still reserved to the Anglicans in the early 1980s.⁴¹ As noted before, the Anglican students were required to wear a cassock at morning and evening prayers. Some of them would keep it on during breakfast. It earned them the nickname of 'cassock brigade'.⁴² Even the ringing of the chapel bell was cause for dissension. For some, it was "a doleful reminder of specifically Anglican services in the Seminary, rather than a joyful call to worship for all".⁴³

Central to the controversy was the doctrine of the Eucharist. The quarrels of the sixteenth century, which divided the nascent Protestant movement to the core, found a new life at Fedsem. Should one speak of a 'communion service' (a memorial service of sorts, to be held from time to time without excessive concern for the proper order) or of the 'Eucharist' (a sacrament effecting the 'real presence' of Christ, to be celebrated every day if possible, for the spiritual nourishment of the faithful)? Both positions were represented at the seminary, as the Spiritual Task Force reported:

There are unresolved difficulties and differences in regard to the doctrine of the Eucharist, such as the question of the 'real presence' of Christ in the sacrament and, by implication, what is to be done with consecrated elements which may be left over at the end of the service.⁴⁴

For those who followed the Reformed tradition, the consecrated elements could be disposed of at the end of the service. For the Anglicans, this was 'terrible', recalls Sandra Duncan, the wife of a

Presbyterian lecturer and a student at the seminary. “No amount of explanation could satisfy them on this.” Graham Duncan, her husband, tried to respect the Anglicans’ feelings but his efforts were not always understood:

After the sacrament I would scatter the bread on the ground and pour water on it. In deference to the Anglicans I started the custom to consume the elements in the vestry after the service. It was against our own tradition. My students would say that the Anglicans drink the wine and became drunk as a result.⁴⁵

At a meeting of the Academic Board, another Presbyterian lecturer, André Kaltenrieder, presented a paper dealing with the “the Reformed understanding of the Real Presence as it has appeared through the controversies over the Eucharist during the centuries”. In the ensuing discussion, all concurred that “unity is acceptance and not uniformity and that there was a need for the Seminary to be teaching the degree of consensus already achieved within the Church Unity Commission”. Did the consensus include the belief in the real presence? Some participants in the meeting doubted it. Another issue was whether the Anglican understanding of the Eucharist implied that a student could refuse to attend a Eucharist celebrated by members of other churches. Yes, the Anglicans responded. In some cases, thought, it was permitted:

It was stated that one of the objections raised by the Anglicans to, for example, Presbyterian services was the lack of order, and that certain vital things were missing in the conduct of the service, eg confession. It was said that Fr Stubbs⁴⁶ had always told students that they were free to take communion from others if their consciences permitted it; if their consciences were not easy about accepting communion from a non-Anglican, they were free to stay away.⁴⁷

These discussions echoed the debate on the mutual recognition of ministry which agitated the CPSA at the time.⁴⁸ In its report, the Spiritual Task Force noted that ‘some students’ - presumably from

Cape Town, a diocese then known for sending conservative students - had scruples about receiving the sacrament of Holy Communion when the celebrant was not a minister ordained by a bishop.⁴⁹ This was precisely the practice which the Church Unity Commission tried to promote as part of its effort to realise the visible union of the church. In 1982 the member churches of the Commission had been invited to approve a document entitled 'Third draft of the proposed covenant' which requested them, in its second article, "to recognise the ordained ministers of each of the Covenanting Churches as ministers of the Word and Sacraments who in their ordination have received God's authority and power and Christ's ministry within it". The first article of the proposed covenant concerned intercommunion.⁵⁰

For Anglicans, the mutual recognition of ministry was a controversial matter. As Michael Nuttall pointed out, it raised the issue of the episcopal order (as would have been the case for confirmation). Only a bishop had the right to ordain a priest in the Anglican church.⁵¹ In August 1982, the diocesan synod of Natal had voted against accepting the CUC document *in toto* "because of reservations which many members have concerning certain aspects of the covenant".⁵² The covenant was accepted by the Congregational church, the Methodist church and some of the Presbyterian churches, but could not be assured of a two-thirds majority in the provincial synod of the Anglican church when the matter was put to the vote in November 1982. Instead, the synod accepted the covenant in principle, pledged to implement the partnership clauses immediately, and committed itself to accepting and implementing the clauses related to ministry whenever it would approve a plan for visible union.⁵³

Another divisive issue was the use of grape juice as a substitute for wine in the Eucharist. "Difference over the use of wine or grape juice is also a source of friction for some", the Spiritual Task Force highlighted in its report.⁵⁴ Traditionally, alcohol was strictly forbidden in the Methodist Church, even for liturgical purposes. When they were leading the common liturgy, the Methodists used grape juice instead of wine for the Eucharist - a practice which some Anglicans believed would render the sacrament invalid. For the Methodists it was a matter of principle. Just as the Anglicans insisted on the right

order of worship, they insisted on the rule of alcohol. This also affected the social life of the seminary. On social occasions, beer or wine was freely available to the seminary community, and the risk existed that the Methodist students would feel excluded from these gatherings.⁵⁵

7 FROM BAD TO WORSE

The Spiritual Task Force presented its report to the Seminary Council on 22 August 1983, thereby concluding a fifteen-month process of consultation and deliberation - probably the longest investigation of that nature in the history of the seminary. It made several recommendations. The first was that the staff appointed by the churches should come together regularly as a 'core group' to 'find one another and build one another up in the Lord for their shared tasks'. The 'core group' had to meet for shared prayer, Bible study and personal ministry to one another, and also for frank and open discussion on areas of theological or other disagreement (particularly those which affected the worship life of the seminary).⁵⁶ Imprecise in its formulation and entirely based on the goodwill of the staff, this recommendation had little effect (at least in the short term) even though some efforts were made to give substance to the 'core group'.

The second recommendation was implemented, to the benefit of the seminary community, but at a slow pace. The Spiritual Task Force recommended the introduction of concelebration for the Eucharist at seminary level. Such concelebrations, it was hoped, would "deepen the bond of unity and help to overcome the scruples of some regarding denominational celebrations of the Eucharist". The task force suggested that the agreed CUC form of service be used rather than denominational liturgies.⁵⁷ On 29 April 1986, the Worship Committee of the seminary (then chaired by Graham Duncan) recommended in a 'proposed draft for services' that the CUC liturgy be used at all services (with the exception of the Ascension Day service) and that the CUC order of service be closely followed.⁵⁸ Judging from the minutes of the subsequent Academic Board, this proposal seemed to have been easily accepted. The CUC form of order of service had already been in use for some time. It was indeed

a good idea. Why not use a form of liturgy created in common by duly appointed representatives of the churches? There was no need to reinvent the wheel.⁵⁹

More controversial was the third recommendation concerning the use of the chapel. The task force recommended that “the constitutional position of the chapel (as set forth in the Memoranda of Agreement between Fed Sem and each College) be reviewed, so that it may be seen to be a Seminary chapel rather than a College chapel with Seminary connections”. The authors of the report must have realised that their proposal was likely to raise objections on the part of St Peter’s College because they backtracked from it in the following sentence: “If this cannot be done, we recommend that all Seminary acts of worship should take place in the hall, and that the chapel be available for the use of the Colleges for their respective Services at mutually agreed times.”⁶⁰ This alternative recommendation was a confirmation of the *status quo*. In effect, the problem remained unresolved. As we shall see, it took another year (and many more conflicts) for the matter to be finally resolved by a compromise on the constitutional status of the chapel.

The report of the Spiritual Task Force was included in the report of the Jacob/Russell Commission which was tabled at the Seminary Council meeting of 24 and 25 August 1983.⁶¹ Strangely, it was not discussed at all during the meeting. The Council focussed their attention on the reports of the two other task forces, one on a full-time president and the other one on administration.⁶² They only agreed to release the report of the Spiritual Task Force “in the form of extracts to be prepared by the Task Force and Commission”⁶³ No follow-up was made at the subsequent meeting of the Seminary Council held on 16 March 1984.

With the Council failing to take responsibility for the worship crisis, it was left to the staff to implement the recommendations of the Spiritual Task Force. They did so in January 1984 at a retreat led by Bishop Nuttall (the convenor of the Spiritual Task Force) at the Redacres Conference Centre, in Merrivale. It is no “exaggeration to say that all those who were present came out of the retreat happy and optimistic”, a staff member from St Peter’s College observed in a later report.⁶⁴ The participants agreed that the members of the ‘core

group' would meet once a term and that Themba Vundla, an Anglican lecturer, would be the convenor. They resolved to ask the Albert Luthuli College "to use a definite rite" when it was responsible for the Wednesday seminary Eucharist. They would have to choose between the CUR order of service or a denominational rite. The Monday afternoon Eucharist - known for being a cause of dissension - would no longer be a seminary liturgy. It would be celebrated at St Peter's College and the other two colleges would choose another time for their evening devotions. The participants at the retreat also agreed that the clause of the memorandum of agreement between each college and the seminary which assigned the ownership of the chapel to St Peter's College would remain unamended. Lastly, and most controversially, they decided that Graham Duncan would be asked to step down as convenor of the Worship Committee on the grounds that he "had been unable to attend the Retreat and might therefore have difficulty in implementing the letter and the spirit of the decisions taken and the direction given". The Methodist Lizo Jafta, who had been the convenor the year before, would continue as covenor for 1984.⁶⁵

The Anglican author of the report had good reason to feel happy. St Peter's College had won the battle for worship on every count with the tacit support of John Wesley College. The Albert Luthuli College had been called to order and the Spiritual Task Force's recommendation that the constitutional position of the chapel be reviewed had been shelved permanently. The only 'drawback' (as he euphemistically put it) was that, with the exception of a new staff member, the Albert Luthuli College had not participated at the retreat. Duncan was attending a Clinical Pastoral Education workshop in Cape Town⁶⁶ and the principal of the college, André Kaltenrieder, was away for some reason. Meant to promote a spirit of reconciliation, the Redacres retreat ended up making unilateral decisions which caused more problems than they resolved.

The staff from Albert Luthuli College, Graham Duncan in particular reacted with outrage to the news of the latter's demotion. They accused the participants at the retreat of having met 'to destroy one staff member'. "No amount of explanation could convince them", the

Anglican lecturer commented, “that the decision had been taken in good spirit with the interests of the Seminary at heart”.⁶⁷

On tendering his resignation at the following meeting of the Academic Board on 9 February 1984, Duncan was told that he “was only to have been asked to step down if he felt he would have trouble in putting the [retreat’s] suggestions into practice”. But the harm was done: He confirmed his intention to resign, adding that “he had been informed that the Rt Rev M Nuttall had suggested he be asked to resign as many of the issues raised were ones he could not agree with”. The student representatives joined the fray, asking why they had not been consulted.⁶⁸

The seminary was now plunged into an open crisis. Speaking on behalf of the Albert Luthuli College, Kaltenrieder informed the Seminary Council a month later of his “grave distress [at] the divisions of the Theological Seminary in matters relating to worship”.⁶⁹ A report, written a few months later, confirmed the gravity of the situation:

The Seminary Worship Committee, after a year of grave disease, is now de facto defunct. It has not yet met in 1984 for the conduct of regular business.⁷⁰

8 THE STUDENT BODY AT WAR

“When the staff sneeze, the students catch a cold,” went the saying at Fedsem.⁷¹ The inter-denominational tensions affected the student body in no smaller measure than the staff. On hearing that Duncan had been asked to resign as the convenor of the Worship Committee, the students went on a worship boycott for a week. Subsequently, a major crisis struck the Student Representative Council (SRC), and led to its virtual paralysis.

According to David Booyesen, an ordinand from Albert Luthuli College and former chairman of the SRC, the Anglican students’ sense of superiority was the root of the problem:

Inevitably, the 'worship' situation makes for a lot of strained relations. Again, even here it is a case of St Peter's versus the rest of us. This comes out not only during worship (with their ridiculing of our Holly Communions [sic]) but in meetings and in classes as well. We suspect (in fact with some practical evidences) that this has [a]ffected staff-student relations along the same College lines.⁷²

Matters came to a head with the acceptance of a vote of no confidence in the SRC chairman at a meeting of the student body held on 21 February 1984. The atmosphere had been tense for some time. In 1983, during David Booyesen's tenure of office as SRC chairman, the Albert Luthuli College students had expressed their displeasure at "St Peter's aggression and their tendency to want to disrupt meetings". On one occasion, Mlungisi Ntsele (an Anglican student) had 'physically assaulted' Tinyiko Maluleke (an ordinand from the Evangelical Presbyterian Church) "because of a disagreement they had during the meeting".⁷³ Yet, at the end of the same year, Ntsele had been elected SRC chairman, presumably on account of the fact that the Anglican students then constituted the biggest group in the seminary. Originally from the diocese of Cape Town, this controversial man was once described by the principal of his college as a conservative Anglo-Catholic who was 'out of step' with the spirit of ecumenism of his time.⁷⁴ During the summer holidays, the newly-elected SRC chairman appeared on a TV quizz show on television. This was in contravention of a resolution of the student body, voted for in February 1983, according to which no student was allowed to 'patronise' the national broadcasting corporation because it was seen as the mouthpiece of the apartheid regime. A similar resolution had been passed by the Academic Board in October 1982.⁷⁵ Ntsele presented his apologies to the student body on 14 February 1983 and it was accepted, but that did not prevent Mamabolo Raphesu (a student from Albert Luthuli College) from moving for a motion of no-confidence in the chairman which was carried by a large majority.⁷⁶ According to Booyesen, the students from St Peter's College were the first to express their 'anger' at Ntsele's appearance on television.⁷⁷

Appraised of the matter, the Academic Board unwittingly poured oil on the fire. They rejected the grounds for Ntsele's deposition⁷⁸ but, because they did not want to impose him on the students, asked St Peter's College to elect other representatives to the SRC - a procedure which they refused to follow,⁷⁹ causing disarray in the seminary.

At a subsequent meeting of the student body, on 22 May 1984, Cierigh Samaai (a student who spoke on behalf of St Peter's College) requested that the matter of the vote of no confidence be placed first on the agenda because of their desire to watch a Dallas movie on television before the end of the meeting. The other students rejected this request and when the issue came up for discussion later during the meeting, they passed a motion (by Tinyiko Maluleke) that they should not debate the matter of the vote of no confidence but rather wait for the outcome of the elections. This enraged Ntsele who stood up and addressed the house 'in a rude language'. Reminded of the rule of debate, he replied: "I don't care about the rule you are quoting. I am here to defend my integrity and nobody is here to tell me to stop." He then left the meeting, banging the door. Two other Anglican students, Steyn and Hanson, then attempted to pass a vote of no confidence in the entire SRC. Emotions were running high. According to Harris Majeke (the acting chairman of the SRC) they tried to assault him and the secretary physically, but were barred from doing so by a group of students from Albert Luthuli College.⁸⁰

The following day, the students from St Peter's did not attend the seminary Eucharist. Following a meeting with the staff, which lasted until four o'clock in the morning, they withdrew their threat to withdraw from all seminary activities but maintained their intention to suspend their participation in the SRC until a new constitution of the student body was adopted.⁸¹ The SRC was only integrated two months later.

9 TOWARDS A COMPROMISE

Meanwhile, the battle for the use of the chapel continued. On 24 July 1984, Albert Luthuli College gave notice of their intention to move the following motion at the next meeting of the Academic Board:

That, in view of the fact that the Chapel has been built for the use of the entire Seminary, we propose:

- a) that it be made available to Albert Luthuli College, John Wesley College and St Peter's College on an equal basis and that a roster be drawn up for its use on that basis including Monday and Friday evenings;
- b) that the Chaplains of each college have access and keys to the Chapel and Vestry,
- c) that the storage space in the Vestry be made available to each College for vestments, linen and vessels;
- d) that it be acknowledged that each College has responsibility for the cleaning of the building;
- e) that all ornamentation which cannot be accepted by all three Colleges be removable for ecumenical or denominational occasions.

Predictably, this announcement provoked consternation at St Peter's College. They needed advice. On 30 July, Vic Mkhize (the principal of the college) sent a copy of the motion to Siggibo Dwane (who now was a bishop of the Order of Ethiopia and was sending ordinands to the seminary) with a request for information:

Apart from the fact that it would be hard for us at St Peter's to accept some of these proposals, we feel that the motion is provocative. If my memory serves me well, you argued, at some occasion, that the Chapel had not been built for use by the entire Seminary. Early this year we, at a Seminary retreat⁸², discussed the position of the Chapel. It became clear to me that there were conditions attached to its use. But in the absence of people like you the others could and did dispute the existence of such conditions. Please enlighten us, any information in this regard will be appreciated.⁸³

Dwane responded immediately. Ten days later, Mkhize confirmed that he had found the document mentioned in his letter, namely

Crispin Harrison's "Plans for St Peter's College within a Federal Structure" of March 1976.⁸⁴

It was not until the 8th of November that the Albert Luthuli College's motion was discussed at a meeting of the Academic Board which lasted for no less than six hours. The chapel issue was the first item on the agenda. Simon Gqubule, the president of the seminary, chaired the meeting. All 14 members of staff attended.

Mkhize informed the meeting that the motion was unacceptable to St Peter's College "as it was their understanding that the chapel belonged to the college". Quoting from Harrison's text, he declared that the chapel was an important focus of training within the Anglican tradition and that historically it had been regarded as St Peter's College's property.

Anxious to break the deadlock, Gqubule appealed to St Peter's College to accept the principle that the chapel was part of the seminary and that all members of the community could use it. Mkhize gave an ambiguous response. He replied that although the staff of St Peter's College had not thought of the chapel as their exclusive property, many of their students did.

It soon appeared that the only way to reach a consensus was to take the motion clause by clause. The Anglican lecturers agreed to this after having been assured that the motion was not 'an attempt to oust [them] from the seminary'. However, slow, this method turned out to be the right one. Under Gqubule's guidance, the Academic Board metamorphosed into a church synod, voting (one by one) for the amendments proposed by members of the assembly in a purely democratic fashion.

The authors of the motion wanted the chapel to be made available to all three colleges on an equal basis 'including Monday and Friday evenings' - since the early 1980s these were the most disputed times in the week. In a spirit of conciliation, this phrase was removed from the clause and it was passed. Only two staff members - presumably from St Peter's College - voted against it and three staff members abstained. The clause granting the chaplains of the three Colleges

access to the chapel and the vestry was also passed, but only after a phrase stipulating that this access was “subject to Clause 4 of the Memorandum of Agreement between the colleges and the Seminary” had been added. Proposed by Brian Banwell (a Methodist lecturer) and seconded by Vic Mkhize (the Anglican principal) this amendment had the effect of confirming St Peter’s College’s ownership of the chapel; while authorising the other two colleges to make use of it without restriction. Nobody voted against the text and only two members abstained. The last stumbling block was the clause requesting that all ornamentation deemed unacceptable by any of the colleges be removed for ecumenical or denominational occasions. At stake were the altar covers, candles and other ornaments that were dear to the Anglicans but alien to the Reformed tradition. To ease matters, the Presbyterians proposed an amendment stipulating “that the responsibility for replacing any items be on the shoulders of the remover and that this should be done immediately after the service concerned and that the Principals Committee agree upon what is removable”. This time, four members voted against the clause and two abstained, although it was accepted by a majority.⁸⁵

10 A NEW ATMOSPHERE

On 7 January 1985 Frederic Amore (the Anglican church’s provincial executive officer) was still referring, in a letter to Joe Wing, to the “sad and difficult state of affairs at the Federal Seminary” which had occupied the attention of the bishops during their recent synod.⁸⁶ And on 21 February, a high-powered commission of enquiry, made up of the chairman and the sub-chairman of the Seminary Council and a representative of all the constituent churches in an executive position, met to investigate the ‘tension and disunity within the Seminary’.⁸⁷ The commission had been appointed in August 1984, at the height of the crisis, but it had taken six months to find the time to meet.

By then, however, the Academic Board had resolved the thorny problem of the chapel and the atmosphere had cooled down. The acrimony that had been characteristic of so many meetings in the past had disappeared. The students and staff interviewed by the

commission did not deny the existence of tensions (around worship in particular) but they minimised their importance, noting that they resulted from “human relationships more than denominational differences”. “Without exception”, the secretary of the commission commented, “every one was committed to a united community, though not necessarily a united seminary, where the relationships would be harmonious, mutually respectful and enriching”.⁸⁸

In March 1985, John Hanson (himself one of the students involved in the SRC dispute) reported at a meeting of the St Peter’s College Council that relationships had improved.⁸⁹ In his annual report for 1985 Khoza Mgojo, the new president of the seminary, made the same point: “1985 begun well as far as worship is concerned. Tri-college worship takes place on Monday morning, Tuesday evening and Wednesday morning and evening, and a number of special services, for example 16th June”.⁹⁰ The Albert Luthuli College was no less satisfied. Its principal noted in a report that the fracas resulting from the application of the Spiritual Task Force’s recommendations, “finally gave rise to a better understanding between colleges and a considerably more harmonious relationship in matters pertaining to worship.” He added that even though “some degree of friction’ was inevitable wherever three different traditions were brought together, the year 1985 has been marked by substantially better cooperation”.⁹¹

The seminary had good reasons, in fact, for forging a new bond of unity. In 1985 the popular rebellion against the apartheid government rose to unprecedented heights, prompting the first state of emergency and increased repression. In August, Fedsem fell victim to this new assault of violence: A group of Inkatha vigilantes, probably under instruction from the Special Branch, tried to force the seminary out of its premises. If they had not won an interim interdict, they would have been expelled for a second time.⁹²

The political battles of the times found an echo in the programme of the seminary. Four of the five public holidays the Worship Committee recommended to the Academic Board in August 1986 implicitly referred to the struggle for liberation:

Public Holidays: it was agreed to recommend:

21 March	Heroes' Day Ascension Day
1 May	May Day
16 June	Youth Day
12 September	Steve Biko Day ⁹³

11 FEDSEM RE-EVALUATED

It took no less than five years for the three colleges to come to an agreement on worship. After 1985 there is no record of any major disagreement on the issue. This does not mean, of course, that all problems were solved. St Peter's College continued to feel ill at ease in the seminary, as is shown by the acceptance of a motion, on 27 March 1987, recommending to the synod of bishops that the college leave Fedsem "in view of recent experiences". The Anglican bishops decided to maintain their presence, at least for a year, but they gradually lost confidence in the seminary. Fewer bishops sent their ordinands to Fedsem and, in 1992, they pulled out completely.⁹⁴

It remains to be said that Fedsem successfully, albeit painfully, found a way of harmonising various liturgical traditions in the life of a training institution. This was no meagre achievement. Several former students and staff members, when interviewed on their experiences at Fedsem, highlighted the positive impact the cohabitation of conflicting worship styles had on their future ministerial practice. They may have fought bitter fights to protect their denominational identities, but they eventually learned from one another and, without realising it, bridged the gaps which separated their respective churches. Anglicans became sensitive to the Presbyterians' pastoral concerns and they, in turn, adopted a more Anglo-Catholic style, as James Ngomane (a Presbyterian minister) explained:

It was strengthening the ecumenical relationships. We were finding one another and understanding one another. There were no ways we were threatening each other. It

was a question of identity: to defy oneself and to defy the other. There is nothing wrong with that. At the end of the day, we became friends. When I left Fedsem, little did I realise that my liturgy was more Anglican. Their approach was more Presbyterian. We were looking for self-identity and fighting for our survival. We were finding the truth for the church. The students would take what is good from the Anglicans or Methodists. In no way it was threatening ecumenism. I always keep the 1995 liturgy from the Anglicans. It is the basic liturgy I use in my ministry. To me the Anglican discipline of the liturgy became an inspiration. I know many Anglicans who hated the idea of *madonana* when they were at Fedsem. They distanced themselves from it, but it inspired them.¹

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