

**Youth in the mission to overcome racism:
the formation and development of the
Christian Youth Movement in Southern Africa (1995-2005)**

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Abstract

The article traces the history of the Christian Youth Movement, and thus provides an approach for dealing with the current surge of contemporary racism (which has religious undertones). This approach to mission, namely the development of missional youth theologies, by youth themselves, is presented and illustrated through a thematic narrative of the formation and historical development of this particular youth movement. I develop this thematic narrative on the basis of the praxis cycle, doing a literature review and a documentary search of formation on the development of the youth movement. The findings show a movement, which, in a specific social context, was transformed through a postcolonial missional self-identity sustained by rituals, to articulate its unity through negotiated and newly forged symbols.

Introduction

“Young, gifted and bad”, is the gripping title of a *Sunday Times* article (Rademeyer 2007:6) on the conviction of four young men who brutally assaulted one man and, later that same night, killed another homeless man. This could have been a straightforward report on just another crime incident in South Africa, but it was not. The case of the so-called “Waterkloof four”,¹ four white² youths who brutally assaulted one black man and later the same

¹ The case of the ‘Waterkloof 4’ are merely used here as an example. Recently, there were other high profile incidences. In January 2008 a white teenager from the Northern Cape went on a shooting spree in the adjacent black community. There was also the case of the ‘Reitz 4’: in 2007, four students entered their home video in a competition designed to humiliate black workers. They were subsequently charged and convicted in 2010, naming, amongst other things, the church as failing them.

² Race categories, such as ‘white’, ‘coloured’, ‘Indian’ or ‘African’ became the defining nomenclature in the discourse of race identity, social location and mobility within the apartheid state in Southern Africa. Although the democratic transformation in South Africa

night killed another, ignited heated and emotional debates during the next four years, and raised some disturbing questions concerning the racial undertones that existed on both sides of the ensuing divide. What is of interest for this study is the fact that, according to the article, the psychological evaluations presented to the judge described the four young killers as, among other things, “religious”.

We find this confluence of racism and religious fervour in another contemporary South African story. A prominent Afrikaans newspaper reported in the middle of January 2007 on four first-year students of colour who were barred from entering a worship service in Potchefstroom (De Beer 2007:6), because they were not white. In a follow-up response, the church’s officials tried to remedy the situation by explaining that its worship services are open to the coloured community, but they are not allowed to become members of what is still an all-white church (Jackson 2007:25).

These stories are, however, not unique to South Africa, and we find the same challenge in other parts of the world. A few years ago (2005), the French government experienced a crisis when it had to deal with widespread rioting among youths in certain suburbs of Paris (Burleigh 2005:1). The unrest, which was concentrated in neighbourhoods with large African and Muslim populations, highlighted the difficulties many other European countries face regarding a form of racism and xenophobia that is based on religious concerns.³ Comments made in a popular reality television show in England by British actors towards a celebrity of Indian origin sparked animated protests in India and in various parts of Britain, including parliament itself (Baker 2007:121-122; Van Zyl 2007:122-123). It is however, surprising how little missiological research has been done on these new, unexpected surges of racism amongst younger people, and more specifically among people who claim to be religious.

Methodological considerations

This article focuses on one story of Christian mission amongst youth to consciously overcome the scourge of racism in religious communities. My reflection are primarily based on my own participation in youth and student work, and in pastoral work in South Africa, both during the struggle period and during the transition period to democracy. In the process of recollecting a

symbolised by the April 27, 1994 elections purported to inaugurate a new non-racial dispensation, we still use these ambiguous and ideologically loaded categories awkwardly as they pertain, directly, to the theme of the article, which aims to address this legacy. It also needs to be noted that this terminology is still used in official legislation, which aims at redressing the legacy of the racialisation of South African society.

³ Of course, one should also bear in mind the recent public debates in European countries such as France and Belgium on banning the wearing of the Muslim veil in public places.

history of the Christian Youth Movement in Southern Africa (CYM), I observed its practices and listened to various sources within the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa⁴ (URCSA). I have also referred to the minutes of various Synods as well as Synodical Commissions, and articles in this church's newspaper, *Die Ligdraer/Ligstraal*,⁵ and to ongoing conversations with the various young leaders who were involved in the CYM. Fragments of the broader South African story are well-documented and I will therefore not dwell on these. However, I do refer to this history, as far as it relates to the emergence of the CYM, as a post-colonial, but more importantly, a post-racial youth ministry.

This self-exposure and reflexivity is important because it already alludes to the understanding of Missiology that will guide this article, namely, the choice being made for a *contextual* Missiology. I selectively appropriate the methodology as proposed in the work *In word and deed: towards a practical theology of social transformation* (Cochrane, De Gruchy & Petersen 1991). Through this remixed⁶ South African model of doing theology, which is based on the pastoral circle of Holland and Henriot (1983), "pastoral praxis, hermeneutics and theological reflection are integrated into an ongoing process..." (Cochrane et al. 1990:13). The different phases in the cycle, i.e. consciously reflecting on our prior faith commitments and insertion, analysing the social context and the faith community, as well as relating these insights to our theological reflection, spiritual formation and action planning (Cochrane 1990:14-25), form the contours of my methodology. We cannot, however, confine the challenge and mission suggested here to a specific struggle for social transformation, nor keep them within the geographical boundaries of South Africa. As indicated in the European incidents, we suggest that this reflection can provide the fundamental frame of reference for the ongoing missional calling of religious communities in various contexts that have emerged out of racism or that have to deal with xenophobia.

We present this article then, in two broad sections: firstly, a thematic narrative of a youth movement in the mission to overcome racism, and secondly, an argument for this mission by the youth themselves, relating it to

⁴ The URCSA is the church which came into existence as a result of the unification process between the predominantly coloured Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) and the predominantly black Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (Nel 2005:4). The colonial type, racially defined Dutch Reformed church family is currently in a complex process of re-unification.

⁵ This newspaper, which was a merger between the *Ligdraer* (Bearer of light) within the former DRMC and the *Ligstraal* (Beam of light) of the former DRCA, has currently been replaced by URCSA News as the official newspaper of this church.

⁶ I use the term 'remixed' here as a metaphor linking up with the contextual understanding of theological method.

their own setting. The article closes with some conclusions relating to the current context.

Youth in mission

My personal faith commitments and participation (initially as a young person in mission and later as a researcher) are based on my membership of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC), a church that came about because of the missionary endeavours and policies of the white Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa (DRC). We were named and understood to be the mission church. However, while we remained the missionary “wing” in the mind of the DRC, our church consciously started to biblically engage with her own context in order to discern her missionary vocation (Robinson 1984:49-59). This church struggle shaped our faith commitments as being self-consciously black and Reformed (Boesak 1984), i.e. committed to a unique context, but also to reformation of this church and society in the light of God’s Word. The adoption, later, of the Confession of Belhar (1986) challenged the transformation of this church’s self-understanding towards a post-racial missionary identity. When one asks people involved with young people in our church why they do this work, their responses vary, depending on their contexts. However, all these responses would include the desire to share the Word of God or to help young people become followers of the Word, disciples or, more ambitiously, missionaries.

From these starting points, it may also be asked how these formulations were understood in the particular context of the young people themselves, during the period this youth movement was formed. This is the challenge of dealing with how the young people see themselves and their calling as they relate the gospel to their world redemptively. We will aim to trace this struggle for a new racial self-understanding, but also for social transformation, as we analyse the historical journey of the CYM, especially during the period between 1995 and 2005.

Youth in mission to overcome racism

A context of social transformation

The CYM was born at a time when Southern Africa and specifically South Africa, in dealing with the legacy of institutionalised racism, faced fundamental social transformation. For Maluleke (1997:339), the quests and struggles of people for political, economic, cultural, spiritual and ecclesial self-determination inform the understanding of this social transformation. Social transformation signifies a fundamental change in terms of the nature of the relations within institutions in society. It is not simply about personal

change; this significant fundamental change touches on institutions, strategic norms and values and can influence groups, organisations, communities and, indeed, whole societies (Joubert 1973:178).

In South Africa, it was the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and, later, the policy of Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR), the functioning of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and African Renaissance, which provided the political as well as economic framework within which social transformation occurred.

On a broader scale, numerous economic, technological and social factors (Castells 1996:83) influence the current state of a nation's political affairs. A critical factor is the manner in which ethnic identifications, economic globalisation and information and communication technologies collude into the creation of what can be described as a new "world order", which Castells calls "the network society" (1996). The current expressions of economic globalisation, but also identity-based, social movements hence provide the framework within which the continent Africa and Southern Africa are transforming. This rise of social movements struggling against new forms of injustice and oppression, within this new world order, are significant to our understanding of the history of South Africa's recent social transformation.

South Africa coming to terms with a racist history

The critical question in the South African context, which concerns this study, is how South Africans came to terms with the racist past in order to forge a new national identity and accommodate various identities (Omar, in Botman & Petersen 1996:24-26). There are at least two significant trajectories addressing this imperative, namely, the adoption of the Constitution and the participation in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Starting with the negotiations between the various political parties on a new dispensation and the democratic elections in 1994, the adoption of the Constitution in May 1996 with the inauguration of the Constitutional Court, set South Africa on a new path of governance. Based on these institutions, the South African state developed with a focus of building a strong human rights culture in order to address the injustices of the past. This meant that many public policy issues had to be debated and formulated anew, in the light of this new constitutional reality.

The South African government also aimed at dealing with the challenge of nation-building, race relations and reconciliation through, among other things, the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act (Act No. 34 of 1995) in July 1995, which prescribed the establishment, work and

scope of the well-known Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).⁷ The TRC did its work alongside the development of new national symbols and various other laws aimed at redress. This need for a truth and reconciliation process was critical in ensuring a peaceful, democratic social transformation. Indeed, at the heart of this process was the question in the Festschrift for Beyers Naudé: “How can South Africans, divided by generations of colonial and apartheid rule, live together in unity?” (1995:11). The pursuit of national unity, the wellbeing of all South African citizens and peace required the twin challenge of reconciliation between the people of South Africa and the reconstruction of society (Cochrane, De Gruchy & Martin 1999:1). This is the historical framework within which we place the formation and development of the CYM, as youth with a mission to overcome racism.

The formation and development of CYM within this context

Historically, the CYM was established at a founding youth congress in 1995 and these youth congresses, held every four years, shaped the movement. The significance and role of these congresses are critical in understanding the story of the CYM. These mass gatherings of young people, officially delegated by local branches, as well as church council members and ministers, are characterised by concentrated times of worship, small-group biblical reflection, contextual analysis and debate. It is at these times that the young people reflect on what it means to be Christian and young in this church and in South African society. They seem to regard the ritual and domain of transforming themselves, their movement, their church and their world in terms of their reading of the gospel. It is in these rituals that key shifts occurred, and we will follow this history from the perspective of her motivations and self-understanding, the key themes that emerged out of this story and, lastly, the symbolism at the heart of this movement of young people.

The motivations and self-understanding expressed in youth congresses that influenced the formation and development of the CYM

The CYM came about as a result of the merger between the youth ministries of predominantly “African” Dutch Reformed Church in Africa, called

⁷ The Act, in terms of which this Commission did its work, aimed at investigating the nature, causes and extent of gross violations of human rights. These violations were placed between the dates 1 March 1960 and April 1994. Public space was created for victims to speak out about the violations that they had suffered. The Act further provided for the granting of amnesty to the perpetrators on condition that they had to tell the truth, thus facilitating full disclosure of all the facts. The Rehabilitation and Reparations Committee could make recommendations to parliament about the appropriate measures required to deal victims’ needs.

“Mokgatlo wa Bodumedi ba Bokreste”⁸ (MBB), and the coloured Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC), the “Christelike Jeugvereniging”⁹ (CJV). The self-image, as well as the structures and practices of these churches, and therefore the MBB and the CJV, were initially steeped in the imagery of the white Dutch Reformed Church’s official collusion with the apartheid. Racial identities, although contested,¹⁰ were internalised, in terms of the racial hierarchy of the time. Erasmus (2001:19-20) argues convincingly that coloured identities, forged within the “racialised relations of power and privilege” are not simplistically to be wished away in the context of “rainbow nationalism”. It emerged within the context of white domination and critically its own,

... complicity with the racist discourses through its creation of an inferior black African Other ... and the exclusion and subordination of black Africans. This discourse of racial hierarchy and its association of blackness with inferiority is mobilised by coloureds against coloureds as much as against black Africans (Erasmus 2001:24).

Although Adhikari (2004) argues that what he calls “coloured racial hostility towards Africans”, is essentially “defensive in nature”, the challenge remains of how to overcome this overt racialisation which deeply regulated the social interaction of Christians during the apartheid era. The decisions as recorded by the youth congresses (1985-1993) of the Christelike Jeugvereniging (CJV) of the former DRMC indicates that serious attempts were made to understand and contextualise the gospel in terms of black youth resistance and working class cultures and struggles of the day. However, the resurgence of re-imagined coloured identities in the 1990s remained a critical issue. Adhikari (2004:173) points out that, since the 1994 elections, a “stereotype Coloured people as particularly prone to racist behaviour has emerged”. This called for an engagement with the notion of non-racism towards the development of new, non-racial institutions, understood as a key element of Christian witness during that time. One of the key events, flowing out of this engagement, which gave impetus to the merger between these African and coloured youth

⁸ Translated from the Setswana as Association for Christ’s (or Christian) Youth.

⁹ Translated from Afrikaans as Christian Youth Association.

¹⁰ It was the Black Conscious Movement in particular, in the 1970s, that promoted blackness as an inclusive, positive political identity (Erasmus 2001:18-19) of the oppressed collectively, rejecting notions of ‘Coloured’, ‘Indian’, ‘Bantu’ as apartheid constructions. Erasmus refers to Neville Alexander’s argument that coloured identity was “white imposed, reactionary and indicative of new forms of racism; an apartheid relic best left behind us in the post-apartheid era” (:20).

ministries, I believe, is the national youth congress of the CJV from 26 June to 2 July 1993 in Pretoria.

Organised by young people themselves, young members from the former DRMC invited a small delegation from the former DRCA to discuss unity. At the congress, they participated with ministers from the DRMC and DRCA in joint worship, debates, Bible study and planning for future youth ministry in a unifying church. Well-known leaders from the two different churches, such as Rev Beyers Naudé and Rev Nico Botha, who were active in the struggle against racism, played strategic roles in this congress. They participated, guided and stimulated the deliberations, and also the worship of young people, in the context of overcoming the legacy of racism through social transformation. This interaction led to the youth congress' unanimous decision, which expressed a commitment to a two-phase unification process; first the unification of the DRMC and DRCA and, secondly, unification between the envisioned URCSA with the rest of the Dutch Reformed Church. Importantly, this congress conceptualised the emerging self-understanding by stating, "It is the conviction of the congress that unification of the DR churches will be a mighty witness in a divided country" (CJV Minutes 1993). Rev Nico Koopman, the then student chaplain of the University of the Western Cape, reflects later in *Die Ligstraal/Ligdraer* (Aug 1993:10) on the historical significance of this self-understanding, by writing:

For various reasons this conference gave me hope for the future: our youth is blessed with wonderful skills, which are demonstrated in their ability to arrange a national event of this magnitude so effectively. Their discipline, loyalty to the church and love for Jesus Christ, struck me. The theme and contents of the conference reflects the spiritual growth of our youth, but it also indicates that our youth is grappling with the most important issues of the day. And very importantly, they are not discouraged, they are hopeful about the dawning of a new unifying church and a unified South Africa. May the young members of the church encourage all of us.

On recommendation from the 1993 youth congress, the founding General Synod of the new URCSA in April 1994 then mandated the relevant commission to form one unified youth movement, which was organised through the executives of the various youth ministries of the two churches. The representatives of this Interim Committee met regularly after the Synod (their first meeting was in April), during which times they would share stories and dreams, while at the same time considering transitional constitutions in the light of the guidelines accepted by the General Synod and the existing constitutions of the various associations. Drafts of an interim constitution were then

sent to the various congregations, as well as to the young people in branches, presbyteries and regions, for the purpose of discussion and input. The responses and ideas from the young people were collated into discussion documents to be put before the founding congress for consideration. These processes are important, because they illustrate the role of the agency of young people as it culminated in the founding congress.

The founding congress met from 8-12 July 1995 at the University of the then Orange Free State campus, to form the CYM. Two hundred and ninety branches, fifty-nine church councils and twelve regional representatives constituted this historic first congress. At this founding congress, we also find prominent this conscious self-understanding, with the opening speaker Rev Leonardo Appies setting the tone. Appies (Minutes of CYM 1995) again referred to the particular contextual challenges and reminded congress by stating:

The social transformation in South Africa presents a new kairos in which the church has not chosen to become what it is becoming ... God made “good news” in South Africa and it is focussed at the masses of the poor and oppressed of this country. The church has to come to terms with this new thing, which God is creating amongst us. However, the church can only fulfil its mission having gone through transformation itself: this is a crucial issue for all South African Churches and this church (URCSA) is looked upon by many as the promise of reconciliation, unity and liberation/justice.

The spirituality of the congress, which expressed itself in worship through the singing and learning of popular and rhythmic songs such as “Until I reach my goal” and “Modimo re Boka wena” (God we praise you, Creator of everything) expressed and celebrated this unique self-understanding. The congress spoke of being open to God’s calling, the transformation of the church, and also called on the movement to transform itself in order to reflect this calling. Through small-group Bible studies led by the Rev Morris Makgale, young people from various racial backgrounds forged a safe space in which they could share their stories, fears, hopes and dreams. Trust started to develop. Young people also started to work and plan together with the aim of concretising their missional challenge. This was worship as well as democratic engagement and difficult negotiations to find a new identity. This meant the development of new uniting, symbols expressed through emblems and pins, forms of clothing; it also involved building new fellowship and new friendships. These practices indicate young people’s self-consciously search to work out their missional calling in a time of fundamental social transformation, and attempting to overcome the deep divisions of the past. The

centrality of intergenerational dialogue with church elders and ministers, in the role of listeners, needs to be noted. The congress also decided that new CYM regional executives be formed, though regional congresses, new presbytery structures, and new local branches, which were to include the different race groups, generations and various constituting movements.

The new executive, elected at the founding congress, then met in Stellenbosch to assess these mandates and to provide strategic leadership in building a uniting movement. This phase is therefore characterised, internally, by the hard, frustrating, but also creative work needed to organise the founding of regional congresses through democratic and inclusive processes, each bringing together a unique history, local context and culture. Young leaders, as well as ministers, also played key roles in these regional processes. In a sense, this period resembles the reconstruction and development programme and truth and reconciliation phase of the CYM, putting in place a process of transforming colonial, racially conditioned faith communities and developing itself and developing new skills in the creation of a unifying post-racial church.

At the Durban congress, four years later in 1999, the CYM were charged again by Rev TE Ngema (Minutes of CYM 1999) to rejoice in hope, celebrating what has been achieved so far, and explore the new millennium possibilities of developing a common language in church and society. In his opening address, the outgoing chairperson, Chris Kilowan, reflected on whether the CYM had made a successful break with the past and whether the promises and commitments at Bloemfontein still held. He urged delegates to remain focussed on the reasons for them being there and on their calling and responsibility.

The new executive again focussed on consolidating unity, but more importantly by continuing the process of strategic transformation within the CYM. The reality of financial constraints on members who struggled with the reality of rising unemployment, restructuring and retrenchment linked to the broader shift in the economic policies as indicated earlier, as did rising education costs, which influenced the economy of regional structures which, in turn, were based on the system of levies from individuals and local branches. New challenges emerged, which included the development of the acceptance of a new predominantly African movement within the Regional Synod of Southern Transvaal in 1999, which claimed ownership of the history of the youth ministry in the former DRCA, the MBB. The leadership within this movement felt that the new CYM did not adequately take into account and preserve the heritage of the separate racial movements. This challenge highlights the vulnerability and indeed complexity of this mission, but also the level of internalised oppression, another symptom of modern racism (Van Schalkwyk 2006:57).

When the General Congress was organised for July 2003, the members were ready to engage in the strategic processes that emanated from the developments described above. This congress was the biggest so far in terms of numbers and representation and included, for the first time, the fully constituted Namibia region. At this congress, the outgoing chairperson, Rev Reggie Nel, focussed on the fact that the congress's objective was now the ongoing reframing of youth in mission and being church in the light of the challenges of Southern Africa. It was argued that the CYM needed to allow the Word to reflect on their lives and to start dreaming again, imagining again and taking on their task, a task which had global implications. It is this task or calling that we can visibly observe in the key themes of this movement.

Key themes identified by the young people themselves

The themes for the various congresses tell the story of this emerging self-understanding from a different angle. While they articulate a new emerging identity, they also express the hope for overcoming racism. Indeed, CYM was born under the optimistic theme "A uniting youth in a uniting church for a uniting society". This theme spoke clearly of the self-understanding which guided this movement, in addressing the challenge of disunity as a result of the factors as highlighted, but also because of the congress's new self-understanding. Within the various regional structures that were established in the period 1995 to 1999, we see the various themes identified by young people, which also tells the story of their own journey.

In particular, the regional report of Southern Transvaal outlines a series of camps, conferences and discussions dealing with matters of inclusivity. The themes of these gatherings tell the story: that the youth conference in 1996 dealt with "Unity", that the focus of the Regional Congress in 1997 was "Reconciliation with Christ as a breakthrough". That conference 1998 dealt with "Onwards with the process of unity" and that the conference of November 1998 dealt with "Preparation for National Congress of 1999". Indeed, this challenge of the legacy of racism and dealing with it through the development of a new self-understanding was predominant in this phase of movement building. Reports from the new regional executives of Northern Transvaal, Free State/Lesotho, Cape/Namibia also reflected this struggle, which also translated into fierce and intense debates by young people, ministers and executives at these gatherings.

The 1999 Congress took place in Durban, with the aim of strengthening the KwaZulu-Natal Region who, as recently as December 1998, had been able to constitute the work, but also to reflect on the movement through the lenses of the theme, "Unity in Christ, unity in action". The congress noted the growing pains of the movement, in terms of the growing numbers, but more so the challenges of diversity and identity. At this congress young people

heard the stories, whilst trying stand in solidarity with those regions and members especially in the Free State and Phororo, where members and congregations from the former DRCA broke away from broader URCSA to reconstitute as the DRCA. In this congress (i.e. 1999), there were intense and serious debates on the issues of an appropriate uniform, language and the new mode of deliberating through small workgroups with facilitators. The leadership of Chris Kilowan and Rev Morris Makgale in these situations is also highlighted, and helped to shape the adoption of new post-racial symbols.

Key symbols that emerged and were developed

During the course of the journey towards unity, a journey aimed at overcoming the legacy of racism, key symbols were developed which articulated the movement's emerging, post-racial self-understanding. I will merely refer to these as these meanings have already been discussed in earlier sections of this article.

As already indicated, from the onset the movement negotiated, struggled and forged a unified *constitution*. This document developed out of the guiding principles laid down by the General Synod, and specifically out of the inclusive reflections by the young people, which were developed from the existing constitutions of both the MBB and CJV. The birth and nurture of this constitution, as a uniting symbol throughout the work of the CYM in local churches, on camps, at services, in communities, express the movement's new, post-racial self-understanding. It was now the constitution that guided the social interaction of young people within this church. This unique source and embodiment of identity, as we have seen, is not, however, static, but evolved as the movement developed. At every congress, young people vigorously debate and renegotiate the constitution, in the light of the Bible, their own experiences and the impact of both on their own action.

The CYM also developed a logo, which is worn on all official garments, at meetings, on pins, T-shirts and tracksuits. The logo consists of two figures, one darker than the other, reaching towards each other over a cross, standing on an open book (which symbolises the Bible). From this picture shines a light which circles out to the periphery, symbolising the whole world. This logo appears on most of the documentation, clothing, banners and websites, indicating where the movement is coming from, but also the key elements that unite it. The logo also brings together various colours, namely brown, maroon, black and gold, and forms part of a new CYM culture (along with certain items of clothing).

Indeed, the issue of uniform or clothing has been debated intensely at the various congresses. The members from the CJV, holding onto a particular self-understanding, argued for informality, and proposed that the CJV adopt

the wearing of an informal tracksuit (or something similar). The members of the MBB, with a self-understanding forged in a particular context, argued for a formal uniform, with men wearing suits and ties and with women wearing dresses and formal headgear, all in black and white. These long debates forced some deep story-telling and remembering, as well as honest debates that eventually led to a compromise. It was decided to appreciate the value of each other's histories, and to agree on both (i.e. an official CYM t-shirt and tracksuit, but also a formal CYM uniform, neither of which were compulsory for those uncomfortable with uniforms). In this respect, the process opened up spaces for young people from different racial backgrounds to engage their histories and their key symbols. As a result, the CYM developed new, inclusive symbols but, more importantly, competencies in dealing with the legacy of the past.

A reflection and an argument for a mission to overcome racism

As a result of the political policies mentioned in section 4, it was hoped that all traces of racism would be erased and that a new era of non-racialism and peace would dawn in South Africa. In other countries, which did not go through the same brutal institutionalised system of racial oppression, it was also assumed that racism would be a non-issue in South Africa. The examples cited in the opening section, however, suggest otherwise. These incidents in themselves suggest that we need to delve deeper.

Batts (as cited in Van Schalkwyk 2006:57-68) argues that what we are dealing with today is more insidious, and that is what she calls the phenomenon of "modern racism". Modern racism is defined by Van Schalkwyk (2006:57) as

... the expression in terms of abstract ideological symbols and symbolic behaviours of the feeling that black people¹¹ are violating cherished values and making illegitimate demands for changes in the racial status quo or the giving of non-race related reasons for the behaviours that continue to exclude and discriminate against black people.

These subtle and covertly "colour-blind" patterns of behaviour, at their core, aim to maintain existing oppressive power relations and vested economic interests. It was the theologians who espoused Black Theology who pointed out this structural dimension of racism in the first place. Indeed, it was the literature of, among others, Barney Pityana, Manas Buthelezi, Frank Chikane,

¹¹ Although the reference here is to black people specifically, I would argue that racism is not only affecting black people negatively.

Bonganjalo Goba, Takatso Mofokeng and Tinyiko Maluleke (Boesak 1981; Kritzinger 1988) who opened the church's eyes to the systemic nature of racism. In writing about the challenge of South African Black Theology to mission, Kritzinger (1988:114) explains, "Black Theology does not see racism in isolation from the other dimensions of oppression". Indeed, Kritzinger (1988:121-122) argues that black theologians trace the origin of racism to the economic greed of the western colonists which, later on in its development, started to acquire a life of its own, when the perpetrators started to believe their own ideology. This argument fits in well with the previous explanation of modern racism, where the core structures of oppression are left intact, only to be translated in the context of a set of new historical factors. Individual and intrapersonal dispositions are no longer articulate through crude language, but its racist institutions continue to reproduce and entrench the ideology and the notion of white supremacy. In this context, the challenge clearly seems to be the transformation of systems and institutions, in particular a church, which perpetuates these structures, within itself and in its context. We therefore need to view the formation and development of the CYM in the light of this analysis and definition of racism. I conclude then with the following critical key shifts, as illustrated above.

From solitary missionary to missional church

Being inserted in a particular mission church, our journey in the struggle to overcome racism, challenged and broadened the dominant image of the solitary missionary who comes to enlighten the heathen. Initially, we struggled to see ourselves in the same light as the image of the white missionary, who came from a white world to convert us. Bevans (1994:158-159) argues convincingly that the quest for being involved in mission has always been influenced by missionary "images", i.e. a particular self-understanding, which he explains as "concentrated theologies of mission, ways of understanding the church, ministry, the significance of Jesus Christ ...". He states, "Today, if the missionary activity of the church and the church's mission to the ends of the earth are still valid, missionaries need to go about mission work differently, and they have to understand themselves and be understood by others through different images" (Bevans 1994:159).

One of the most significant different images of mission in recent times is the notion of the "missional church". Building on the work of Leslie Newbigin, Jürgen Moltmann and Karl Barth, Bosch (1991) points to an emerging convergence in understanding the intricate relationship between mission and church, which is currently expressed in the term "missional church" (Guder and Barret 1998; Nieder-Heitman 2002; Hendriks 2004). Here, the concept "missional" is to be understood as the adjective which qualifies that faith communities, by their very nature, are to be con-

ceptualised, structured and transformed by the fact that they exist by virtue of the triune God's mission towards, in and with the world. This term expands and deepens the understanding of concepts such as "witness" or "missionary", and builds on the rejection of these terms by various mission churches, including our own. It suggests, fundamentally, more than certain exotic actions by individual "lone rangers" or programmes in far-away lands and cultures. No longer do we simply envision solitary, lone individuals, missionaries or certain groups, commissions or agencies within the church, initiating and sustaining *their* mission. Instead, this shift points to a particular collective self-understanding or self-identity and the overall intention that runs through every aspect of the church's being. Kritzinger (1995:368) describes this integrating self-understanding or self-identity as "that dimension of its existence which is aimed at making a difference to the world, at influencing or changing society in accordance with its religious ideals". In this, the *transformation* (conversion) of the church, not of individuals in faraway lands, becomes critical. The journey of CYM illustrates this quest for a new self-understanding, i.e. the acquisition of new self-images. These new self-images were articulated through specific rituals, themes and symbols.

This is, however, not the only way in which we re-imagine youth in mission.

From mission projects in our youth ministry towards embodying missional youth theology

If we agree, then, that the church is a missional organism in her essence and therefore "either missionary or it is not church at all" (Nel 2002: 66), then the faith formation work with young people is essentially missional. I therefore share Burggraaf's view (1988:193-207), who makes a case for defining youth ministry as indeed "youth in mission". Neal explores this theme under the title of an article, *Youth workers as cross-cultural missionaries* (*Youth Worker* July/Aug 2001:40-43). By linking these themes using the cross-cultural missionary as a metaphor, Neal indeed points us in the right direction in terms of seeking insight from missiology to help those who work with youth. Missiology itself stands to gain insight from listening to and engaging in dialogue with young people and establishing how they and youth workers themselves engage in this quest. What are the perspectives from youth work which, according to this approach, need to be taken into account?

The theoretical framework of understanding youth as a social process or as a relational concept and not as a final product is critical. This re-imagining of *youth* (Wyn & White 1997) not only takes into account assumptions from developmental psychology concerning universal stages in development and identity formation, but also contends for a sociological

perspective. Wyn and White argue that we need to assess the impact of social transformations on our conceptualisation of youth. In this understanding, young people are not merely following universal patterns of development, but are themselves engaging critically with social processes in specific and varied ways. This explains the reality of the diversity of youth experiences and meanings, taking into account particular historical and cultural processes. Although young people share in the global and chronological conceptions of time and lifespan, which can be measured objectively, a sociological perspective suggests that “social and political processes provide the frame within which cultural meanings are developed. Both youth and childhood have had, and continue to have, different meanings depending on young people’s social, cultural and political circumstances” (Wyn & White 1997:10).

This perspective consequently takes seriously the agency of young people themselves in reflecting on, appropriating and articulating an understanding of the gospel in their own voices, thus forging a particular missional identity, expressed and embodied through the youth’s own missionary self-images. In other words, young people are no longer merely the objects or empty receivers of the well-meaning projects, “ministry” and “outreach” of adults, the church or experts, but have themselves become agents of their own contextual missional theologies, communicated via new images. In the dialogue with current theological discourses, this agency implies a search to discern and amplify the unfolding narratives of young people themselves, engaging in and constructing meaning in their contexts of transformation. Youth in mission becomes youth doing missional theology.

This type of missional theology is recognised by Bosch (1991:489-498) as one of the multi-varied expressions of what he then called an ‘emerging’ post-modern missionary paradigm. Bosch concurs with Schreiter (1996) that indeed mission as contextualisation involves the construction of a variety of local theologies, where communities wrestle with their contexts in the light of their religious ideals and values. Specific historical stances are therefore made in the context of oppression and power relations, as well as in the uncovering of stories emerging from struggle, be it blacks, women, the poor, etc. We have therefore taken into account the historical and contextual nature (Bosch 1991:353) emphasised in this approach, as well as the “experimental and contingent” (Bosch 1991:427) nature of these various theologies. Botha (2003:106) states, “I find myself speaking of mission and missiology more in metaphorical and narrative terms as contextualisation, rather than in terms of hard and fast definitions.”

I propose then that we discern these emerging youth theologies in dialogue with the youth themselves, as they negotiate and express them through their own metaphors, symbols, rituals, signs, and narratives. Indeed, as Schreiter (1996:31) argues, “we cannot assume written texts – with all they in turn assume about argumentation – as the sole form of communi-

cating cultural meaning, and therefore theology”. These unfolding narratives, expressed through the symbols, rituals and signs in tune with the cultural framework of these agents of transformation, the youth themselves, will have to be assessed, in terms of the context where we find the new confluence of race and religion.

Conclusion

We showed how CYM, in her new missional self-understanding, aimed to transform the self-understandings of young people and of youth ministries. This journey took seriously the agency of young people themselves, but also the critical accompaniment of adult leaders, of ministers doing theology with the young people. This journey established new rituals, where young people from various racial backgrounds regularly came together, worshipped, studied the Bible and planned for the establishment of new structures, but also the transformation of existing ones. This journey was regulated in the form of a constitution, articulated through various themes, and celebrated through new symbols and codes. Indeed, the image of religious young people does not have to be that of “young, gifted and bad”, but as Koopman (1993:10) suggested, of “hopeful”.

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