

THE SOCIAL ETHICS OF THE
BAPTIST UNION OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

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PREFACE

This interdisciplinary study of Baptist social ethics in South Africa reflects my scholarly interests in both Christian moral theology and ecclesiastical history. It also stems from my personal involvement in public issues on three continents since the mid-1960s. Like many other Christians of my generation, for much of my life I have consciously lived in a socially and politically turbulent age which has both challenged my faith and spurred me to seek to apply it more effectively to my human environment. While this is not an appropriate place for a detailed autobiographical statement, it seems relevant to mention that during the 1960s I participated in the civil rights movement in the United States of America. During the early years of the following decade, while a student at Harvard University and at two universities in the Federal Republic of Germany, I was active in the movement to end American military involvement in Viet Nam and elsewhere in south-east Asia, and, although not a strict pacifist, I successfully resisted conscription into the Armed Forces of the USA. At approximately the same time I participated in so-called "Christian-Marxist dialogue" groups in the German Democratic Republic and Czechoslovakia, owing less to personal ideological concerns than to my keen interest in the situation of the churches, particularly their relationship to governments and society in general, in communist countries. I was also active in church-related campaigns to oppose the arms race and ameliorate the "Cold War" which kept the nations of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Warsaw Pact on edge through a nuclear "balance of terror". Since 1979 I have spent from one to four months in South Africa nearly every year. My activities there have brought me into close proximity to many dimensions of religious life and interracial social intercourse in that deeply divided country. I have been a doctoral candidate at three of the country's universities and a guest lecturer at half a dozen others as well as at several theological colleges. I have also served as a consultant to a major American Christian magazine which has shown considerable interest in the social and ethical roles of the South African churches. These and other endeavours in South Africa, involving co-operation with a broad spectrum of the population, have inescapably brought me into close contact with

churchmen of many creeds, ethnic identities, political and ideological sympathies, and cultural backgrounds.

Given my personal background and the inability of most churches in South Africa to escape from the general morass of the country (notwithstanding the conscious attempt of many to flee it), it was inevitable that both my attention and interests would turn to Christian social ethics in South Africa, both past and present. Like many other foreign observers and participants, I found it captivating to witness revolutionary changes taking place in the country and to keep an ear to the ground for the prophetic voices which Christians in many quarters have long raised. In other places, of course, the silence of the churches has been equally deafening.

But why specifically a consideration of the Baptists in this context? There is no facile answer to that crucial question. Let me first emphasise that I have never been a member of a Baptist church, although I have long interacted with several of them in a personal Christian capacity and, on a professional level, I wrote scholarly articles about Baptist history, albeit European and North American, during the 1970s and 1980s. In South Africa intimate friendships and other close ties with members of Baptist congregations, both clergymen and lay people, as well as non-members who have worshipped regularly in them, date from the early 1980s and have long spanned interracial clefts. Interaction with this ever-widening circle of friends and acquaintances has allowed me to observe at close range the diverse Baptist scene, if indeed one can speak of such in a cluster of congregations and denominations so loosely associated as any kind of unified entity. It occurred to me nearly a decade ago that most of the scholarly literature pertaining to Christian social ethics in South Africa, such as John W. de Gruchy's commendable study of *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, has cast an interdenominational net but caught very few Baptist fish, probably owing greatly to the absence of the Baptist Union from the South African Council of Churches since 1976 and the fact that until very recently that denomination produced few well-educated theologians and astute social commentators. It seemed appropriate for someone with my concerns and in my detached but critically sympathetic position to seek to fill at least part of this *lacuna*. During the latter half of the 1980s I discussed the general matter with prominent

Baptist pastors, lecturers at two of the Baptist theological colleges in South Africa, and theologians representing a fairly wide variety of denominations. Most encouraged me to pursue it, and some openly shared my enthusiasm for the project.

Two incidents which took place in February 1990, long after I had initially undertaken research on the topic, further honed my interest in it. On the morning of 11 February, my beloved, partly Baptist host family in Pretoria took me, as they had done on many previous occasions since 1983, to worship in their white suburban church, which for a decade had unfortunately been much better known for internal dissent than for raising a prophetic voice about most of the public issues of distinctive relevance to South Africa. As usual, on that Sunday the daily bulletin informed visitors that "we have a modern outlook and are vitally concerned with the problems of our age". As usual, there was no mention of such questions that day; specifically, no-one made the slightest mention of the announced release of Nelson Mandela which was to take place a few hours later or of the attendant unbanning of the African National Congress and other forbidden political organisations. Perhaps I was not the only worshipper in that economical sanctuary that morning who wondered what the Afrikaans pastor and the members of his chiefly Anglophone flock believed was the relevance of their faith to the Copernican political and social changes pending in their country. That afternoon I had the privilege of being in Cape Town when Mandela was released from nearly three decades in captivity and gave his first public speech since being set free. Two weeks later, while chatting with a prominent retired church historian on the campus of an Anglophone university in another part of South Africa, I mentioned that I was deeply engaged in research on Baptist social ethics. "Social ethics?" he replied in amazement. "I didn't know they had any". The cynicism of this former official of the South African Council of Churches probably reflected the resentment which leaders of that organisation have voiced at the Baptist Union's withdrawal more than it did any serious research on the subject. Yet his attitude is one which I have found to be fairly widespread amongst non-Baptist Christians in South Africa, one which underscores the need for a close examination of the topic. Ironically enough, though for reasons which hopefully will become clear in the present study, even

some Baptists of various political persuasions agree at least in part that "Baptist social ethics" is a *contradictio in adjecto*. There is a tendency amongst some conservatives either to deny or to remain unconscious of the inevitable ethical consequences of their faith. One consequence of this is that many are simply unaware of socially relevant thought and activity in their denomination. On the other hand, a severely critical attitude of the Baptist Union's ostensibly "apolitical" heritage and modern-day stance on public issues characterises a considerable number of members who are sympathetic to the liberal sector of South African politics.

The study which has emerged spans Christian ethics and ecclesiastical history in terms of both methodology and content. The overall framework is unabashedly historical, both because I tend to think partly in terms of chronological development and because comparisons of positions expressed on ethical issues across time illustrate vividly one of the themes of this study, namely that while South African Baptists have often postulated deontological Biblical ethics, changing social and other worldly conditions have strongly conditioned their interpretations and applications of both Old and New Testament prescriptions.

Within this framework, readers will also trace the historical contours of meta-ethical sophistication or, in countless instances, the absence thereof. This is particularly the case in the chapters covering the colonial period and the Union of South Africa until 1948. Often one searches in vain for even the most rudimentary Biblical or other theological justification for positions which even well-educated Baptists took on public issues. Attitudes, as opposed to nuanced theological lucubrations, characterised many of their contributions to debates. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that emotions and self-interest, rather than either the Bible or the brain, long provided much of the guidance for the energy which Baptists invested in public controversies. After about 1950, when the National Party began to implement its apartheid programme piecemeal, commentators within the Baptist Union tended to express more clearly, if often quite naively, the relationship between their faith and their ethics. This development has made its imprint on the present study, which necessarily reflects the chronolog-

ical imbalance in extant evidence. It should be borne in mind, however, that the South African Baptist Union does not have a deeply rooted academic tradition, and only in recent years has the number of Baptist theologians in the country with doctoral degrees exceeded a very tiny figure. Religious zeal, ethnic loyalties, and intensely held political and anthropological opinions have long been more apparent than keen theological acumen. Obviously, Baptists do not have a monopoly on this imbalance.

It will presumably not surprise any reader with even an elementary grounding in South African history and current events that Baptists, like many other Christians and non-Christians there, have long held a wide variety of strong opinions about issues central to the structure of their country and, in turn, of their place in society. Given the fact that I also have certain convictions about social reform in South Africa, it is inevitable that I will disagree earnestly with many of the people whose positions I am describing and evaluating. Instead of maintaining a pretense of total objectivity in this regard, it seems most honest and prudent to indicate explicitly that my own approach to Christian social ethics is, in brief, one involving a flexible deontological ethic which employs Biblical teachings as general principles rather than specific prescriptions immediately transferable and applicable to virtually any situation. Politically and socially I would be near the liberal end of the spectrum which has obtained among white South Africans in recent years. As a theologian and historian whom various circumstances have compelled to reside in several countries, I have little regard for exclusivist ethnic loyalties, racial preservation, conventional patriotism, or military intervention as agents or strategies of resolving political and social problems on either a domestic or international scale. Many of the Baptists whom I have interviewed or who have otherwise assisted me in my research, however, are of a different mind, as will be readily apparent in the last three chapters of this study. In places I criticise some of their positions and actions quite severely, although it should be stressed that in most cases I do so without any intention of impugning their integrity. With few exceptions the Baptists with whom I have interacted in doing research on the present topic have impressed me as sincere men and women of principle, morally not significantly inferior or superior to most other

people. Some, moreover, including a few whose earlier stances on public matters fare poorly in these pages, have undergone noteworthy transitions in their efforts to apply their faith to a rapidly **changing** South Africa. Others have stagnated or, in their own view, maintained political consistency from the era of full-scale apartheid under Verwoerd and Vorster, and now seem even more out of touch with the realities of their time than they were two or three decades ago.

A related but essentially different matter is my consideration in Chapter II of certain works by other theologians who have commented on Baptist social ethics. Having been educated in Scandinavian, German, and North American academic traditions which have stressed the necessity of not only expressing one's disagreement with the work of others, when such disagreement exists, but also the moral obligation to spell out in detail why one believes that one's own findings compel one to differ with previous interpretations, I have commented at considerable length on relevant previous literature. As a corollary to this, I have perceived it as one of my scholarly duties to indicate errors of fact and interpretation as well as flaws in conceptual frameworks which might mislead other readers. I realise fully that both in South Africa and elsewhere some scholars approve of this approach while others disdain it, and only after discussing the matter with and receiving the approval of the head of the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at the University of Natal have I decided to adhere to this tradition in the present study, in the expectation that readers will respect it, even when their own work comes under the loupe. I emphasise that I personally respect and share many of the ethical concerns of the people whose scholarly work I evaluate in exacting detail, and that I have been the grateful recipient of their cordial hospitality and willing assistance, which I have sought to reciprocate.

Obviously the present work cannot pretend to be the final word about Baptist social ethics in South Africa, a broad topic which could fill many volumes. Given the primitive stage of immediately relevant scholarship, it has seemed most prudent to limit the scope to a small number of matters, chiefly race relations and the debate over militarism and military conscription, while placing them into a broader historical context. It is my hope that this **study** will stimulate others who wish to pursue research which will further extend the perimeter of our

understanding of Baptist and other Christian social ethics in an ever-changing South Africa.

In conducting the research for and while writing this study in six countries on three continents, I have incurred a large and varied debt of gratitude. Approximately forty South African and Zimbabwean Baptists, most of whom are listed in the bibliography, willingly submitted to interviews of from one to five hours' duration. Nearly all answered my probing questions openly and cordially. Only three interviewees, one of whom had served as a propagandist for the South African government and another who was a retired military chaplain, were even partly evasive. Only one minister in the Baptist Union, the senior pastor of a prominent church in Pretoria, flatly refused to grant me an interview, while another deliberately gave me a distorted account of his educational background. Officials of the Baptist Union, most notably members of its Christian Citizenship Committee, offered enthusiastic moral support and made extensive archival materials available to me. The lecturing staffs of the Baptist theological colleges in Johannesburg and Athlone also expressed great interest in the project and steered me to valuable published and unpublished sources. Librarians at both of those institutions were unfailingly kind and helpful, as were their counterparts at the South African Library, the libraries of the University of Cape Town, the University of South Africa, the University of the Witwatersrand, the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg and Durban, Rhodes University, the State Library in Pretoria, the University of Uppsala, the University of Oslo, the University of Minnesota, Concordia College of Moorhead, Bethel College and Theological Seminary, and Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary, and the Natal Society, and the public libraries of Johannesburg, Cape Town, Pretoria, Durban, Detroit Lakes, Minneapolis, and Moorhead. Archivists at the provincial archival depots in Cape Town, Pretoria, and Pietermaritzburg assisted me in locating a variety of primary materials. Friends and acquaintances provided hospitality, insights, and other assistance in many forms during my many stays in Pretoria, Johannesburg, Cape Town, Athlone, Milnerton, Durban, Pietermaritzburg, Uppsala, Knivsta, Oslo, Saint Paul, Mount Prospect, Birmingham, Munich, and other cities. I thank them all warmly, not only for putting me up, but also for putting up with me during my search for more truth. My

cordial promoter at the University of Natal, Professor R.B. Nicolson, deserves a special word of thanks for promptly reading **the chapters** of this thesis, making numerous suggestions for their **improvement**, and giving me appropriate encouragement. Finally, I wish to express my gratitude to his predecessor as head of the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at that university, Professor Martin Prozesky, for both encouraging me to apply for doctoral candidature there and approving my proposed thesis topic.

In accordance with the requirements of the University of Natal, I declare that this thesis is my own original work.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Scope of the Present Study

The topic of this thesis is broadly defined as the social ethics of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa in historical context. This is a subject which until very recently has received very little scholarly attention, a condition which reflects the fact that prior to the 1980s there was scant genuinely intellectual activity in that denomination. True, the Baptist Union has had at least one theological college since the early 1950s, and owing to the almost single-handed efforts of Dr Sydney Hudson-Reed we have at our disposal the beginnings of a documented history of the denomination, albeit one which has been criticised as being almost exclusively a treatment of white, Anglophone Baptists and more representative of conventional denominational chronicling than modern historical scholarship. Despite these commendable efforts, however, most of the intellectual endeavour in the Baptist Union has been of recent date.

Related to this, the previous scholarly literature pertaining to South African Baptist social ethics is both quantitatively and qualitatively weak, consisting thus far of little more a small handful of articles. In Chapter II, which is a critique of it, I shall describe it in considerable detail and criticise certain articles which raise important concerns but scarcely begin to answer them in a satisfactory, scholarly fashion appropriate to the journals in which those pieces have been published. The field, it seems, is not purely virginal, but it nevertheless remains largely unploughed. The primary intention of the present study is to cut some significant furrows into it. Whether it will ever yield a bumper crop is a question which might not be answered for decades. It is encouraging, however, that other theologians have begun to work in this plot, each bringing to it unique implements with which to toil, notions of how the task should be done, and visions of where the fence around it lies.

I shall not attempt to accomplish the impossible by writing an all-inclusive study of the topic, one which would encompass every social

issue which South African Baptists have dealt either individually or as a denomination. Instead, it has seemed prudent to focus primarily on two major ethical problems, namely that of oppressive race relations, which has permeated many other social and political issues in South Africa since the nineteenth century, and conscientious objection to military conscription, because this matter has obvious parallels with Christian ethics in many other countries and is readily linked to the larger question of racial subjugation. Generally speaking, South African Baptists have paid more attention to personal than social ethics. To place their treatment of the latter into a meaningful perspective, therefore, I have dealt in a secondary way with an issue which spans the two, namely Baptists' responses to the proliferation of alcoholic beverages in South Africa and their attempts to influence the governments of that country to restrict the flow, both in general and especially to the indigenous segments of the national population.

For several reasons this study deals mainly with Anglophone white Baptists. First, it is beyond dispute that such people have controlled most of the affairs of the Baptist Union from its inception. By controlling most of the skeletal denominational bureaucracy, the major official periodicals, the faculties of the theological colleges, and the majority of the pulpits, they have been in a position to determine not only which questions should be given serious consideration but also the procedural and theological grounds on which they would be discussed. They have *inter alia* held most of the seats on the Christian Citizenship Committee, set the agenda for the discussion of social ethics at the annual assemblies, and established the curricula at the institutions at which Baptists have been educated for the ministry. Until most of them left to form a separate denomination in the 1980s, there were a considerable number of indigenous Africans in the Baptist Union, most of them in essentially or exclusively black churches, and in the vicinity of Cape Town there have been numerous Coloured Baptist congregations since the 1970s. For that matter, there have been Indian Baptist churches in Natal since early in the twentieth century. These groups, however, have not effectively challenged the firm grasp which white men have held on the affairs of the Baptist Union. Nevertheless, I shall pay some attention to black Baptists and a bit to Coloured Baptists in the penultimate chapter dealing with the

period after about 1980, when these people began to become both more numerous and more outspoken in the Baptist Union and started to call for more attention to be paid to social ethics. In a few instances the viewpoints of Afrikaans Baptists will also enter the fray.

In order to view South African Baptists into a more meaningful context than considering them in a denominational vacuum, in places I have elected to compare their positions on social issues to those taken by other churches and ecclesiastical organisations. In some cases this has involved examining denominations and other associations which have generally been more outspoken on public issues than has the Baptist Union, such as the Dutch Reformed Church (in this case meaning the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk), the Roman Catholic Church, and the South African Council of Churches. Yet such comparisons would arguably produce a distorted impression of the Baptist Union if they were not accompanied by a look at one or more denominations which have had little to say about social issues. In the final chapter, therefore, the Church of England in South Africa will come under the loupe. This is a denomination which until the 1980s remained almost completely silent on such matters as apartheid (despite the presence of thousands of black members in its parishes) and even in recent years has remained far behind the cutting edge of social reform.

Some Basic Hypotheses

This study revolves to a considerable extent around several cardinal hypotheses. A principal one is that both individual Baptists and the Baptist Union in South Africa have often been fairly outspoken on certain public issues, and that concomitantly their widespread reputation as a denomination which has tended to remain silent on such matters as race relations is not well founded. I hasten to add that it is not a purpose of this study to prove that Baptists have marched in the vanguard in the campaign for social reform in South Africa, for unquestionably most have not. Nevertheless, the accusation that Baptists have generally been "apolitical", by which is apparently meant that they have remained aloof from social reform movements, is one

which calls for a thorough examination of the evidence before a verdict can be handed down.

A second central hypothesis is that a close consideration of the social ethics of South African Baptists, not unlike that of Baptists and other Christians in other societies, over time will reveal an alarming lack of consistency with regard to meta-ethical principles on one hand and positions taken on public issues on the other. This is in itself obviously a cautious and general hypothesis; few individuals or groups consistently live up to the principles which they profess. A more nuanced and arguably more relevant question is how and why many South African Baptists have departed from theirs. Does their inconsistency involve primarily and stem from a lack of understanding of their principles as such? Have secular factors exercised a great influence on the decision-making process and, if so, which factors? A second and intimately related sub-hypothesis involving the broad matter of inconsistency is the evolution of the positions which Baptists, again both individually and as a denomination, have taken on race relations and military conscription. In the main, South African Baptists, like their denominational cousins in many other countries, have tended to emphasise Biblical prescriptive or deontological ethics (though often quite unarticulately), finding in both the Old Testament and the New rules, or at least firm guidelines, on which to base their conduct. Nevertheless, despite the immutability of the texts to which they appeal, individual Baptists as well as the Baptist Union have often interpreted those texts variously and, in some instances apparently unrelated to that practice, have taken quite different stances on public issues. That these positions have changed through the years, sometimes at a glacial pace and in other cases quite dramatically, is obvious from a survey of such documentation as the reports of the annual assemblies of the Baptist Union and letters to the editors of the denominational periodicals. Less apparent, however, is the answer to the nagging problem of causation. Which factors have caused general shifts in the course which Baptists have set on their approach to public issues? Has there been a tendency, notwithstanding the denomination's proud heritage of religious nonconformity and oft-repeated denunciations of "worldliness", to conform to the changing contours of popular opinion?

A further hypothesis of particular relevance to Baptists is that in South Africa many have misunderstood their own tradition concerning the separation of church and state. Many have either condemned or denied the involvement of the Baptist Union in what they dismiss as "political" matters. By doing so, they have been quite inconsistent in choosing whether to address governments on matters of public policy or remain silent, thereby tacitly supporting rather than challenging the *status quo*. It therefore seems relevant to ask whether one can perceive in South African Baptists' use of the Bible in relation to social ethics a tendency akin to that of which the Dutch Reformed Churches have long been accused, namely of exploiting Scripture to legitimise and defend privileged social position. In South Africa in particular, the general question of relations between church and state, and of individual Christians and the state, has long involved a striking irony. On the one hand, South Africa claims to be a Christian country; even the preamble to its present constitution emphasises that point. More specifically, governments have insisted on the maintenance of tangible relations between church and state, manifesting themselves in such ways as the place of religious instruction in public schools, the military chaplaincy, and a regular diet of regular Christian worship in the government-controlled broadcast media. Moreover, governments have certainly welcomed and encouraged the approval which churches have long given many of their actions. On the other hand, when churches have had the audacity to raise a prophetic voice against public policies or the behaviour of political leaders which they have found morally unacceptable, they have incurred the wrath of the secular rulers. Given their traditions of both separation of church and state and of speaking out on numerous issues, how have South African Baptists come to grips with this dilemma?

It is especially in attempting to answer this last cluster of questions that a modest comparative dimension becomes particularly pertinent to the present study. What parallels, if any, can one find between the positions which white South African Baptists and Dutch Reformed Christians have taken through the years on social ethical questions? For that matter, how have Baptists reacted to questions of race and militarism in comparison to Christians in other more or less Anglophone denominations? Has there been a significant degree of

common ground with, for example, the other churches which trace their roots to the British Isles and thus share a common if not absolutely identical cultural background, such as the Congregationalists, Anglicans, Methodists, and Presbyterians? When they have reacted differently, how can one explain the dissimilarities?

Finally, can the evolving social ethics of white South African Baptists be more fully understood by placing the topic into a larger eschatological framework? A major theme in twentieth-century Biblical and systematic theology has been the *Kingdom of God* motif as one most overarching element in the Old and New Testaments. It has thus provided an invaluable key to understanding social ethics (and the failure to appreciate social ethics) in various corners of the church universal during the twentieth century. Yet few South African Baptists have evinced a noteworthy grasp of this. More often than not, it seems, the Kingdom of God is seen primarily as a future development, one placed exclusively into an apocalyptic context. It therefore seems relevant to ask whether many South African Baptists, despite all their appeals to Scripture, have a woefully incomplete notion of Kingdom of God. If it were possible to find a comprehensive set of detailed written statements of what South African Baptists believe has been the ultimate purpose of Christian ethics, this might shed a great deal of light on their understanding of the "Kingdom of God" and various ramifications of this. Unfortunately, no such comprehensive documentation exists. In the absence of it, we must attempt to examine less direct statements piecemeal.

Meta-ethics?

Meta-ethics is generally defined as the study or analysis of the underlying principles and processes involved in making ethical decisions. Centuries of debate about these matters in the international intellectual arena have given rise to a wide variety of schools of ethics within the realm of general philosophy. Two of the broadest of these, each encompassing numerous sub-genres, are *teleological* ethics, which considers the consequences of behaviour as the primary factor which should govern moral decisions, and *deontological* ethics, which seeks

to differentiate between right and wrong in terms of how decisions and acts reflect obedience to specified codes or principles rather than judging them on the basis of their consequences.

Within specifically Christian ethics, there are also several fundamental approaches or schools of thought, the precise number depending on how carefully one nuances the categories. Some of these clearly parallel ethical approaches in secular philosophy. It has become commonplace, however, to distinguish between prescriptive, imitative, and situation (including contextual) contextual ethics. Without meaning to caricature any of these approaches beyond recognition or cast aspersions on the integrity of any of the adherents of each broad school, we can define the *prescriptive* approach to Christian ethics, which has particular relevance to the study of South African Baptist social ethics, as essentially the attempt by Christians to find in the Bible rules, or at least fairly firm guidelines, for personal and social conduct. This parallels what in secular philosophy is usually called deontological ethics or ethical formalism. In this school of Christian meta-ethics, the primary emphasis is inevitably placed on the teachings of Jesus Christ, although the precepts found elsewhere in the Bible are also recognised as generally valid, provided they do not contradict the words of Christ. The extent to which the Old Testament Law is normative is a matter on which there has never been a consensus amongst adherents of prescriptive ethics. For obvious reasons this general approach finds much of its following amongst Christians whose hermeneutics tend towards literalism, including many who would define themselves as "evangelicals", such as most South African Baptists. (In Chapter II we shall discuss at length the difficulties in applying the term "evangelical" without carefully defining it, but for the time being we shall accede to the way it is too loosely used in much of the Anglophone world.) In fairness, however, it should be emphasised that at the most rudimentary level prescriptive ethics does not mean the same thing to all Christian ethicists. Some use it to refer - often pejoratively and condescendingly - to those believers who think - naively or otherwise - that they can find directly applicable rules of conduct in their Bibles. Others distinguish between general theological tenets underlying specific Biblical texts, such as the sanctity of life as a gift

of God, and examples of the how these principles are applied, such as in the epistles of the Apostle Paul. This involves a quest for the Word behind the words, so to speak, rather than an attempt to find in literally interpreted texts the principles to be applied. Both of these general directions have many adherents, one of the most articulate in the latter camp being the Canadian New Testament scholar Richard N. Longenecker, whose *New Testament Social Ethics for Today* appears to have been quite influential in some North American "evangelical" circles since its publication in 1984.

For decades prescriptive ethics, which has also been loosely called "traditional ethics", has come under fire from various quarters, and even some self-styled "evangelicals" have aimed their pens at it with varying degrees of intensity. Arguably with some justification, it has been called legalistic, unrealistic, neo-Pharisaic, and other pejorative names. One label which it has borne is "casuistic ethics", an appellation which is itself a mixed blessing because of the two-fold meaning of the adjective. Not all of the serious criticism, however, has been deserved. Caricatures of it abound, some of them generously fed by the simplistic usages and blustery rhetoric of many practitioners of prescriptive ethics themselves, including more than a handful of South African Baptists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. To cite one revealing example of such a caricature, the American ethicist Donald G. Bloesch has declared that "hidebound traditionalists do not have to go through the agony of ethical decision making. They glibly believe that there are 'clear and distinct' answers to all ethical problems. No ethical issue defies a rational resolution". Bloesch then sets up a rhetorically convenient dichotomy by juxtaposing these simple-minded folk with what he calls "people of faith", who "recognize that in many cases no moral principle is directly applicable, that one must nevertheless heed the call of Christ and go forward confident in the knowledge that our feeble efforts to obey are covered by the blood of Christ and that the validity of our obedience will be made clear by the fruits of the Spirit of Christ in our lives".¹ As will be demonstrated in the present study, facile attempts to apply Biblical principles and norms as absolute rules have abounded in the history of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa. It will also be seen, however, that many of the individuals in question who subscribe to prescriptive ethics are

quite capable of engaging in nuanced thinking and that they realise that some ethical problems which they face were unknown in Biblical times and pose dilemmas for which there are no perfect solutions in this world.

A second general school of Christian moral thought is usually called *imitative ethics*, because it regards the life of Jesus Christ as the primary - though not exclusive - guide for Christian conduct. Intimately related to this, and forming a diverse sub-school of it, is the ethics of discipleship, according to which Christians have found their primary source of ethical inspiration in the concept of being disciples of Christ. Amongst adherents of this approach, one of the most widely quoted internationally is the American Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder, whose 1972 study of *The Politics of Jesus* revived what to many had become an outmoded and naive attempt to adapt first-century models of conduct and ethical decision-making to complex, twentieth-century social problems unanticipated in Biblical times. For decades critics of imitative Christian ethics and the ethics of discipleship had pointed to the endless dilemmas which many issues pose and rejected these approaches as naive relics of the nineteenth century and the moderately liberal environment which produced Charles Sheldon's best-selling novel, *In His Steps*. The outbreak of the First World War had shattered the optimism underlying this general approach, and the difficulties in coming to grips with the spread of fascism in Europe and elsewhere sent it to its grave. It should be stressed, however, that sophisticated theoreticians in this school recognise the difficulties inherent in it. Some have sought to deal with them by combining the imitation of Christ's life with underlying theological-ethical principles, thus straddling the fence with one leg in the prescriptive field and the other in that of imitation. A vexing difficulty inherited from the transition from nineteenth to twentieth-century New Testament scholarship is the enduring problem of discerning the real Jesus Christ to be emulated. As critics have pointed out, the endeavour to model one's own conduct after that of Jesus has tended to involve the recreation of him in one's cultural or political image.

The third general approach was popularised by the American Episcopalian ethicist Joseph Fletcher in his book of 1966, *Situation*

Ethics: The New Morality, but in fact some of the principles espoused in that slender but influential volume had appeared in the works of other scholars, such as Paul Lehmann, years or even decades earlier, though generally in more sophisticated and nuanced form, often under the label *contextual ethics*. Subsequently the latter term came to refer to various relativist approaches which pay considerable attention to the social milieu in which ethical decisions are made. The label is also loosely applied to some aspects of liberation theology. One common denominator which the various forms of situation ethics have shared is a general repudiation of prescriptive norms associated with deontological ethics. In brief, the more inclusive situationist school rejects prescriptive ethics as legalistic, manipulative, arcane, and contrary to both the words and spirit of the New Testament. In lieu of a nearly interminable codification of rules, situation ethicists usually substitute that which they believe is the corner-stone of Christian morality, namely the commandment of *agape* or love of one's neighbour. The course of action to be followed in any particular situation is determined not by appealing to either Old Testament Law or specific New Testament teachings, but by weighing options and deciding which comes closest to fulfilling God's intentions of proliferating *agape*. The emphasis is thus on the result, not on the duty to follow specific commandments or teachings. Christian situation ethics is thus a religious mode of teleological ethics. Though popular in many circles for several years in the 1960s and 1970s, and adamantly rejected as inherently unbiblical by many who regarded prescriptive ethics as the only authentic way of using the Bible in making decisions affecting either personal or social ethics, situation ethics eventually lost much of its appeal in many initially receptive quarters, partly because it assumes more sophistication and selflessness on the part of Christians than many believe is realistic to assume. Critics have pointed out endlessly that fallen humanity is essentially self-seeking and generally incapable of making decisions objectively when personal, national, tribal, or other interests are at stake. Situationists nevertheless prompted many of their adversaries to reconsider the pitfalls of facile employment of Biblical prescription, especially that form of it which has failed to distinguish between general Biblical ethical principles and specific examples of the application of the same in the Bible.

It should be emphasised that the present typological framework defining in very general terms these three approaches to Christian ethics is a simple pedagogical construct and that it often proves difficult to pigeonhole either the thoughts of ethicists or the actions of individual Christians neatly into any of the three categories or, for that matter, any others. In reality, many ethicists combine two or even three of them. Moreover, when individual Christians, regardless of the amount of exposure, if any, they have had to ethical theory, and regardless of their level of general theological sophistication or ignorance, consciously attempt to make moral decisions on the basis of their spiritual convictions, they probably most frequently employ a simple form of prescriptive ethics, less frequently take their cues from the life of Jesus, and sometimes weigh options teleologically and try to determine what course of action would come closest to the realisation of what they believe would be Christian solutions to their dilemmas. This generalisation operates to South African Baptists collectively, as one must surmise after perusing the writings and spoken words of countless individuals in response to a host of ethical problems facing their country and society.

Apart from that, however, it is entirely legitimate to ask what relevance a discussion of meta-ethics has to a study of the social ethics of South African Baptists. All cynicism aside, conducting this study has convinced me that a formal consideration of meta-ethics has less relevance than initially expected. I undertook research for this project with several basic assumptions, one of them being that theologically educated Baptists in South Africa, like their counterparts with whom I have had much interaction in North America and the British Isles, would generally adhere to the prescriptive school of ethics and consciously defend or oppose apartheid, to cite the most obvious and persistent social problem facing them, as well as comment on other public issues explicitly on the basis of their understanding of Biblical precepts. In this expectation I was partly disappointed. True, I found many examples of appeals to this or that Old or New Testament text in defence of positions taken on various issues. To the extent that South African Baptists can be located on the terrain of Christian meta-ethics, most have undoubtedly pitched their tents somewhere in the prescriptive camp, although many also make tentative

excursions into that of the imitation of Jesus. No less frequently, however, I discovered that since the nineteenth century both Baptist ministers and lay people in South Africa, both individually and when speaking as a denomination, have made pronouncements on social questions without citing a single verse of Scripture, let alone discussing underlying theological principles which potentially useful texts reflect. Obviously one cannot assume that individuals never considered Old Testament Law, the teachings of Jesus, or other contents of the Bible in reaching their decisions. Nor can one exclude the possibility that when delegates to the annual assemblies of the Baptist Union met to debate such matters as the response their denomination should make to conscientious objection to military conscription or racist legislation they quoted Scripture left and right. The point is that in a study of this sort we must rely on the evidence, and there is surprisingly little of it to support the assumption that South African Baptists have been fairly consistent exemplars of prescriptive ethics. Several seasoned white Baptists whom I asked about this specific matter agreed that this ironic state of affairs was the case. Indeed, as one senior pastor and missions administrator who had served for nearly two decades on the Christian Citizenship Committee of the Baptist Union put it, many of the resolutions which the denomination has passed at its annual assemblies since the 1960s have been made on the "gut level". He added that my tentative observation that they tended to lack a theological foundation was "totally correct".²

On what, then, have they rested? This question brings us back to one of the principal hypotheses of this study, namely that the positions which white South African Baptists have taken on social issues have often been governed less by demonstrable ethical reasoning than by what they have perceived to be their political, social, or economic interests. The "often" in this hypothesis is emphasised. As will be seen, frequently middle-class, white, Anglophone Baptists have differed with one another on such issues as the Christian moral viability of conscientious objection to conscription, the defensibility of apartheid on Biblical grounds, and whether Christians may protest against their secular rulers when they believe that their governments are violating civil and political rights.

Nevertheless, it is striking how the positions which Baptists, perhaps moreso individual lay people than the annual assemblies of the denomination, have reflected the prevailing defensive reactions of white South Africans in general on these and other issues. This has often been the case even when Baptists have quoted Scripture to bolster their positions. The legacy of religious nonconformity, it seems, fell captive to the white colonial culture in which it was manifested and from which it never escaped. Ostensibly prescriptive ethics, in other words, can mask intentional or unintentional ethics of racial or national egoism.

A corollary of this is that one reason for it is the dearth of meta-ethical sophistication amongst most South African Baptists, including many who have received diplomas or degrees in theology. I have not sought to measure this statistically, but when conducting dozens of interviews as part of my research I repeatedly asked both pastors and lecturers in theology whether they could define such terms as "axiology" and "meta-ethics". Very few could do so. I also asked them what they had read in the area of Christian ethical theory. Many were unable to name a single book apart from one or two volumes that had been required reading as part of their training at theological college, and not all could do even that. Several, for that matter, were hard pressed to identify twentieth-century theologians who had made any impression on them at all. Within the Baptist Union there is a general consciousness that the denominational heritage is partly Calvinistic, and indeed since the 1980s one faction of Baptists have been actively seeking to reassert part of that legacy in confessional form. Testing the extent to which theologically educated South African Baptists were aware of the ethics of John Calvin, however, proved to be an exercise in futility. Very few of the approximately twenty-five pastors and theological students whom I queried in this regard could tell me anything of a specific nature about Calvin's understanding of the purposes of the Old Testament Law. Almost none had any notion of his belief in the *didacticus usus legis* or why Martin Luther had rejected that third use of the Law. This is not to suggest that South African Baptist clergymen are theologically incompetent or that their preparation for the ministry lags behind that of their counterparts abroad, for it would be highly presumptuous for me as a foreigner and

non-Baptist to pass that kind of summary judgment on them. In fairness to the Baptist Union, moreover, it should be **emphasised** that during the 1970s and 1980s the general level of its theologians' scholarly qualifications rose significantly. Nor is it meant as an indictment of the spiritual or theological maturity of the Baptist laity in South Africa. The fact remains, however, that an undeniable and, indeed, generally acknowledged intellectual *lacuna* still exists. As will be seen in chapter after chapter of the present study, this has had direct and generally negative consequences for the positions which Baptists have taken - or failed to take - on social issues confronting them.

One major and readily discernible consequence of this for the present study is that while we shall deal to some extent with explicitly theological matters, many of the opinions which South African Baptists have expressed on social issues since the late nineteenth century must also be examined in terms of the racial and political attitudes which they reflect. This volume is thus to a large degree a study in ethics on the "grass roots" level rather than on a lofty intellectual niveau. Where theological arguments are found in South African Baptist debates over social issues, they have in many cases been poorly developed, cryptically stated, and otherwise fallen short of internationally accepted scholarly norms. Even in their weaknesses, however, they shed light on the thought patterns which have frequently prevailed. The exceptions, which have become more numerous during the fourth quarter of the twentieth century, are refreshing and also help to illuminate the subject. Whatever many of the essays and hundreds of letters from both pastors and lay people to the editors which have appeared in the official periodicals of the Baptist Union have lacked in logic and theological refinement, they have at least quantitatively made up for with ideological, cultural and racial biases. That such factors have played an enormous role in the shaping of opinions seems entirely beyond dispute. They will consequently receive much of our attention.

It seems at least arguable that in order to engage in debates about Christian social ethics requires not only a solid grounding in Christian ethics as such but also a firm understanding of the society about which one is commenting. This, too, however, has often been lacking

amongst South African Baptists who have expressed themselves about the conduct of public policy. There has never been a great deal of expertise about social structures, national economic policies, black African cultures, race relations, and the like amongst South African Baptists, despite a widespread willingness to express opinions on these matters and endeavours to sway not only Baptist opinion but also to influence governmental policies which touch on them. The denomination's Christian Citizenship Committee has had as two of its stated tasks to conduct research on public issues and to enlighten congregations accordingly. Owing to shortages of funds and personnel, however, it has rarely been able to perform either effectively. Partly because of this, as we shall see much of the debate about such matters as apartheid has flown at an alarmingly low altitude without sufficient velocity or evidential force to challenge the governments which have advocated racial segregation.

Methodological Considerations

Generally speaking, there exists an abundance of written sources on which to base a study of this sort. The entire files of the English and Afrikaans periodicals of the Baptist Union are extant and, as the annotation indicates, I have made extensive use of the massive number of articles and letters to the editors which they contain. The published reports of the annual assemblies are also preserved and have been a second major source. They give the texts of dozens of resolutions which those denominational conventions have passed through the years but unfortunately rarely shed any light on the argumentation, theological or otherwise, which lies behind the adopted statements. Manuscript collections, on the other hand, are relatively scarce, although I have been fortunate enough to have at my disposal the minutes of the Christian Citizenship Committee of the Baptist Union for the 1980s. Various other primary documents, both published and unpublished, supplement these sources. Unfortunately, very few South African Baptists have published lengthy theological treatises of any kind, and none has written a scholarly book about social ethics. Secondary material on Christian social ethics in South Africa which is

at least tangentially relevant to this study is fairly abundant, however, although very little of it pertains specifically to South African Baptists. As indicated in the Bibliography, interviews of dozens of men and women have also formed a major segment of the research. They have proven invaluable for clarifying various issues and gaining greater insight into the thinking of individuals who have commented on issues in print. The fact that from the outset I took pains to get lengthy interviews with a broad spectrum of Baptists who represent a variety of ethnic backgrounds, theological emphases, and political views proved especially helpful both in terms of shedding light on ethical questions and avoiding one-sided conclusions about prevailing opinions within the denomination.

The methodology used in dealing with this body of material inescapably reflects my background in *inter alia* ecclesiastical history, and that experience has undoubtedly influenced my creation of a historical framework on which to attach and study the positions which South African Baptists have taken on public issues. Chapter II is a detailed discussion of the previous literature pertinent to South African Baptist social ethics, focusing on the many unsubstantiated generalisations and other weaknesses in what has been written. Then proceeding in a generally chronologically fashion through four chapters, I have identified the stances which both the Baptist Union and many individual members of its constituent congregations have taken on social questions and sought to discuss both the logic and content of the theological argumentation (when such was present) and, in many instances, secular factors which shaped opinion. Chapters VII and VIII are primarily thematic, however, dealing with Baptist responses to questions of pacifism and conscientious objection to military conscription and Baptist participation in and leadership of right-wing religio-political organisations, respectively.

At an early stage of my research, two Baptist theologians who advised me on aspects of the project initially suggested that I endeavour to gauge opinion statistically amongst white South African Baptists in general or at least those who were ordained **ministers**. We discussed this proposal at length before concluding that various difficulties involved would render such an investigation questionable and that any results stemming from it would give part of the study an

air of false scientism. Consequently, I have relied on conventional historical and theological means of reaching and presenting my findings.

This has involved allowing many Baptists, both those with some measure of theological sophistication and those without such pretenses, to speak for themselves at considerable length. The purpose of quoting them extensively has been to elucidate both their theological argumentation and their popular attitudes, emotions, and beliefs, not least as expressed in their letters to the editors of the Baptist periodicals, which have proven to be amongst the most illuminating sources of information about the changing contours of Baptist thinking through the past century. In the frequent absence of succinct theological statements of an intellectual sort, material of the latter kind has proven invaluable, stimulating, and, not least, in many cases highly irritating to read.

In accordance with internationally accepted scholarly norms, I have made a conscious effort to reproduce faithfully the indisputably pluralistic nature of Baptist opinion on various social issues, especially those involving race relations and the militarisation of South Africa, throughout most of the twentieth century. Some readers may find that the politically conservative Baptists quoted in this study fare less well than their counterparts who have favoured greater social reform. If such is the case, it probably indicates something about the prejudices of both the readers and the author at a time when public opinion in general has rejected positions which many South African Baptists once deemed morally feasible, such as racial separation. Like most other studies, this one has been shaped by the tenor of the times in which it was planted and came to fruition.

Endnotes

1. Donald G. Bloesch, *Freedom for Obedience: Evangelical Ethics in Contemporary Times* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), p. 66.
2. Interview with Theodore Pass, Johannesburg, 15 March 1991.

CHAPTER II

PREVIOUS LITERATURE AND THE CURRENT DEBATE

Introduction

Very little of a truly scholarly nature has been published about South African Baptist social ethics past and present. For that matter, professional church historians have rarely turned their attention to the South African Baptist Union, and specialists on South African ethical problems have tended either to overlook Baptist involvement in and responses to them entirely or give them only cursory and entirely inadequate treatment. Only in recent years have a few emphatically concerned scholars begun to take initial steps towards rectifying this general neglect, but the works they have published thus far arguably cast more shadows than light on the general subject.

To some extent, this scholarly negligence reflects the uneven state of development of related matters internationally. To cite but one general example, for many years the historiographical literature of British Baptists contained little about their involvement in social ethics apart from occasional references to the work of Charles Spurgeon and his associates amongst impoverished people in Victorian London. Only in the 1970s did the history of British Nonconformity begin to place noteworthy emphasis on the participation of Baptists and members of other denominations in public issues. On the other hand, dozens of books and articles illuminating the positions which Baptists in the United States of America have taken on many social ethical issues have existed for decades. Yet, quite understandably, until about the 1970s British more than American Baptist traditions influenced the South African Baptist Union, including its writing of its own history.

With regard to recent and contemporary ethical issues, it is more difficult to find justifiable excuses for the paucity of pertinent literature before the late 1980s. What is obvious is that meta-ethics is still a poorly developed discipline amongst South African Baptists, and the study of ethics in general as an academic discipline is taught but not strongly emphasised at the theological colleges of the Baptist Union. This appears to have inhibitive consequences. While members

of several other denominations in South Africa have since the 1950s and especially since the 1970s produced a quantitatively impressive amount of literature about apartheid, military conscription, and other ethical tribulations in the country, Baptists have contributed very little. Precisely why this is the case is difficult to ascertain, apart from the obvious lack of a strong meta-ethical tradition. One can speculate that the relatively small number of Baptists compared with, for example, Anglicans and Methodists in South Africa automatically militates against a generous contribution to the pertinent literature. Other factors may also have been at work. Until quite recently, the intellectual tradition was poorly developed among South African Baptists, although since the late 1980s this has changed somewhat, though not yet sufficiently to reverse the deeply rooted inhibitions to scholarly activity. Moreover, the very decentralised polity of the Baptist Union has not nurtured much co-ordinated research on ethics, although it should be added that a congregational polity and concomitant absence of a well-developed hierarchical or other form of central bureaucracy have not prevented members of many other denominations in South Africa and several other countries from writing extensively in the field of ethics. In any case, by withdrawing from the South African Council of Churches in the 1970s, the Baptist Union isolated itself somewhat from more intellectually inclined Christians in other denominations who otherwise may have begun to give Baptists their due in interdenominational studies. Whether a socially conservative attitude of acceptance of the *status quo*, perhaps justified by theological presuppositions, has also prevented some white South African Baptists from being more outspoken on issues which have stimulated many of their compatriots in other traditions to raise prophetic voices and expend countless litres of printers ink is a question which I shall try to answer in this study.

In the present chapter I shall examine critically three kinds of scholarly and quasi-scholarly literature in which the general topic of South African Baptist social ethics has been discussed or at least should have been, namely books intended to present broad surveys and analyses of the churches' involvement in the development of the South African national crisis, general histories of South African Baptists, and more recent articles by two internal critics of the Baptist

Union, Louise Kretzschmar and David Walker. It seems necessary to pay particular attention to the efforts of these two concerned Baptists and critically dissect their writings in considerable detail, partly because their work comprises such a great portion of the pertinent literature. Furthermore, their articles are among the first to deal directly with the subject at hand and to call attention to certain moral issues, and as such they may be influential both in terms of shaping scholarly opinion and determining the course of subsequent investigations of the general topic. It is particularly revealing to review carefully the existing specifically Baptist literature, limited as it is in terms of both quantity and quality, because scholarly difficulties which burden it reflect so vividly the involvement of the authors in question in recent controversies. The Baptist theologians in question are not, in other words, merely drama critics but also players on the stage. To obviate any misunderstanding, I emphasise that while in a study of this sort one is compelled to apply stringent scholarly standards in evaluating their works, this does not suggest the slightest malice or condescension, and indeed the analytical task is undertaken with considerable sympathy for some of the manifest ethical concerns of the Baptist theologians in question.

General Studies of South African Churches in the National Crisis

Since the 1970s the contextual study of Christian social ethics in South Africa has spawned a relatively large number of books and articles whose authors have sought to understand the general relationship between the country's churches and its national crisis, especially with regard to race relations. Quite understandably, the various denominations are unevenly represented in these studies. On the one hand, theologians, historians, and other scholars have paid much attention to the diverse Dutch Reformed traditions and their conspicuous roles in the creation and legitimising of apartheid. On the other hand, they have described in detail the opposition to it which some denominations, most notably those which are prominent members of the South African Council of Churches, have afforded. Many other churches, however, are either entirely absent from these studies or

merely bit players in them. Among the latter, for reasons which we shall attempt to illuminate, is the South African Baptist Union. A survey of the denomination's place in some of the most prominent studies will cast light not only on this but also, indirectly, on factors which have inhibited an understanding of Baptist social ethics in South Africa.

In his internationally known book, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, which initially appeared in 1979, the eminent analyst of South African Christianity John W. de Gruchy, a Congregationalist, declined to pay significant attention to the Baptist Union, curiously arguing that its withdrawal from the South African Council of Churches earlier in the decade had effectively removed it from the category "the English-speaking churches". Probably tipping his hand, de Gruchy in the following sentence declared that Pentecostals should also be excluded from that misleading rubric because of their "distinct character and lack of involvement till now in ecumenical groups and social issues".¹

To his credit, de Gruchy did not entirely ignore the Baptists. Yet his consideration of the Baptist Union is limited to its responses to two seminal events in the history of relations between church and state. First, in his treatment of the widely resented Native Laws Amendment Bill of 1957, which outlawed integrated worship services or African worship in "European areas" unless special permission were obtained from the Department of Native Affairs, de Gruchy noted that even the Baptist Union lodged a strongly worded protest. He then quoted two sentences of the Executive of the denomination explaining its opposition to the bill but gave only an oblique reference in the corresponding endnote.² De Gruchy inescapably paid more consideration to the Baptist Union's response to the statement *A Message to the People of South Africa*, which the South African Council of Churches issued in 1968. The authors of this highly controversial, six-page document argued that apartheid was anti-Christian because it directly attacked the unity of the church and that for many people it had become a "novel gospel" of salvation through racial separation. De Gruchy devotes three paragraphs to the Baptist Union's critique of the *Message* and his own rejoinder to the denomination's official rejection of it. Clearly, de Gruchy found it irritating that the Baptist

Union crossed theological swords with him and his colleagues over this document. He pointed out, however, that in contrast to the Dutch Reformed "the Baptists" did not attempt to justify separate development on theological grounds. This is essentially correct, although through the years some individual Baptists have in fact sought to do precisely that. De Gruchy's treatment of the denomination in this controversy is generally fair and accurate, although as his source for the position of the Executive he does not refer directly to its own publication but only to an excerpt from it in a volume of which he was a co-compiler.³ The only weakness which stands out, given the understandably brief treatment of the denomination in a broadly conceived book of this sort, is de Gruchy's misleading use of the definite article in referring to "the Baptists" in connection with a specific theological response. One is not merely quibbling in noting this because, as will become apparent in the present study, a crucial and determining feature of the Baptist Union of South Africa, as of many corresponding denominations elsewhere, is the autonomy of its local congregations and the independence of its individual members in matters of social ethics.

In books of this genre, consideration of the Baptists inexplicably declined during the 1980s. In 1981 American sociologists James Young and Marjorie Hope elected to place Baptists beyond the pale of their survey of *The South African Churches in a Revolutionary Situation*, though for a different reason. Assigning the Baptists to the much more often used than defined category "the conservative evangelical churches", they declared that "inasmuch as these denominations are small, they will be mentioned here only briefly." Indeed, so cursory was their treatment that Young and Hope made no effort whatsoever even to describe the place of these churches in recent South African life. In a brief historical section, however, they asserted that "not only the DRC [*i.e.* the Dutch Reformed Church] but [also] the Lutherans and the Baptists believed it necessary to keep native and European churches apart, because Christianity ought to become thoroughly African and presented in such a form that Africans could understand it and accept it as something of their own."⁴ This partial explanation of ecclesiastical apartheid, however, is a severe caricature and oversimplification of both Lutheran and Baptist missionary strategy,

one which corroborates the prevailing stereotype of white South African Baptists as social and political arch-conservatives but sheds no light on the factors which have shaped their Christian social ethics.

More recently, South African Methodist ethicist Charles Villa-Vicencio anchored this image in his critical appraisal of the role four of his country's Anglophone denominations in helping to legitimize and passively preserve racism on a national scale. "Like the Church of England in South Africa, the Baptist Union is not included in that alliance of churches designated as the English-speaking churches," he affirms, marshalling a rationale highly reminiscent of that which de Gruchy had employed nearly a decade earlier. "It does not belong to the South African Council of Churches (SACC), of which the Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians, and United Congregationalists are among the most significant member churches."⁵ In other words, for Villa-Vicencio, as for de Gruchy, an ethical criterion was determinative in defining an explicitly linguistic-ecclesiastical category. With this conviction, he could generalise that "the Baptist Union of South Africa has tended to isolate itself from the issues that bind the Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians and Congregationalists together."⁶ Villa-Vicencio consequently writes virtually nothing about South African Baptists. His only reference to them occurs in a treatment of less than two pages of the "conservative evangelical churches", where he merely notes that some Baptist churches "have in recent years begun to rediscover a measure of social concern in keeping with their historic Anabaptist and English nonconformist roots".⁷

Ethics in South African Baptist Historiography

The severe underrepresentation of Baptists in works such as those cited above is arguably understandable if not necessarily excusable when one realises that at least two inhibiting factors have been at work. First, the conceptual frameworks employed have not been sufficiently inclusive to cover all the significant denominations in South Africa. Secondly, in some instances prominent South African Baptists individually or the Executive of the Baptist Union has either remained silent on prominent issue of social ethics or taken positions

with which people like de Gruchy and Villa-Vicencio obviously disagree. Thirdly, instead of doing a vast amount of research into the past, the authors of these books chose to rely heavily on secondary materials for their historical sections. In general ecclesiastical history is not a well-developed subject in South Africa. Among the country's Baptists, the historiographical tradition is still quite weak, and globally professional church historians have written very little about the denomination in the Union of South Africa, the Republic of South Africa, or the nineteenth-century colonies and republics which antedated those states. Indeed, in recent decades only a few relevant books and articles have been published.

These few South African Baptist historical publications shed precious little light on questions of social ethics. That very fact, however, is reason to examine both what the amateur historians who have written them have sought to express and what they have ignored in terms of public issues. Readers of many other denominational histories in South Africa, North America, Europe, and elsewhere, chiefly those of recent date, can gain at least a superficial awareness of those churches' positions on social ethics through the years, but such is not really the case when one turns to most of the South African Baptist material.

The first twentieth-century attempt to chronicle the development of the Baptist tradition in South Africa was H.J. Batts' *The Story of a 100 Years, 1820-1920, Being the History of the Baptist Church in South Africa*, whose cumbersome and ungrammatical title promised much more than its author delivered.⁸ The details of its general failing as history need not concern us here. The book consists largely of sketches of the ministries of early Baptist clergymen, narratives of the founding of congregations, and a survey of the growth of the denomination and its missionary programme. This brief work fails to consider to any noteworthy degree the social context of the Baptist tradition in South Africa and, in accordance with this neglect, tells readers virtually nothing about the ethical issues which adherents of that tradition.

The field then lay largely dormant until 1970, when Sydney Hudson-Reed, a Baptist clergyman and historian, began to plough it. He dominated the writing of South African Baptist history throughout the 1970s and 1980s, writing and editing several books on the general

topic, partly in conjunction with the denominational centenary in 1977. Hudson-Reed's works reveal a great deal about the origins and development of white Baptist churches in southern Africa. His first survey history, covering the period up and including the founding of the Baptist Union, is essentially the published version of a Master of Arts dissertation he submitted at the University of Natal. Titled *By Water and Fire 1820-1877*, it is a mere sixty-two pages in length and bears out its author's admission that "source materials of the period 1820-1877 are very sparse". The focus of this popular work, which includes only a short bibliography and a handful of unnumbered footnotes, is on denominational expansion, and the mode is essentially one of individual congregational chronicling. Given the limits of the documents at his disposal, Hudson-Reed conveys an appreciable amount of information, though exclusively from a sympathetic white viewpoint. Such matters as race relations are largely overlooked.⁹

The first volume of a trilogy published in connection with the above-mentioned centenary was also brief, popular, and uncritical but nevertheless represents a notable advance in its treatment of social ethics. In this work, *Together for a Century*, Hudson-Reed again chronicles the first half-century of the Baptist presence in the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope. The emphasis is still on denominational expansion. Hudson-Reed includes a bit on race relations, though only in connection with the wars between European settlers and indigenous Africans in the Eastern Cape from the 1830s until the 1950s. He declares that these conflagrations exacerbated negative attitudes, but apart from a written testimonial by William Davies, the first ordained Baptist in the colony he sheds no real light on the matter. As we shall see in the immediately following chapter, however, that piece of evidence, moreover, is self-consciously tendentious, written to counter the image of interracial tensions which other colonists, particularly John Philip, were helping to create in Britain.¹⁰ At present it merely should be noted that Hudson-Reed does virtually nothing to develop this ethical theme, however significant it may have been.

In subsequent segments of the same book, two of Hudson-Reed's colleagues discuss other aspects of Baptist history and theology. John N. Jonsson sketches what he broadly terms the "Baptist Theological Outlook" in approximately twenty-five pages. Nothing in his treatment,

however, reveals anything about either meta-ethical principles in the denomination or other factors influencing its social ethics.¹¹ Much more to the point is the third segment of the book is Christopher W. Parnell's consideration of "Public Matters" during three periods of the church's history since the 1890s. "The Baptist Union, like other denominations, was concerned about many matters in society", he writes. "It was concerned about justice and race relations". In support of his generalisation, Parnell merely quotes snippets from resolutions passed at the Annual Assemblies of the Baptist Union between 1894 and 1976. One learns from this, for example, that delegates to those conventions urged the government to tighten censorship of publications and films in 1911, opposed racist "job reservation" legislation in 1932, and twenty-five years later took a firm stand against the "Native Laws Amendment Bill", which placed high hurdles before attempts to integrate worship.¹²

Kretzschmar on Ostensibly Apolitical Baptist Behaviour

As the violent decade of the 1980s approached its end, two internal critics levelled broadsides at what they believed was the irrelevance of the Baptist Union's policies and practices *vis-à-vis* South Africa's abysmal race relations and intimately related issues. The first of these rigorous commentators was Louise Kretzschmar, then a student at the University of Cape Town and lecturer in Religious Studies at the University of Transkei but who in 1991 joined the faculty of the University of South Africa. Kretzschmar, an Anglophone from Benoni who converted from the Dutch Reformed Church while a teenager in the early 1970s, did not receive most of her spiritual formation in Baptist churches but rather through the Student Christian Association in Johannesburg and while a student in England in the early 1980s. By her own account, her involvement with Baptist churches apart from her membership in one at Umtata has been quite limited, and her critical comments about the Baptist Union of South Africa have made her *persona non grata* in some quarters of the denomination and thus exacerbated the difficulty she has experienced in conducting appropriate research.¹³ Nevertheless, in an article cumbersomely titled

"Pietism, Politics and Mission: An Examination of the Views and Activities of South African Baptists" which the internationally known journal *Missionalia* carried in 1989, she assumes a momentous task, namely "to describe and analyse the missiological thinking" of what she labels "a less well-known Christian denomination", which proves to be the South African Baptist Union. Subsequently, however, Kretzschmar whittles this assignment down to what may have seemed manageable dimensions by posing two related questions, namely "whether it is valid to view the South African Baptist Church, as many do, as being apolitical and pietistic" and "whether its missiological interest is restricted to evangelism". A paragraph later, she asks hypothetically whether "the South African Baptist Union is being true to its distinctively Baptist heritage" and, seeking broader significance for her study, whether that denomination is "in line with traditional and contemporary evangelical thinking", having declared with less reservation than redundancy three sentences earlier that "the 'evangelical' ideas espoused by Baptists are shared by a much larger group of believers drawn from a variety of different Christian denominations and para-church organizations".¹⁴ In brief, her article is an effort to prove that while South African Baptists have frequently passed resolutions at their annual conventions expressing concern over racial injustices and related matters, they have done little to redress those issues. Kretzschmar perceives Baptist spirituality, especially in South Africa, as having become an almost entirely private or, in her diction, "pietistic" matter which militates against active involvement in public affairs. Her article is thus a serious accusation of collective hypocrisy and abandonment of a valuable denominational legacy.

Commencing in the introductory lines of her article and continuing through much of it, Kretzschmar commits several fundamental errors which severely diminish the cogency of her argument and virtually preclude whatever chance an essay of this sort might otherwise have of supporting her obvious goal of developing a scholarly case for changing the course of the denomination's social ethics. These shortcomings include *inter alia* the absence of a meaningful and defensible conceptual framework, the failure to define many of her key terms, insufficient research to cover adequately the generalisations

which she makes, numerous deficiencies in her annotation, a patently deficient command of both Baptist history and the contemporary nature of the denomination about which she is writing, *non sequiturs* and other illogic in her deductive and inductive argumentation, and a general carelessness about the *akribi* of theological argumentation and writing. Even orthographic inconsistencies, tangled syntax, typographical errors, and subjective digressions detract from the professional quality of Kretzschmar's article. The publication of it in one of South Africa's most prestigious theological journals and the virtual non-existence of any other attempts to deal with this subject necessitate a detailed critique of the piece if scholarly inquiries into the general question of South African Baptist social ethics are to proceed in a profitable direction.

To begin at the beginning, Kretzschmar does not define at least half a dozen pivotal terms which she apparently believes are self-explanatory but which are not. We shall examine the most salient of these here. The first is "Baptists". On the one hand, Kretzschmar refers explicitly to "the South African Baptist Union"; on the other, she mentions more generally "the South African Baptist Church" as though it were a single entity. Again she is inconsistent, for she subsequently reveals an awareness of some of the other Baptist denominations in the country but appears to be incognizant of the variety of them among the blacks. For some unexplained reason Kretzschmar declares that "it should also be noted that the Southern Baptists of the USA have been closely associated with both the Baptist Union and the [black] Baptist Convention" but fails to develop any relevance for that seemingly anomalous fact.¹⁵

A second crucial term which remains undefined is "apolitical", notwithstanding its centrality in Kretzschmar's first question. We shall return to this in greater detail later, because Kretzschmar asks whether South African Baptists are "apolitical in outlook" and seeks to identify this as a consequential characteristic of at least white Baptists in South Africa.¹⁶ For the time being, we shall only point out that ambiguity reigns in this usage. Kretzschmar nowhere explains whether the phrase refers to *e.g.* 1) Baptists having certain views (as one might infer from her use of the term "outlook"), 2) exercising their fundamental political right to vote, join political parties, and, in some

instances, seek elected office, or, 3) refusing to ally with fellow Baptists in advocating certain public causes. For that matter, Kretzschmar does not clarify unambiguously whether her query presupposes a cause and effect relationship or allows for a coincidental one, *i.e.* whether South African Baptists, if indeed many abstain from involvement in the political process, remain aloof because of their religious affiliation or in spite of it. This is a crucial matter to which we shall return when discussing the logic of Kretzschmar's argument.

A third term which relates to another of her questions is "evangelical". We shall discuss this at length in the following section in our consideration of David Walker's critique of the alleged shortcomings of twentieth-century "evangelicals" in their responses to apartheid. In brief, it is relevant to Kretzschmar's article because she declares that her subject pertains to both "traditional and contemporary evangelical thinking". In fairness to Kretzschmar, she at least refers to a now somewhat dated attempt by John W. de Gruchy of the University of Cape Town to classify the myriad of "evangelicals" in the United States of America into five general types,¹⁷ but she makes no effort to clarify how those foreign categories relate to Baptists and other Christians in South Africa.

Part of Kretzschmar's argument rests on the assumption that South African Baptists are the heirs of an activist social ethical tradition but that they somehow have squandered their inheritance and thus severed their ties with this once-proud legacy. Properly developed, this could have formed much of the foundation of her article. Had Kretzschmar examined nineteenth-century British Baptist history, which in effect spawned the South African Baptist Union (notwithstanding a strong German immigrant strain in the denomination from its outset), she would have found many significant examples of denominational advocacy of social reform. To cite but a few, during the Victorian era Baptists in the United Kingdom raised prophetic voices about the enactment of the Corn Laws, slavery in the British Empire, and exploitative labour relations in the wake of the Industrial Revolution. Such a historiographical approach would have gone far towards allowing Kretzschmar to understand why the direct descendants of this denominational tradition in southern Africa turned

away from that tradition, if in fact they did. Instead of following that obvious line, however, Kretzschmar briefly pursues a thread backwards through denominational history in search of Anabaptist origins of English Baptist history. No church historian, she states in one confused paragraph of her section "Who are the South African Baptists?" that English Baptist roots can be traced to "the Puritan or non-Conformist [*sic*] movements of the 16th and 17th centuries". Kretzschmar then argues that "the English Baptists can, in turn, be linked to the Anabaptists of the Reformation period". Her only expressed reason for making this connection is the fact that some people whom she calls "early English Baptists", including John Smyth, "spent several years in exile in the Netherlands where they associated with Dutch Mennonites such as the Waterlanders". As her only source for this connection, Kretzschmar refers an article about the Dutch Anabaptist Hans de Ries by James R. Coggins which supposedly appeared in *Mennonite Quarterly Review* in 1968. In fact, it did not appear in that journal until eighteen years later. But even if Kretzschmar had given the correct source, her argument would not have benefitted, because Coggins' brief article in no way substantiates her claim of an etiological link between Dutch Anabaptism and the English Baptist tradition. Instead, it is an effort, by its author's admission, to demonstrate that Hans de Ries' *Short Confession*, an early Dutch Mennonite creed, was written in 1610 "as part of the union negotiations between the Waterlander Mennonites and John Smyth's congregation of English Separatists".¹⁶ That such a merger took place has long been a well-documented fact. On the basis of this otherwise unspecified association, Kretzschmar ventures out on thin ice by deducing in no uncertain terms that "strictly speaking, South African Baptists have their roots in the radical Anabaptist theological tradition which repudiated war, violence, military service, and the civic oath . . .". This lineage, she asserts, "gave rise to the denomination in the first place".¹⁹ For all her insistence on its significance, Kretzschmar makes nothing else of the supposed Anabaptist connection in her article. It proves to be little more than a rhetorical *cul-de-sac* into which she has driven her argument.

Indeed, it could hardly be more, because Kretzschmar's effort to establish the Anabaptist paternity of the English Baptist tradition is

essentially ahistorical. An examination of the roots of that British denomination reveals that it did not exist during "the Reformation period" and that its relationship to Dutch Anabaptism was more one of rejection than acceptance. Smyth, a former Anglican clergyman, served as a Separatist minister at Gainsborough in Lincolnshire early in the seventeenth century. Owing to religious persecution under James I, he and part of his congregation quit England in about 1608 and removed to Amsterdam and Leiden, where Calvinism was well-entrenched. This was, of course, decades after and not during the Reformation period. The Leiden party eventually emigrated to North America as the "Pilgrims" who founded Plymouth Plantation near the site of present-day Boston. Smyth's group continued for a while in Amsterdam, where they began to discuss again the sacrament of baptism, which English Separatists had debated from time to time for decades. There was no consensus on the matter amongst these exiles in the Netherlands. Smyth came out in favour of believers' baptism and wrote a pamphlet in which he attributed his change of mind on the subject to study of the New Testament. He baptised himself and many members of his flock by affusion, in contrast to the Anabaptist practice of immersion, and founded a congregation in which membership was contingent on believers' baptism. Subsequently Smyth came into contact with Dutch Mennonites and advocated a merger with them. This led to a schism in his church. One faction, under the leadership of Thomas Helwys, resisted this and returned to England. In London they established an independent congregation, the first Baptist church in the British Isles. The Smyth group, on the other hand, remained in Amsterdam. Smyth died in 1615, and what was left of his flock was received into the *Waterlander* Mennonite church less than three years later. This wing of what otherwise could have become one root of the English Baptist denomination thus ceased to exist as a separate entity. Direct Mennonite influence on the genesis of the British Baptist tradition, in other words, was practically nil. Whatever the rhetorical advantage of asserting its significance may be, well-established historical facts indicate that its importance was slight. There is little for Kretzschmar's too facile and one-sided contention that "strictly speaking, South African Baptists have their roots in the radical Anabaptist theological tradition".

Kretzschmar could have saved herself the embarrassment of this blunder had she perused *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* more carefully and read the articles which scholars have written in it as well as in such obviously significant journals as *The Baptist Quarterly* and *Baptist History and Heritage* testing the hypothetical links between Anabaptism and the English Baptist traditions. Both the General Baptists and the Particular Baptists, the two principal roots of the latter tradition, have there been examined repeatedly. Lonnie D. Kliever conducted a "fresh examination" of the hypothesis with regard to General Baptist origins in 1962. He found "significant differences" regarding *inter alia* such central doctrines as original sin, free will, and justification. These led Kliever to conclude that "the Anabaptists and the originating group of the General Baptists [are] dissimilar Christian traditions". Whatever influences Anabaptists may have had on General Baptists were "negligible", he wrote. His dismissal of the hypothesis was unqualified: "No historical continuity can be claimed under any circumstances. No theological indebtedness is admitted. And little significant doctrine kinship can be discovered". On the contrary, Kliever argued cogently that "the essential theological tradition as well as the distinctive features of early General Baptists are accounted for by their English Puritan Separatist background. They appeared on the scene as a leftward movement of Puritanism and a logical extension of Separatism".²⁰ At the same time, Glen H. Stassen explored possible "influence" which Anabaptism exerted on the founding of the Particular Baptists, the other main root of the modern British denomination. He concluded that when founded in ca 1640 this group was theologically indebted to either the German or the Dutch version of Menno Simons' *Foundation Book* but that it nevertheless differed significantly from Anabaptism. Even allowing for that, Stassen's work still does not support Kretzschmar's assertions, because he confirmed that the Particular Baptists, like the General Baptists, arose from English Congregationalism, not from Dutch Anabaptism, and that origins of the Particular Baptists lie outside the chronological and geographical framework which Kretzschmar designates.²¹

The debate about possible Anabaptist influence on the genesis of the Baptist denomination resurfaced in the 1980s and yielded several inconclusive but nevertheless significant articles to which, curiously

enough, Kretzschmar does not make reference. Generally speaking, research published during that decade confirmed previous findings, albeit in less categorical terms than those which Kliever had used. As Stephen Brachlow argued in a re-evaluation of 1985, even Smyth's rebaptism and theological transformation "may be understood more naturally as a derivative of his participation in Puritan English Separatism, rather than the result of Anabaptist influences".²²

The eminent American Baptist historian William R. Estep, Jr., on the other hand, sought to modify this course somewhat and steer a *via media* between what he regarded as the Scylla of atavistic theories of Anabaptist influence and Charybdis of their outright rejection. As he pointed out, no-one has the "license to ignore evidence that does not fit neatly into one's own theory of Baptist origins derived from something other than historical evidence". Estep found it regrettable that much of the debate had focused on factors which had influenced Smyth. Instead of that minor issue, he believed, "the question is the extent to which the congregation of Thomas Helwys carried back to England a faith and order that was neither Mennonite nor Separatist but incorporated elements of both". Estep found both similarities and dissimilarities between the Dutch Anabaptism of the very early seventeenth century and subsequent Baptist doctrines. Among the parallels were an insistence on complete religious liberty and the separation of church and state. Whether the Baptist positions on these central matters had been derived from Separatism of Anabaptism, however, remained unproven. In any case, Estep realised that the differences between the Baptists and the Anabaptists were striking, not least with regard to social ethics. "Both General and Particular Baptists affirmed in their confessions that the magistracy was ordained by Christ and that a Christian could be a magistrate", he noted. "Helwys went on to define and defend the concept of a 'just war' and to legitimize the use of the sword by a Christian".²³ This point is particularly relevant, because at no time did the Baptists generally adopt pacifism, although in many countries prominent members of one Baptist denomination or another - and in some cases smaller Baptist denominations - did so. As will be seen subsequently in the present study, South African Baptists who have refused on the basis of Christian principles to participate in military service have represented

a minor position within the Baptist Union and endured stiff criticism from fellow Baptists. These objectors have rarely appealed to a supposed historic position of their denomination or its predecessors in Britain or elsewhere on the issue of conscription.

In a subsequent and equally censorious article, Kretzschmar clings to and seeks to justify her belief in the Anabaptist paternity of the South African Baptist Union. In a frontal assault on previous historiography in that denomination, she takes to task Sydney Hudson-Reed and others who have either denied or "evaded" the supposedly determinative role of the Anabaptists. Kretzschmar tries to place this into a Baptist tradition of disavowal stemming from the seventeenth century. During that formative period, she declares, English Baptists were compelled to deny their Anabaptist roots because "the authorities" looked askance at the legacy of the Peasants' War of the mid-1520s and other excesses in Germanic principalities a century earlier. Kretzschmar offers no evidence for this theory, even though she asserts that it was "certainly" true, and she fails to mention other reasons for the seventeenth-century English Baptist denial of alleged Anabaptist roots, such as cognizance of their seminal indebtedness to English Separatism, modified Calvinism, and other currents, and, consequently, theological differences from the Anabaptists. In Southern Africa during the nineteenth century, Baptists were supposedly "loath to admit their Anabaptist roots" because of fear of "accusation from more powerful denominations". As supposed evidence of this and of the supposed "silence of the early German and British Baptists in South Africa concerning the Anabaptists", Kretzschmar quotes a German Lutheran who criticised other German immigrants for becoming "Anabaptists". This one non-English example is very facile induction, however, and in effect counters her categorical and much too simple pronouncement that "the fact that the South African Baptists are directly descended from the handful of English Baptists who came to South Africa along with the 1820 settlers is not disputed". Kretzschmar's only other attempt to prove her assertions is an anecdote concerning a German lay leader who refused to become involved in an argument about the Reformation radical Thomas Müntzer. Again, readers are left wondering whether and why Anglophone Baptist immigrants reacted to accusations that they were

heirs of the Anabaptists, if indeed they were ever thus accused. Even though Kretzschmar has not demonstrated that such was the case, she makes another categorical and unsubstantiated generalisation by insisting that "they had certainly accepted the distorted view that was generally held by scholars concerning the Anabaptists at that time". Yet these Baptists refused to acknowledge their true roots because they feared ostracism if the truth had become known, according to Kretzschmar's theory; they "could not afford to follow a path which they knew to be socially unacceptable".²⁴ Whether these settlers, whom Kretzschmar claims were "from the poorer and uneducated classes", actually knew anything about their supposed Anabaptist heritage, and how they knew that to be identified with that tradition implied ostracism, remains a mystery. One is also left wondering why in the United States of America, Canada, and other denominationally pluralistic countries the most direct descendants of the Anabaptists, particularly Mennonites of various kinds, have readily acknowledged their own roots in the radical wing of the Reformation.

Kretzschmar tries hard to prove her hypothesis of the primacy of the Anabaptist tradition in the origins of the Baptist movement. Ignoring or playing down much of the professional literature from the 1980s mentioned above which would have weakened her case, she correctly indicates some points of similarity between the two, such as a commitment to believer's baptism and, related to this, the separation of church and state. What Kretzschmar fails to demonstrate, however, is causation; her argument is thus little more than an example of the *post hoc ergo propter hoc* fallacy. In fairness to Kretzschmar, it should be stated that she also mentions a few obvious dissimilarities, such as the general willingness of English Baptists to bear arms and serve as magistrates - curiously enough, matters which pertain most directly to social ethics. The etiology of these crucial differences is left largely unexplained. Nor are most of the theological contrasts mentioned. Instead, Kretzschmar merely says in a peculiar rhetorical twist that the theological common ground "cannot be negated" by dissimilarities.²⁵

Kretzschmar's presentation of the relevance of Baptist history to contemporary Baptist social ethics in South Africa also raises two other central questions. The first is purely historical. How about the roots

of the denomination which clearly differ from those which she emphasises? Kretzschmar has focused her attention almost exclusively on the genesis of the General Baptists in England. Yet even the most rudimentary understanding of the denomination's history would include the realisation that as it has existed in South Africa since the the nineteenth century it developed from a merger of the General Baptists and the Particular Baptists, the latter tracing their theological roots to modified Calvinism, not to the Mennonite tradition. Yet on this Kretzschmar remains silent, despite her general declaration that "what is at issue is the historical and theological origins of the English Baptists themselves".²⁶ It is difficult to avoid the suspicion that her unwillingness to discuss this other vital sector of the denomination's history reflects not ignorance but tendentiousness, as the Particular Baptist tradition would have diminished the cogency of her argument.

The other question is both historical and meta-ethical. To what extent should a denomination, especially one which at least claims to base its social ethical stances primarily on Biblical prescription (a self-understanding which will be questioned in the present study) either appeal to or be limited by one segment of its complex tradition when formulating its ethical positions? To be sure, Kretzschmar does not contend that South African Baptists should uncritically adopt Anabaptist views when applying their faith to social issues. But on the one hand she writes as though sixteenth and seventeenth-century Mennonite theology and social ethics should inform late twentieth-century South African Baptist thinking; on the other she does not mention the many other influences in the development of the Baptist tradition during the intervening period which might prove enlightening and indeed relevant. Instead, Kretzschmar is content to assert that "the equally important, perhaps greater, contribution of the Anabaptists should be stressed".²⁷ Whether she has quantified or otherwise gauged the extent of these respective influences in the shaping of the Baptist tradition, however, also remains unexplained.

In the final major section of her article on the supposed Anabaptist ancestry of South African Baptists, Kretzschmar seeks to relate certain aspects of the latter's theology, particularly their doctrines of baptism and ecclesiology, understanding of the Kingdom of God, and view of religious freedom, to contemporary South Africa.

Here too, however, her article suffers from grave problems of interpretation and argumentation. Among the most consequential of these is Kretzschmar's unnuanced portrayal of the alleged absence of religious freedom in South Africa and Baptists' relationship to this state of affairs. In two generalisations quite illustrative of her rhetorical style, she announces that "the existence of religious and civic freedom is nothing but a dangerous illusion" and insists that the former "rarely amounts to more than the freedom of Sunday worship at churches in areas where certain groups are compelled by law to live". Kretzschmar neither substantiates these categorical assertions nor mentions such classic touchstones of religious liberty as the right to choose one's religious affiliation or not to have any, governmental toleration of widely divergent doctrines, the right to proselytise, the absence of religious tests in the civil service or university admissions, the absence of a state church and attendant religious taxes, and the right to publish religious literature. On all of these points, and many others, realities of contemporary South Africa would have contradicted Kretzschmar's indictments, notwithstanding the undeniable challenges of the South African government to the South African Council of Churches and the Institute of Contextual Theology, which she mentions briefly. Rather than testing her own generalisations, however, she declares that Baptists in effect helped to shape this dearth of religious freedom by "permitting the imposition of the Group Areas Act", which supposedly compelled their churches to function only within racially designated regions. Kretzschmar neither examines Baptist positions regarding that statute nor demonstrates that the Baptist Union was able to permit it to be passed or to prevent its enactment.²⁸

Digressing to matters whose relationship to the main theme of her article are quite tenuous, Kretzschmar contends that in contrast to the Anabaptists South African Baptists embody "enormous social divisions" which separate whites from blacks and Anglophone from Afrikaans members. She laments, moreover, that "members of the [Baptist] Union do not appear overly perturbed" at the secession from it of the predominantly black Baptist Convention in 1987, leading one to wonder whether Kretzschmar believes they ought to be overly perturbed. In yet another unrestrained polemical generalisation, she avers without adducing any evidence to support her comparison that "amongst

Baptists in South Africa today, paternalism, division, suspicion and disunity far outweigh any experience of a truly regenerate church and genuine Christian community concern".²⁹

Kretzschmar then charges that "the [Baptist] Union is multi-racial only in name" and insists that this was "clearly" shown at its annual assembly in 1989, when the first session was held at a military camp in Kimberley. Countering her own accusation, however, she mentions that the objections of Coloured delegates prompted a change of venue to a less controversial site. Nevertheless, in another *non sequitur*, Kretzschmar deduces from this sorry episode that "if such is the state of affairs within the denomination, it is little wonder that the innumerable statements addressed to the government by the Union concerning their rejection of Apartheid and its evil outworking, carry little weight both within and without the denomination".³⁰ This curious piece of reasoning apparently assumes that if the Baptist Union had been more thoroughly integrated and sensitive to the social status of its non-white members, its pronouncements would have had greater influence on the government, an assumption which the general ineffectiveness of, for example, statements which more integrated denominations such as the Church of the Province of South Africa and the Methodist Church of Southern Africa contradicts. In a related piece of illogic, Kretzschmar concludes that "the Baptists' tendency to withdraw from socio-political matters has left the State free to pursue its aims unchallenged by a Christian social ethic".³¹ This assumes, without evidence or explanation, that South African Baptists have in fact thus withdrawn, again a questionable assertion against which much evidence could be adduced. It also implies that South African Baptists alone determined whether their government was free to implement certain policies without being subjected to Christian ethical criticism. This ignores the prophetic voices emanating not only from white Baptist circles but also from much larger and influential denominations in the country, including several which encompassed racially heterogeneous memberships.

Precisely what Kretzschmar hoped to achieve with this article is puzzling. It seems most plausible that she believed that members of the Baptist Union could benefit by examining the Anabaptist legacy and applying it to their own conduct, not least in terms of social ethics

and church-state relations. Yet one wonders whether the improbability of that happening on a noteworthy scale renders the exercise virtually futile. Kretzschmar, after all, demonstrates that Baptists in general and white South African Baptists in particular do not have a living Anabaptist component in their heritage; if it ever was present it was denied to death on both sides of the Atlantic, including the British Isles, centuries ago. Ultimately, therefore, the genetic link, if it ever existed, becomes irrelevant. Kretzschmar might have presented a more relevant case for the Anabaptist tradition by scrutinizing the social ethics of twentieth-century Mennonites in racially pluralistic capitalist societies, such as the United States of America, and gleaning from such an investigation lessons which might prove applicable in South Africa, rather than trying to prove that sixteenth and seventeenth-century Anabaptists exercised a great influence on the origins of British Baptists. Had she done so in a comprehensive manner, she may well have discovered aspects of Mennonite conduct which could beneficially be emulated. On the other hand, Kretzschmar's keen interest in ecclesiastical political involvement would not have found unilateral fulfilment in such an analysis; many Mennonites and their churches have eschewed political activity while a relatively small number of others have played significant roles. Alternatively, and possibly with greater effect, Kretzschmar could have examined both British and South African Baptist history and discovered numerous instances of protest against military conscription, job reservation, and various other forms of racism. She would have uncovered little in terms of active resistance to governmental policies, however, apart from statements of defiance to the "church clause" of the 1957 Native Laws Amendment Bill.

One might wonder why Kretzschmar refers at all to the alleged Anabaptist parentage of the Baptist tradition in her article of 1989, given her failure to develop the point there. Part of the answer probably lies in the purpose of her essay of 1990, in which she seeks to develop a case for the relevance of the Anabaptist tradition to contemporary South Africa. It is striking how neatly Kretzschmar's position on this matter fits a theory which Ian Sellers presented in 1981 on historical fluctuations in the willingness of Baptists to identify themselves with the Anabaptist tradition. In brief, he argued cogently

that when Baptists have sought to be accepted as part of the religious and social mainstream, they have said little about this connection. Conversely, Baptists desiring an identity as social or religious radicals have often emphasised their supposed roots in the left wing of the Reformation, particularly Anabaptism in its historic tension with worldly institutions and the *status quo*.³²

Let us return to Kretzschmar's article of 1989. No less significantly than the question of the roots of the Baptist tradition, it bears repetition that the development of a religious tradition which is nearly four centuries old encompass not only its origins but also its evolution. This is particularly relevant if by "roots" one means *inter alia* the social ethical principles and history of a denomination, as by their very nature they invariably develop in a historical setting, usually evolving in a changing one. A sense of history, in other words, is essential for understanding ethical tradition. In the case of British Baptists, this involved responses to such matters as the proliferation of distilled alcoholic beverages, slavery in the British Empire, military conscription, the enactment of the Corn Laws, and labour relations in the wake of the Industrial Revolution. These were key elements in the social ethical tradition which British Baptists brought to southern Africa during the nineteenth century and which eventually was severely compromised there, as we shall see in subsequent chapters of the present study. Kretzschmar's article, however, tells us virtually nothing about that legacy.

Nor, for that matter, does it bridge the historical gap between Baptists in England at any stage and twentieth-century South Africa. Kretzschmar devotes only a few lines to Baptist immigrants in the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope during the nineteenth century, and in doing so she commits serious mistakes which undermine the case which she is eager to develop for Baptist involvement in oppression of indigenous peoples on the one hand and lack of a social reform impetus on the other. Kretzschmar realises that English settlers founded the first Baptist congregations in the eastern part of that colony. She further states correctly that German immigrants also established Baptist churches at almost as early a stage. Immediately thereafter she concludes: "This meant that Baptist beginnings were closely associated with the economic and political repercussions of the border conflicts

between the settlers and the Xhosa". When unsubstantiated by any evidence, and in the absence of even any further explanation, this is not a logical conclusion. The presence of people of a certain denominational persuasion in an area does not *ipso facto* prove that they had any significant relationship to interracial conflicts, though of course it does not preclude that possibility either. Pursuing her case further, Kretzschmar generalises that "even though the Baptists, as settlers, were part of the colonial dispossession of tribal land, it does not appear that the implications of this - for both their Christian faith and their missionary efforts among Africans - have been thoroughly grasped".³³ This is potentially a highly consequential point which should probably be pursued in detail if anyone ever writes a scholarly history of Baptist missionary ventures in southern Africa. By not adducing any evidence or even mentioning a single Baptist person or congregation known to have dispossessed tribal land, however, Kretzschmar gives us no real indication of how this accusation relates to subsequent Baptist behaviour. Moving forward in time, she accuses South African Baptist missionaries of "sociological blindness": "Even recent literature about the late 19th and early 20th century mission efforts contain only minimal references to the social, economic and political climate within which Baptist pioneers operated". Consequently, Kretzschmar declares in another of the categorical generalisations which burden her article, "there can be little doubt that this 'sociological blindness' has a great deal to do with the dissatisfaction of some Baptists with the [Baptist] Union's theology and practice of mission".³⁴

This, too, is faulty deduction. It is true that in the little recent historiography of South African Baptists one finds only scattered references to matters which have become widely discussed themes in missiology. The almost total absence of those topics from the two works by amateur historians which Kretzschmar cites, however, does not prove that the missionaries in question understood nothing of the social contexts in which they laboured. That would require a careful analysis of such historiographical evidence as the letters and reports of the missionaries against whom she has levelled her accusation. Her magisterial declaration that there "can be little doubt" about this supposed ignorance as a factor contributing to the dissatisfaction of

unnamed and unquoted Baptists with the denomination's missionary theology and endeavours is thus virtually meaningless.

Turning to the present, one must wonder whether Kretzschmar comprehends or at least appreciates adequately the methodological implications of the congregational polity of the Baptist Union of South Africa to her own research. Much of her argument rests on the primacy of that denomination's annual assemblies as a collective barometer of its social ethics, particularly the resolutions which delegates to those gatherings have passed. She sets an unrealistic standard for the denomination to meet by critically pointing out that the "statements of political protest" which emanated from its yearly gatherings "did not always have the unconditional support of the delegates present". Kretzschmar apparently realises that this is methodologically problematical but excuses her focus on those statements by reasoning that "because these resolutions were issued at several Assemblies, it means that they did not issue from a small group only, but were voted for by the majority of the delegates - who, after all, are pastors or official church representatives".³⁵ One wonders whether she actually expects unanimity in a large denominational meeting. Presumably she believes that her inductive method is nevertheless defensible because some of the most influential people in the congregations are involved in the process of passing the resolutions. Curiously enough, however, Kretzschmar elsewhere declares that in her experience lay members of Baptist churches in South Africa "are largely ignorant" of the yearly proclamations. She also states, quite correctly, that in the polity of the Baptist Union "individual members and their pastor have the last say" on matters of policy. Kretzschmar casts a wide net by generalising that "South African Baptists have largely conformed to the *status quo*, and have not really exhibited the validity of the resolutions quoted in a practical way". Even ignoring what she means by "validity", it is undeniable that in making such an assertion Kretzschmar has taken upon herself an enormous burden of proof, one which she does not bear well. Indeed, the inductive argument which she adduces to substantiate this claim consists of only one example, namely an assertion that while the Baptist Union strongly criticised the government's unsuccessful attempt in 1957 to outlaw racially

integrated worship (which rarely existed anyway at that time in Baptist or most other South African churches), there had subsequently "been little contact between Baptists of different racial groups beyond annual Assemblies or Treverton meetings" and that "leadership has remained firmly in the hands of Whites and inadequate attention has been given to the development of African leadership".³⁶ This assertion, however, though potentially significant, is itself unsubstantiated and does not cover Kretzschmar's sweeping generalisation. Nor, for that matter, does it comply with her awareness of the determinative role of individual members and their congregations in establishing policy. Determining the extent to which Baptists have actually lived up to their denomination's declarations concerning race relations in South Africa or in effect repudiated them by behaving in ways which contradict them would involve the formidable task of examining closely those individuals and their congregations. This Kretzschmar nowhere does to any meaningful degree. We are therefore left wondering what the role of the resolutions within the Baptists Union has actually been and how Baptists have responded to them.

In fairness to Kretzschmar, it should be pointed out that at times she attempts to temper her generally one-sided critique of white Baptists by conceding that some have recently evinced a social conscience. But even in doing so she departs from academically acceptable norms of argumentation and commits further errors in her logic. To cite but a few examples of this, Kretzschmar points out that in 1979 the Baptist Union urged the government to liberalise legislation concerning conscientious objection to military conscription. Then, however, as "further evidence" of denominational social concern she quotes a remark by a British Baptist who, after visiting South Africa in 1988, reported that Baptists there were "right in the forefront" of movements for social and political reform.³⁷ This is not evidence, but hearsay. Had Kretzschmar wished to adduce proof of Baptist social concern in the 1980s apart from an open letter which the annual assembly sent to State President P.W. Botha in 1985, she could have cited a relatively broad spectrum of documentary evidence including further resolutions, articles in denominational and other periodicals, booklets by the Baptist Union's Christian Citizenship Committee, letters which that body sent to government officials and other materials in its

archives, responses to such well-known statements the *Kairos Document* and *Evangelical Witness in South Africa*, and so on. In a very brief historical section, she mentions a few resolutions concerning race relations passed beginning in 1894 and reasons that Baptists can therefore declare that "they have, from the outset, spoken out against discrimination and injustice".³⁸ Again the evidence does not cover the conclusion; the Baptist Union was created in 1877, not 1894, and there were Baptist congregations in southern Africa for approximately four decades before the date of that founding. In a related vein, Kretzschmar dwells on the reactions of arch-conservatives, especially lay minister R.A. Gorven (whose surname she spells in three different ways), to the open letter to Botha and to resolutions calling for social reform, but she devotes only one sentence to the establishment of the liberal "Fellowship of Concerned Baptists" in 1986.³⁹

Kretzschmar devotes approximately the last one-third of her article to an attempt to attribute to pietistic influences the alleged South African Baptist disregard for social ethics. This too is problematical. She gets off on the wrong foot with her delimitation of the term "pietism". Aware that theologians and others have applied this inclusive word to a wide variety of denominational traditions, movements, and para-church organisations in Europe, North America, South Africa, and elsewhere, Kretzschmar resorts to a negative definition of pietism as "a theology which does not move beyond the personal, spiritual concerns of the Gospel and either neglects or denies its socio-political implications". This not only fails to explain what pietism actually is and how pietists understand the Gospel; it is simply carousel logic. Kretzschmar declares that pietism is theology devoid of social ethics, then proceeds to attribute the neglect of social concern in some Christian traditions to it.⁴⁰ The role of "pietism" becomes relevant to a consideration of South African Baptists when one asks why those particular Christians, if indeed they are guilty of Kretzschmar's generally unproven accusations, are pietists in this detached sense. Does their alleged neglect of social ethics spring from their theology, or does the principal reason for this lie in cultural and other environmental factors? If the former, is it possible that secular considerations influenced the theology?

Kretzschmar suggests that by searching the emphases in Baptist theology one can find the keys to unlocking the riddle of the denomination's aloofness from public issues. She points out, probably correctly, that since the nineteenth century there has been a tendency in the Baptist Union to regard sin as almost exclusively an individual, personal matter, and that until very recently few members had any noteworthy concept of social or structural sin. In support of this perception of the denomination's history, Kretzschmar quotes two of its presidents, one in 1882, the other more than a century later. Yet both are *non sequiturs* in the context of her argument. The earlier official declared that "the Baptists believe [*sic*] that religion is purely personal and voluntary; that Christ's church should be composed of those, and only those who believe in him . . .". But at least as quoted in Kretzschmar's article, this is merely a declaration of exclusive ecclesiology of the sort which Baptist churches have usually espoused, if not necessarily upheld, since the seventeenth century; the reference to "personal and voluntary" says nothing about social ethics or the denial thereof. Kretzschmar then cites such well-known Old and New Testament texts as Amos 5:10-24 and Matthew 25:31-46 and, without limiting her accusation to South Africa, incredibly declares that their "social force" is "seldom recognised", a generalisation that will baffle many a church historian and ethicist. This supposed "fact", she believed, "was acknowledged by a one-time President of the Baptist Union, the Revd Ellis André" in his University of Cape Town Master of Arts dissertation, where he declared that "the Baptist Union has distinguished sharply between its proclamation of the Gospel of personal salvation and its witness to the State in respect of moral and socio-political affairs".⁴¹ Even if André's statement is correct, however, it does not support a contention that the denomination has failed to recognise the social implications of the Biblical passages to which Kretzschmar refers. Nor can it be adduced as evidence that the Baptist Union has neglected social ethics; André refers explicitly to the denomination's "witness to the State" in this regard.

One might also question Kretzschmar's largely unexplained focus on theology as the culprit for this supposed neglect. It seems legitimate and relevant to ask whether there actually is something in Baptist theology which militates against social ethics as such. The

question is more complicated than it initially may seem, involving as it does hundreds of denominations on spanning dozens of countries with a variety of Calvinist, Zwinglian, Arminian, and other theologies. In many cases these denominations do not have incisive confessional statements which one can consult in a search for clues to the question. It must therefore lie outside the scope of the present critique even to attempt to answer it. It seems relevant, however, to point out that in many cases, such as that of the nineteenth-century British Baptists cited earlier, major Baptist groups have been highly active in terms of both social welfare projects and direct political action. These manifestations of their faith have co-existed with an emphasis on individual salvation through personal redemption. The one has not excluded the other. To the extent that pietism, Kretzschmar's negative definition notwithstanding, has generally emphasised personal spirituality and morality, it has not necessarily excluded social reform. One need only examine the history of Methodism to see countless examples of this. As we shall see shortly in our consideration of David Walker's article on alleged "evangelical" support of apartheid, there is an extensive body of historical literature on this topic.

If theological factors cannot satisfactorily explain the detachment of some Baptists from social reform or their defence of the *status quo*, one can probably find much of the reason for this aloofness in cultural determinants of denominational conduct, as I shall argue at length in the present study. For the time being, it may be enlightening merely to point to one convenient comparison. During the half-century immediately preceding the Civil War of the 1860s in the United States of America, Baptists in that country differed sharply on the issue of retaining, limiting, or abolishing slavery. Generally speaking, much of the impetus for abolition came from Baptists of British ancestry in the northern states, where slavery had not existed for several decades. In the South, however, whose economy depended heavily on the low-cost toil of Afro-Americans in bondage, countless white Baptists defended the institution. Both sides marshalled Biblical texts and referred to their denominational heritage. During the 1840s the debate and resulting acrimony became sufficiently acute to split the denomination, resulting in the creation of the Southern Baptist Convention. In both North and South, Baptists had been heavily involved in "revivalism"

which underscored the individual's sinful nature and his or her need for personal redemption. To many Baptists, however, especially those whose social standing and economic prosperity did not depend on slavery, its evil nature was obvious, as was its disharmony with their understanding of the doctrine of Creation. It is virtually impossible to overlook the social and economic factors involved in varying perceptions of slavery in this example and, for that matter, how those considerations influenced the use of the Bible by, respectively, those northern and southern Baptists who debated the issue.

Kretzschmar mentions very little about cultural factors shaping social ethics in her article, apart from the previously mentioned allegation that Baptists were involved in the dispossession of tribal land in the Eastern Cape. Instead, she focuses almost exclusively on the predominance of "spiritualisation" and individualism in the general South African Baptist understanding of the Gospel. In her two concluding paragraphs, Kretzschmar pronounces that in the Baptist Union "dualism, spiritualisation, and individualism have combined to emasculate the gospel and render the church ineffective in the present crisis". In her experience, she makes clear, "little is heard of the Christian's social responsibility or the practice of Christian ethics in a selfish, confused and fear-filled society". Kretzschmar closes her article by declaring that because of their lack of general concern about social ethics, "the Baptists, as a group, do not really have a message that can penetrate the South African miasma of fear and rage".⁴² Again this is a sweeping accusation which extends far beyond the defensible perimeter of the evidence which Kretzschmar adduces in this article.

Kretzschmar's Call for "an Alternative History"

Kretzschmar continued a similar line of criticism in 1990 at an "awareness workshop" which the predominantly black Baptist Convention of Southern Africa sponsored in May and June 1990. In a speech later published as an article in a symposium which that conference yielded, she seeks "to analyse aspects of the history of the Baptist Union from what has been termed 'the underside' of

history, from the point of view of those who have been excluded from the power structures, policy making and executive actions of the Baptist Union". Two pages later, however, Kretzschmar shifts gears and declares that "this article is an attempt to view the Baptists within the social realities of South African existence and accord attention to those who are generally excluded from historical writing". She makes abundantly clear both her solidarity with the African Baptists in South Africa and her belief that because she is female she could readily "share the frustrations of those who are given token acceptance and authority, whilst being denied the substance thereof". The nine-page article bears the grandiose title "A Theology of Dominance - an Alternative History of the South African Baptist Union".⁴³

Beyond that, however, Kretzschmar elucidates very little and confutes much. Despite the promises inherent in its magisterial title, this essay, like the one published in *Missionalia*, is arguably not pure scholarship as such but a motivational piece in which both historiography and theology are subordinated to a tendentious purpose. No less than the previous article does it rest on insufficient research and fail to contain what the title implies. It is rife with illogic, unsubstantiated assertions, unproven allegations, poor grammar, errors in punctuation, and inconsistencies in both the text and the inadequate notational references.

Kretzschmar takes to task Batts, Hudson-Reed (whose name she consistently spells incorrectly), and other historians of the denomination for presenting an incomplete picture of its history, particularly for failing to consider adequately the black churches, colonialism and European dispossession of traditional Xhosa lands, and ethical issues in general. Not content with shooting at the vulnerable targets of the conventional denominational histories, in the same section she even castigates the compilers of the annual Baptist Union directories for giving the contemporary role of women short shrift. To Kretzschmar, previous writers have "undoubtedly [*sic*] selected" subjectively the facts which they are willing to put into print on the basis of "what the historical writers regard as important. . . . thus, it is the interests and actions of white, male Baptists that receive the lion's share of the attention". Arguing her case a step further, she states that "other Baptists in South Africa have neither been

encouraged nor enabled to write their own histories. Indeed, a different view to [sic] that which has been traditionally accepted may even be regarded as disloyalty to the Baptist cause or a distortion of the Gospel". Kretzschmar seeks to document the last allegation by referring to one letter in the monthly periodical *Baptists Today* whose writer criticised the formation of the Fellowship of Concerned Baptists, a reform-minded caucus within the denomination.⁴⁴

Kretzschmar's observations about the many *lacunae* and the disproportionate emphases in the conventional histories are partly correct. Yet her unsubstantiated explanations for them are also incomplete and fail to do justice to the church historians on whom she categorically passes harsh judgment. Kretzschmar seems to be oblivious to fact that they, like their colleagues in other denominations in South Africa and elsewhere, are severely limited by the evidence at their disposal. It is conceivable, of course, that they have selected too subjectively from the extant body of pertinent archivalia and other sources, though that remains unproven. What is beyond dispute is that both the documentary collections in the archives of the Baptist Union and the files of its periodicals yield a wealth of information about white males but next to nothing of definite historiographical value about African, Indian, or Coloured Baptists of either gender and, until quite recently, little about white women.

Related to this, Kretzschmar admonishes that "the Baptists, it must be remembered, did not arrive in Southern Africa as missionaries, but as part of a scheme devised by the colonial authorities to stabilise the border region by increasing the population of the Zuurveld (the area between the Fish and Bushman rivers)". She admits that these immigrants "existed only in small numbers and exerted little influence over colonial policies" but nevertheless deduces that "in other words, the Baptist settlers regarded their possession of the land as being justified on the spurious grounds that the Xhosa were treaty-breakers, cattle thieves and invaders of settler property". Her only source for this claim is a brief and admittedly derivative centenary publication issued in 1960, and even it she cites incorrectly in an endnote. Kretzschmar bemoans the absence of a condemnation of this action from general histories of the denomination: "Neither the Baptist Union as a whole, nor individual Baptist churches, have recognised

their direct participation in this destruction of the traditional black societies, both in the Eastern Cape and elsewhere in South Africa". This alleged historiographical negligence, she reasons, helps to perpetuate racial tensions amongst the country's Baptists. "How, one might ask, can white Baptists expect black Baptists simply to forget the past and forgive those who have not even acknowledged their guilt? . . . In my view, this is were [*sic*] the Union needs to begin, with the painful process of repentance and restitution". Kretzschmar does not mince words in declaring that any attempt to create a racially united Baptist Union, (*i.e.* convince the secessionist Baptist Convention to return to the fold) before guilt is acknowledged "would be a meaningless sham".⁴⁵

Numerous errors of historical fact and logic burden Kretzschmar's example. To begin with, only a relatively small percentage of white South African Baptists can trace their lineage to the Eastern Cape. Many nineteenth-century Baptist immigrants from the United Kingdom and other countries settled in Natal, on the Witwatersrand, and other parts of what is now the Republic of South Africa. Much of the denomination's numerical growth, moreover, can be attributed to British immigration in the late nineteenth and in the twentieth centuries. It is simply erroneous to declare categorically that "the Baptists" were either consciously or otherwise implicated in the British colonial encroachment on Xhosa territory, however tawdry an episode that may have been in the history of the British Empire. That *some* may have been is, of course, entirely plausible. For all we know, perhaps many were culpable. But, despite her censorious attitude towards the alleged behaviour of nineteenth-century Baptists and twentieth-century Baptist historians, Kretzschmar does not take upon herself the unenviable research task of proving that even a single member of the denomination was involved, let alone individual Baptist congregations and the Baptist Union, whom she pronounces had "direct participation" in this territorial dispossession. Without the adduction of such evidence, her call for an acknowledgement of guilt thus smacks of the pre-Enlightenment assumption that a suspected criminal offender was guilty until proven innocent.

No less seriously, Kretzschmar fails to consider in this article the protests of the Baptist Union and of many of its members against

racist legislation from the late nineteenth century until the present day. A perusal of extant and readily accessible sources yields a much more nuanced picture of the denomination's behaviour in this regard than the caricature which Kretzschmar paints. White Baptist reactions to the tortuous course of race relations in South Africa have included nearly everything from unabashed enthusiasm for British imperialism and praise of apartheid to unmitigated denunciations of the latter, as will be demonstrated repeatedly and in detail in the present study. Kretzschmar's assault on the "one-sided" and consequently skewed character of conventional South African Baptist historiography is thus little more than a case of the pot calling the kettle black. To her credit, she acknowledges that "behind this paper lie own [sic] assumptions and aims", but in her historical section she does not even attain the degree of comprehensiveness which the targets of her wrath reached decades ago.

Kretzschmar then devotes two pages to her effort to prove that the Baptist Union has had and continues to have a thorough "commitment to the ideology of Apartheid". She criticises an overdrawn and defensive statement by A.H. Jeffree James (whose name she gives incorrectly) that in the Baptist Union "there has been a consistent protest against any state policy affecting the basic human rights of any section of our population - not only during the forty years of Apartheid, but for nearly sixty years before that". Echoing an argument of unrealistically high expectations reminiscent of her previous article, Kretzschmar counters by asserting but not demonstrating that "these statements were 'individual' protests of Assembly delegates, and were not always representative of the churches of these delegates". The overall stance of the Baptist Union, she believes, has been at best "cautious and 'balanced'" and therefore inadequate and ineffective. Kretzschmar perceives no favourable consequences of these protests: "As a result, its numerous resolutions had no effect on the government's Apartheid machine, which continued rolling over the homes, dignity and bodies of black people, including black Baptists".⁴⁶

This argument assumes that a stronger and more consistent stance which "combined theological statements with appropriate action" could have impeded that state apparatus from doing precisely that. Yet there

is no compelling reason to believe that such would have been the case. On the contrary, the history of the South African Council of Churches and of some of the most politically and socially active denominations demonstrates the virtual inefficacy of such an approach in South Africa since the 1950s.

The central thrust of Kretzschmar's argument in this section, however, is essentially that the Baptist Union has revealed its racism and even aped secular apartheid by creating and maintaining separate associations for African and other non-European Baptists. By restricting the "non-white" congregations to membership in the South African Baptist Missionary Society, the white power brokers excluded them from the central part of the denomination and the committees which actually influenced the functioning of the Executive. Kretzschmar realises that such is no longer the case but insists that the willingness of the Baptist Union to open its doors to non-whites dates only from 1976. The evidence which she quotes to document that assertion, however, actually contradicts it; in 1976 the Assembly of the Baptist Union "reaffirmed" that congregations could join it regardless of their racial composition. Kretzschmar also points to the continuing existence of ethnic associations within the Baptist Union as proof that white men still keep women and non-whites generally in positions of ecclesiastical subservience. The question which must be asked in this regard is who insists on the maintenance of those particular bodies? The logic of Kretzschmar's argument requires that white men in positions of influence do so, but she does not adduce any evidence to support this. It is conceivable that the people who devote considerable amounts of their time, talents, and money to those ethnic and gender associations have argued for their continuation. After all, ecclesiastical women's groups are hardly unique to the South African Baptist scene, but are a very common phenomenon in many parts of Christendom. For that matter, an international comparative approach to the matter would have revealed that ethnic associations within or attached to Christian denominations (or, indeed, separate ethnic denominations) are also fairly common outside the borders of South Africa and that their existence is attributable in large measure to the desire of the ethnic minorities (or majorities, as the case may be) in question to preserve at least some measure of their linguistic and other cultural identity.

One need look no further than the history of the Baptist churches in the northern part of the United States of America to find numerous instances of this. During the nineteenth century the Northern Baptists conducted missionary work amongst immigrants from many European countries and helped to establish special conferences for them, thereby emulating the activity of a few other American denominations. Eventually some of those conferences were absorbed into the sponsoring Anglophone denominations, but others became separate bodies entirely. On the other hand, some immigrant Baptists, such as those from Sweden, established separate denominations from the outset. This is not to deny that racism has always existed in the Baptist Union of South Africa. As this study will point out repeatedly, it has existed in abundance from the outset. The point is merely that the presence of ethnic associations is not in itself proof of intentional white domination and exclusivism. Assertions that it is must be proven.

Kretzschmar perceives "further" evidence of racism at the annual assemblies of the Baptist Union, but again her argumentation is faulty. She generalises redundantly that "the agenda of the annual Baptist Union Assemblies has always been a white agenda" but does not prove or even assert that whites have always been responsible for its creation. In a *non sequitur* to her generalisation, Kretzschmar seeks to dismiss countervailing evidence in the form of the many resolutions proposed for decades protesting against racism by arguing that there has been "no concerted attempt" to eliminate racism from the Baptist Union itself. Obviously, even if this is true it does not prove her generalisation about the character of the agenda.⁴⁷

The final section of Kretzschmar's article deals with the "privatised" theology of the Baptist Union, although what she means by that adjective remains a mystery. Much of this segment is devoted to the inadequacies of theological training for black Baptists in South Africa, which she believes both mirrors the weaknesses of "Bantu education" and, by being "both Euro-centered and privatised", failed to prepare aspiring clergymen to meet the ethical challenges they would face in the ministry. Her evidence of these accusations is limited to one endnote in which she refers obliquely to anonymous "present Convention leaders" and an interview with a similarly anonymous "previous lecturer" at a theological college for black Baptists.⁴⁸

Kretzschmar does not mention that the two Baptist seminaries which enrol chiefly white students are also open to blacks.

Kretzschmar takes umbrage at what she perceives as opposition to or neglect of social reform advocacy by some Baptists during the latter half of the 1980s. "The extent to which the Union was theologically out of step with other Baptists, both internationally and in South Africa, was reflected in its reaction to the Kairos and EWISA [*i.e. Evangelical Witness in South Africa*] Documents", she reasons. "Within the Union, the document was either studiously avoided or rejected". Kretzschmar does not specify which of these two statements she means. She points out that one white Baptist criticised the 1985 version of the *Kairos Document* but does not mention the fact that many other reform-minded Christians, both white and black, also voiced strong reservations about it. Kretzschmar quotes approvingly John Jonsson, a Baptist and former South African, who lamented the paucity of Baptist signatories to it. She does not, however, explain the absence of her own signature and those of black Baptists from that edition of the manifest.⁴⁹ As part of her contrast between white South African Baptist and international Baptist reactions to the *Kairos Document*, Kretzschmar points out that the Baptist World Alliance recommended "further study and other action".⁵⁰ In fact, in 1986 Peter Holness, who chaired the Christian Citizenship Committee of the Baptist Union and who for many years has taught Christian ethics at its theological college near Cape Town, wrote three detailed articles about the *Kairos Document* which were published in the denomination's magazine. In them, he called explicitly for due consideration of that treatise.

In short, Kretzschmar's article rarely rises above the level of intentional polemic. "Criticism comes easier than craftsmanship", wrote Pliny in his *Naturalis historia* nearly two millennia ago. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*. One gains the impression, however, that Kretzschmar consciously departed from her role as a homelands university lecturer when writing this piece and that her primary intention was to motivate with inflammatory rhetoric rather than to inform through careful historical and theological scholarship. She virtually admits as much about her article: "Its success will be primarily judged by its ability to encourage its readers to write their

own readers so as to radically revise the self-perceptions of Baptists in this country, as well as the perceptions that others have of us".⁵¹

Walker on "Evangelicals" and Apartheid

At virtually the same time when Kretzschmar's first critique of Baptist social ethics appeared, the *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* carried David Walker's somewhat longer article titled "Evangelicals and Apartheid. An Enquiry Into Some Predispositions". Its author is a seasoned Baptist minister and former lecturer in theology who has served congregations in both South Africa and, briefly, Zimbabwe. Like Kretzschmar, he is gravely concerned about what he perceives as an inability or unwillingness of many of his denominational fellows to respond more effectively to the crisis in race relations in South Africa. For at least a decade he has been a moderately prominent advocate of reform in social issues confronting the Baptist Union. When interviewed in 1991, however, shortly after he accepted a post at a Roman Catholic seminary near Pietermaritzburg, Walker stated that his most significant radicalisation took place during the mid-1980s owing to frustrations in ministering to conservative white Baptists in Port Shepstone. By the end of that decade he had in effect left the Baptist ministry and begun to worship in an Anglican church without entirely cutting his ties with the Baptist Union.⁵² In his article of 1989, Walker takes on a task even more ambitious than that which Kretzschmar assumed in hers, namely to examine "both evidence of evangelical support for and opposition to apartheid" and evaluate "elements in evangelicalism which appear to predispose it to favour apartheid". He states explicitly that he is dealing not merely with South Africa: "This response [to racial separation in South Africa] is seen to involve evangelicals throughout the world, as apartheid is an ethical issue on a global scale".⁵³

Like Kretzschmar's articles, Walker's suffers from serious defects involving the scope of his research in relation to his purpose, conceptual framework, definitions (and lack thereof) of key terms, logic, and use of language. They begin on the first page, where two crop up immediately in his initial sub-heading, "Evangelical Support

of Apartheid". Nowhere does Walker define either "evangelical" or "support", and the resulting lack of precision in dealing with this general topic on a grand scale drastically reduces the scholarly merit of the article.

In fairness to Walker, it should be emphasised that in attempting to deal with "evangelicalism" he has inherited a self-contradictory, ambiguous, and ultimately stultifying conceptual framework which exacerbates his already enigmatic task. During the past 450 years the term "evangelical" has been applied to a welter of theological and religious movements, denominations, missionary societies, and other organisations. A brief survey of these usages will illustrate not only that point but also indicate some of the difficulties which can arise from what approaches being a semantic universal donor in international Protestant diction. During the Reformation, both Lutherans and Calvinists appropriated the term "evangelical" to apply especially to their cardinal tenet of justification by faith in contrast to attaining salvation by accruing merit through good works. It is significant that cognates of this Greek-rooted word have been used without interruption in this primary sense since the sixteenth century in a variety of languages including German, French, English, Swedish, Danish, Norwegian, and Dutch. In English it was sometimes used to refer to German Lutheranism in general in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. During the eighteenth century, however, a related, indigenous meaning became current in the British Isles in connection with so-called "revival" movements, especially those associated with the rise of Methodism. This stressed, as had the Reformers, the depravity of human nature and the consequent irrelevance of attempts to gain salvation through through one's own efforts. This usage continued in the nineteenth century, when members of Low Church party in the Church of England were sometimes referred to as "the Evangelicals". North of the border, meanwhile, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the Church of Scotland was divided into the "Evangelical" and "Moderate" parties. The former group, emphasising the Calvinist heritage of the church which it believed was being diluted, seceded in 1843 to form the Free Church of Scotland. A highly visible international thread was added to the warp and woof of this confused semantic tapestry in 1846 when

some 800 delegates representing a wide array of fifty British, European, and North American Protestant denominations convened in London and expressed their opposition to the Oxford Movement, which sought to emphasise the Roman Catholic tradition underlying Anglicanism and seemingly threatened religious progress in various quarters abroad, by organising the Evangelical Alliance. This organisation exercised considerable influence internationally for several decades, keeping its name before the eyes of both English-speaking Protestants and those who used other languages. In short, the term "evangelical" was not by any means restricted to any one denomination or theological direction in Britain or in countries whose religious life British Protestantism influenced. Nor did the various usages simply succeed one another; in general older ones were retained while new ones were added, thus creating the potential for increasing theological confusion by planting even more hedges in the semantic maze.⁵⁴

These post-Reformation usages began to spread across the North Atlantic during the seventeenth century and entered the common religious vocabulary of Anglophone Canada and what would become the United States of America. In many cases, however, they remained quite imprecise and undefined. From time to time North Americans sought to reduce the resulting confusion. During the nineteenth century the American Presbyterian clergyman Robert Baird (1798-1863) wrote a book in which he sought to explain to European readers the denominational pluralism of his country. In that volume he sorted denominations and other religious - and anti-religious - groups into two broad camps. The first he called "the evangelical churches", a sheepfold further divided into both Calvinistic and Arminian pens and encompassing many conventional Protestant bodies. The goats, in Baird's view, belonged in the paddock of "the non-evangelical denominations", or "sects that either renounce, or fail faithfully to exhibit the fundamental and saving truths of the Gospel". This motley array was so variegated as to denude the term "non-evangelical" of any meaning it otherwise may have had, including *inter alia* Roman Catholics, Jews, Mormons, Unitarians, atheists, deists, and Fourierists.⁵⁵

During the Second World War, in the wake of the theological controversies which had rocked many American denominations for more

than two decades, diverse Protestant leaders succeeded in forging an unlikely coalition of "fundamentalists" (itself a highly imprecise and originally journalistic term which had become burdened with unsavory connotations), Pentecostals, and others called the "National Association of Evangelicals". Since its founding in 1942, the NAE, perhaps more than any other para-church organisation or any denomination, has influenced use of the term "evangelical" in the United States of America and Canada, and, it would seem, in many other Anglophone countries. Theologically this is questionable and has caused endless confusion as to how inclusively the word should be employed. Nevertheless, through vigorous foreign missionary programmes, use of global print and broadcast media, and other means, Christians associated with the NAE, and like-minded believers without any official ties to it, have gained enormous influence throughout much of the world and thereby propagated a loose, twentieth-century usage of the term "evangelical" which is often at variance with primary Reformation definitions. In many countries today, it is therefore impossible to know immediately whether a person who is identified merely as an "evangelical" espouses essentially a Lutheran, Calvinist, Arminian, Pentecostal, or other position on the pivotal doctrine of justification, practices believers' or paedobaptism, adheres to a certain understanding of the Eucharist, holds a particular view of the place of the *charismata* in the modern church, advocates or discourages close co-operation with churches different from his or her own, and so on. For that matter, even in their view and use of the Bible self-declared "evangelicals" differ noticeably; the stereotype of them as anti-intellectual folk who are quick to impose literal interpretations on virtually every passage of Scripture usually does not survive close examination of their hermeneutics.⁵⁶ Inevitably, their exegesis consequently yields different results. As American theologian Robert K. Johnston wrote in 1979, "That evangelicals, all claiming a common Biblical norm, are reaching contradictory theological formulations on many of the major issues they are addressing suggests the problematic nature of their present understanding of theological interpretation. To argue that the Bible is authoritative, but to be unable to come to anything like agreement on what it says (even with those who share an evangelical commitment), is self-defeating".⁵⁷

Within the realm of Christian ethics, there is thus no consensus among "evangelicals" on such basic matters as *a priori* commitment to deontological as opposed to teleological ethics (although in many quarters the former, in the form of Biblical prescription, is simply assumed to be the only kind of Christian ethics), the use of the Old Testament Law, the public role of the individual Christian and the church in religiously pluralistic societies, and the nature of church-state relations. Small wonder, then, that endless debates, many of them quite fruitless, often characterise discussions of such basic issues as military conscription, race relations, economic and political oppression, the relevance of Christian ethics to the abuse of the environment, capital punishment, and birth control, to name but a few.

Adding to the confusion, self-styled "evangelical" denominations have themselves undergone theological evolution, so that even the presence of that label attached to a particular religious group representing a well-established tradition does not necessarily identify its theological contents. This is perhaps most evident in international Lutheranism, which in some quarters bears scant resemblance in the late twentieth century to the confessional orthodoxy of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Conservative dissatisfaction with alleged departures from orthodoxy has spawned numerous neo-Lutheran denominations and other groups, some of which claim to be the real heirs of Reformation evangelicalism. In Germanophone circles, this has given rise to the term *evangelikal* in contradistinction to the traditional, and now more inclusive, word *evangelisch*. The former term has also gained currency in Swiss and German Reformed circles.

From time to time theologians and others in various Anglophone countries have sought to add some method to the semantic madness by nuancing the overarching category. The eminent American church historian Mark A. Noll, for instance, sought to distinguish between Reformed and Lutheran evangelicals on the one hand and "American evangelicals" on the other in a pair of articles published in the 1980s.⁵⁸ Even these attempts to nuance the categories, however, underscore their overall conceptual inadequacy and illustrate the difficulty of transcending modern usages in historical analysis. In the latter essay, Noll defined "American evangelicals" as "the post-fundamentalist, largely northern and white Protestant conservatives who have emerged

as a quasi-denominational entity in the years since the Depression".⁵⁹ He repeatedly squared the circle, however, by subsequently applying that term to such eighteenth and nineteenth-century churchmen as John Witherspoon and Timothy Dwight and asserting that "American evangelicals succeeded in becoming the main architects of nineteenth-century American life".⁶⁰ George Marsden, another noted historian of Protestantism in the United States, sought in 1984 to clarify to North American readers the nature of "the evangelical denomination". He conceded that providing a conceptual framework for this phenomenon was a great challenge and that "one might wonder why evangelicalism is ever regarded as a unified entity at all". Marsden did not abandon the word, however, which he described as being "surrounded by a haze of vagueness and confusion", choosing instead to cut through the fog. Writing in very general terms, he declared that "evangelicalism" could be thought of as a unity in that it "designates a grouping of Christians who fit a certain definition", despite the presence of obvious differences which make those believers a pluralistic lot. Moreover, shared goals and agendas provided some basis of common ground amongst otherwise diverse Christians. Finally, particularly in terms of membership in para-church organisations, many of them bearing the "evangelical" label, rounded out the conceptual unity of the phenomenon. Marsden listed such characteristics as emphasis on the authority of the Bible, salvation through individual trust in Christ, the centrality of evangelism and missions, and the importance of a spiritually transformed life as the general hallmarks of Christians in this broad camp.⁶¹ Writing chiefly for South African readers, John W. de Gruchy published an article in 1978 in which he differentiated between "Evangelical Protestantism", "Evangelical Pietism", "Evangelical Fundamentalism", "Conservative Evangelicalism", and "Radical Evangelicalism", the last of which had his greatest sympathy because of its emphasis on social reform. By his own admission, de Gruchy's overlapping categories apply more readily to the Protestantism of the United States than that of his own country, although he makes clear his belief that "South African history has been profoundly shaped by Evangelical Christianity".⁶²

These attempts to sort out varieties of "evangelicalism" are all imperfect and quite vulnerable, but in any case they testify to

international scholarly realisation that the term is in itself imprecise and that it needs further definition if it is to be used responsibly. In Walker's article, however, there is no such definition and little evidence of understanding how confusing and self-contradictory it can be.

Walker's failure to define "support" and "favour" is also consequential for his argument, probably more so than may initially seem to be the case. When he writes about "support of apartheid", one does not always know whether he means active, explicit support, *i.e.* advocacy of racial separation, or, near the other extreme, tacit acceptance of it and the holding social and political views which in effect contribute to a climate which allows the *status quo* in South Africa to continue virtually unhindered. This distinction is particularly crucial because if one examines evidence pertaining to the social ethics, articulated or otherwise, of South Africans who fit one or more of the definitions used internationally for "evangelical", one can find innumerable examples of both. As we shall see in the present study, the study of Baptists past and present yields many shadings across this spectrum. Instead of recognising the inherent pluralism of the phenomenon, Walker papers over significant differences and divisions by referring obliquely to "the evangelical scene", "the South African evangelical scene", "the evangelical community", "the evangelical popularity chart", and "evangelical conservatism". Again and again he makes statements which suggest a homogeneity or at least a unity of "evangelicals" or "the evangelicals".

This is only one of the principal weaknesses in Walker's section on "Evangelical Support of Apartheid". The pages which comprise this portion of his article are to a great extent chronologically contradictory. Walker writes in the present tense to argue that many Christians in South Africa and elsewhere in one way or another contribute to the maintenance of racial separation in that country. Most of the evidence he adduces to undergird this contention, however, dates from the 1960s and 1970s, and much of it is quite strained and otherwise weak. For example, Walker cites Desmond Tutu, of all people, as an authority on South African evangelicals to support his belief that these Christians tend "not to become embroiled in political activity". His more empirical evidence, all of it of a very

general character, is dated and problematical in various ways. He devotes a paragraph to arguing that there is a "natural affinity between conservative theology and [conservative] politics" but cites as his only proof of this a study done approximately twenty years earlier by the Polish-American psychologist Milton Rokeach. Even this Walker has third-hand, having found it referred to by the American sociologist of religion David Moberg in a book by the British theologian John Stott. Further diminishing its cogency, Walker admits that Moberg described "the storm of protest" over the "faulty" methodology of Rokeach's study but nevertheless insists that his findings should not be ignored.⁶³ One is left wondering why not.

Seeking to make the same point specifically with regard to South Africa, Walker cites a study by Robert Buis of the attitudes of white Christians of three denominational affiliations towards blacks, published in 1975. This investigation found that members of the Dutch Reformed Church had the most negative attitudes and Roman Catholics the least negative, with Presbyterians lying in between. On the basis of this, Walker concludes that religious factors are influential in determining racial attitudes and that "conservative theology is amenable to conservative politics". Buis' study, he believes, "confirms" his hypothesis that "the evangelical community is one which is conservative in its general political character, whose approach has the overall effect of supporting the present system of government". This is immediately illogical, however, partly because the inductive research on which the study rests is quite insufficient to cover Walker's far-reaching conclusion. For that matter, it would even be of questionable value as evidence to support a more nuanced hypothesis that conservative theology tends to bolster conservative politics. As presented by Walker, the case does not prove that theologically the Dutch Reformed Church is more conservative than the Presbyterian Church, although that might be demonstrable on the basis of other evidence. On the other hand, the logic of the argument necessitates regarding Roman Catholic theology as liberal, which would be a most strange assumption to make in an empirical argument, especially during the pontificate of John Paul II. No less seriously, Walker's employment of the Buis experiment is methodologically unsound, because it does not isolate the religious factor as determinative or

separate it from cultural factors. Members of the three cited denominations tend to differ significantly from each other in terms of culture. Had Buis sampled only, say, a reasonably large number of unmarried, urban Afrikaans women in South Africa between the ages of thirty and forty-five years with university educations who somehow happened to belong to Dutch Reformed, Presbyterian, and Roman Catholic churches, and found a significant correlation between racial views and religious affiliation, it would probably be reasonable to infer that a cause and effect relationship exists between the two, although which is cause and which is effect might be an open question.⁶⁴

Not content to rely exclusively on the dated studies of South African and foreign scholars, Walker marshalls his own observations in support of his case. "Experience teaches us that evangelicals generally tend to be socially and politically conservative", he declares. "This is an obvious conclusion for those well acquainted with the evangelical scene".⁶⁵ This is subjective induction at its worst. It also contradicts some studies of the political and social views of self-styled "evangelicals" and belies the social engagement of many "evangelicals" in both the nineteenth century and more recent times. There is now a wealth of scholarly literature which testifies to the extensive social and political activism of self-styled "evangelicals". Much of this reflects nineteenth and twentieth-century British and American religious history. As Boyd Hilton has argued cogently in his masterful study, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795-1865*,⁶⁶ various kinds of Britons who bore the "evangelical" stamp held differing political views. Some were outspoken guardians of the *status quo* and would thus fit Walker's theory. Others, however, were prominent social reformers. William Wilberforce, for example, who in addition to everything else was a noted millenarian, is best remembered for his decisive role in the abolition of slavery from the British Empire. Anthony Shaftesbury, the acknowledged leader of the "evangelical" movement in the Church of England, supported the repeal of the Corn Laws which raised the cost of living for the impoverished and favoured the political emancipation of Roman Catholics. He may be best remembered for sponsoring laws for the protection of labour. The reforms he advocated in this regard appear moderate when viewed from a much later time, but in

Shaftesbury's own day they were very progressive. As we shall see in the immediately following chapter, during the Victorian era many people in British Nonconformist circles also combined conservative theology with liberal politics.

Turning to the North American scene, in his incisive if arguably overdrawn survey, *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage*, published in 1976, Donald Dayton described the leading roles which evangelicals had played in campaigns for women's suffrage, the abolition of slavery, and other reforms.⁶⁷ Timothy L. Smith found much of the background of the "Social Gospel" in nineteenth-century evangelical holiness movements.⁶⁸ Norris Magnuson explored "evangelical social work" in American slums during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁶⁹ One could go on and on. It is true that after about 1920, owing to reactions against both the "Social Gospel", which was associated to some extent with Protestant liberalism, and the repercussions of the Bolshevik Revolution, many conservative Protestants in the United States and elsewhere retreated into a defensive shell of political noninvolvement or became active in conservative causes. During the 1960s, however, there began a partial reversal of this in the direction of participation in new reform movements, such as the civil rights campaign, efforts to end American military involvement in Southeast Asia, and actions on behalf of the world's hungry and impoverished. It was hardly coincidental that such Christian magazines of social and political protest as *Sojourners*, *The Reformed Journal*, and *The Other Side* originated during the 1960s and 1970s, much to the consternation of many politically conservative "evangelicals" who adhered to positions which in some quarters had earlier been taken for granted as natural expressions of Christian ethics.

The rise of the "Religious Right" as a powerful force in American politics beginning in the late 1970s was a major if not necessarily long-lived phenomenon, and it would be incorrect to exaggerate the extent to which "evangelicals" of various denominational and theological types became proponents of liberal reform. Yet there is evidence that by the mid-1980s the "evangelical" label could no longer be perceived as merely the religious veneer on political and social conservatism. American Christians who identified themselves as such occupied many positions on the political spectrum and took varying

positions on the ethical issues of their time.⁷⁰ Political scientists Stuart Rothenberg and Frank Newport found in 1984 in their study of *The Evangelical Voter* that considerably more identified themselves as Democrats than Republicans and generalised that on the whole evangelicals were "a swing constituency with a Democratic bias" and a "lack of coherence and consistency on some issues".⁷¹ A public opinion poll which the self-styled "evangelical" magazine *Christianity Today* in 1988 found that the majority of respondents favoured ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment (a favourite cause of feminists and liberals generally) which would have outlawed gender discrimination on a nation-wide basis), increased federal intervention in preserving the environment, and more disarmament treaties with the Soviet Union. To be sure, on some issues, such as abortion, respondents toed the conservative line.⁷²

Obviously it would be simplistic to assume that South African Christians whose theologies resembled those of their counterparts in the United States of America or elsewhere would manifest analogous political views. Yet Walker, by his own account, is seeking to deal with "evangelicalism" as a world-wide phenomenon, so it hardly seems out of line to test his generalisations and the representativeness of his personal observations with data from both South Africa and abroad. As we shall see in the present study, amongst South African Baptists it is not true that conservative theology automatically spawns conservative politics or a tendency to shun political involvement and avoid Christian social ethical issues, as Kretzschmar argues. Walker might have placed his argument on more solid ground, although he probably would have been compelled to alter his generalisations considerably, had he engaged in comparative studies of "evangelicals" on questions of race relations in South Africa, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and possibly other countries. One could, for example, ask whether British and Anglophone South African Baptists have reacted similarly towards increasing interaction with Africans or people of African ancestry. One could also compare the responses of the Dutch Reformed denominations in South Africa with the corresponding churches in the United States and Canada. At least such an approach would have afforded Walker the opportunity to test whether the behaviour of the Christians whom he seeks to describe

can be traced consistently to their religious affiliation or whether secular factors have been determinative.

After attempting to prove on the basis of dated and otherwise problem-ridden evidence that there has been considerable "Evangelical Support of Apartheid", Walker admits that he has painted "an incomplete picture" and seeks to give "a balanced perspective" by also describing "Evangelical Rejection of Apartheid". This somewhat stronger section generally rests on more recent material, such as the birth of the National Initiative for Reconciliation, the Baptist Union's open letter to P.W. Botha in 1985, and the issuing of the statement *Evangelical Witness in South Africa* in 1986. Particularly this "radical" declaration Walker sees as evidence of black African disillusionment with "evangelicalism's normal identification with the status quo", although which "status quo" he does not specify. To some extent this does not complement the earlier section or help Walker to paint a balanced portrait of a complex issue but actually contradicts his previous generalisations. Eager to emphasise this dissatisfaction, Walker uncritically reproduces an unqualified excerpt from that document in which the drafters declared that "we realized that our theology was influenced by American and European missionaries with political, social and class interests which were contrary or even hostile to both the spiritual and social needs of our people in this country". Which missionaries, which theology, and which needs are meant in this indictment remains unclear. Nearly as obliquely, *Evangelical Witness in South Africa* takes to task "people who claim to be Christians, especially who claim to be 'born again'".⁷³ Generalisations of this sort, in other words, burden this section of Walker's article nearly as much as other kinds diminished the cogency of his segment on "Evangelical Support of Apartheid".

In his third main section, Walker seeks "to look at evangelicalism itself" and discern how racism "can be twisted from its pure origins and made to serve an alien and evil system". He finds one cause in the "rigid biblicism" which characterises "many evangelicals" and ostensibly hinders them from becoming more involved in what he loosely terms "social activity". If this is so, however, one might wonder why in fact many "evangelicals" have in fact become social reformers and, moreover, why devotion to and literal interpretation of Biblical

texts would not compel more South Africans to strive energetically for greater racial justice in their society. Why, for example, have some Christians turned more readily to Romans 13 than to Amos 5 when searching for Scriptural passages to justify preconceived notions about the prerogative of the state? Walker correctly believes that a hermeneutical problem is involved, but he does not appear to have pinpointed it. The difficulty would seem to entail *inter alia* a tendency to fall into eisegesis reflecting a desire to justify social status on the basis of texts which seem to fit that quest for worldly justification while ignoring others which contradict it. In any case, as one example of this tendency, Walker focuses on the propensity of white Protestants in South Africa to appeal to Romans 13 as an argument not to raise a prophetic voice against the government and quotes a piece by the present writer in *Christianity Today* in this regard. However flattering that may be, surely such a significant point calls for far more documentation than a quotation from an article by a foreign observer. A similar need for greater evidence is required to support Walker's belief that because of this simplistic use of Romans 13 "conservative evangelicals appear to be favoured in South Africa's corridors of power". Walker also cites preoccupation with doctrinal soundness at the expense of "orthopraxis", particularist soteriology with its emphasis on the salvation of individual souls and a concomitant neglect of other things which need the healing of the Gospel, an overemphasis on evangelism at the expense of other aspects of missionary work, and the stress which many "evangelicals" place on millenarian eschatology and the immanent end of the world as factors which inhibit a commitment to Christian social ethics. Walker concludes his essay with a call "to turn from dualistic towards holistic emphases" in which the spiritual salvation of individuals will no longer be the nearly exclusive concern of many white Protestants in South Africa.⁷⁴ In his brief discussion of these factors, however, he again adduces a small number of examples which, though generally plausible, are quite imprecise with regard to application to specific persons, denominations, or other groups, do not cover Walker's overarching allegation or explain why other "evangelicals", both in South Africa and elsewhere, have become active in social ethics in ways which counter his argument.

Conspicuously absent from Walker's article, when read through the eyes of one educated in Christian ethics, is any explicit discussion of meta-ethics. He comes close in his discussion of the "rigid biblicism" which he perceives in many quarters. One suspects, however, that had Walker sought out statements on metaethics by the people whom he criticises for ostensibly supporting or favouring apartheid, he may have been able to shed significant light on the topic. If, for example, South African white Protestants who have advocated a continuation of strict legal separation by law do so on the basis of deontological principles and cite New Testament texts to bolster their case, then it seems relevant to ask why other believers in South Africa and elsewhere who claim to be operating from the same metaethical presuppositions take different positions. For that matter, if Walker tried without success to find noteworthy discussions of Christian ethics as such with regard to this perennial issue, that in itself may have been an indication of the theological inadequacy or irrelevance which he perceives but does not document well.

In short, Walker succeeds in asking a number of relevant questions pertaining to the relationship between theology and social ethics, but he does not really answer them. He presents practically no firm evidence (as opposed to unsubstantiated and unexplained accusations) of any person's, denomination's, or other religious group's theological justification of racial separation, and none at all for recent years. This is particularly strange because a wealth of such evidence exists practically at arm's length in major South African academic libraries, and not only with regard to the various Dutch Reformed churches. Indeed, Walker could have struck paydirt in the lode of his own denomination's recent history, which, however, he seems reluctant to mine, apart from his consideration of its open letter to Botha in 1985. But that task is left to us.

Endnotes

1. John W. de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, and Cape Town: David Philip, 1979), p. 87. In a pertinent article, "The Great Evangelical Reversal. South African Reflections" (*Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, no. 24 [1978], pp. 45-57), de Gruchy had expressed his belief that "many white Evangelicals in South Africa" had become aware of the nation's social ills but added that "the urgency of our situation requires a greater evangelical awareness of and response to them" than he perceived. De Gruchy did not, however, deal explicitly with Baptists in this nondenominational essay.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 61, 247 n.18.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 120-122, 253 n.23.
4. Marjorie Hope and James Young, *The South African Churches in a Revolutionary Situation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1981), pp. 21, 57.
5. Charles Villa-Vicencio, *Trapped in Apartheid: A Socio-Theological History of the English-Speaking Churches* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, and Cape Town: David Philip, 1988), p. 17.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
8. H.J. Batts, *The Story of a 100 Years, 1820-1920, Being the History of the Baptist Church in South Africa* (Cape Town: T.Maskew Miller, n.d.).
9. Sydney Hudson-Reed, *By Water and Fire 1820-1877: An account of Baptist Beginnings in Southern Africa, 1820-1877* (n.p., South African Baptist Press, 1970).
10. William Davies, *A Brief Memoir of Mrs Charlotte Davies* (Grahamstown: Meurant & Godlonton, 1838), p. 75, quoted in S. Hudson-Reed, "Baptist Beginnings in South Africa 1820-1877", in Sydney Hudson-Reed (ed.), *Together for a Century* (Pietermaritzburg: South African Baptist Historical Society, n.d.), pp. 14-16.
11. John N. Jonsson, "Baptist Theological Outlook", in Hudson-Reed (ed.), *Together for a Century*, pp. 29-57.
12. Christopher W. Parnell, "'The Detailed History'", in Hudson-Reed, *Together for a Century*, pp. 82-84, 101-104, 127-131.
13. Interview with Louise Kretzschmar, Johannesburg, 16 March 1991.

14. Louise Kretzschmar, "Pietism, Politics and Mission: An Examination of the Views and Activities of South African Baptists", *Missionalia*, XVII, no. 2 (August 1989), p. 103.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 103-104.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 104.
17. John W. de Gruchy, "The Great Evangelical Reversal", *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, no. 24 (September 1978), pp. 45-57.
18. James R. Coggins, "A Short Confession of Hans de Ries: Union and Separation in Early Seventeenth-century Holland", *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, LX, no. 2 (April 1986), pp. 128-138.
19. Kretzschmar, "Pietism, Politics and Mission: An Examination of the Views and Activities of South African Baptists", p. 104.
20. Lonnie D. Kliever, "General Baptist Origins: The Question of Anabaptist Influence", *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, XXXVI, no. 4 (October 1962), pp. 291-321.
21. Glen H. Stassen, "Anabaptist Influence in the Origin of the Particular Baptists", *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, XXXVI, no. 4 (October 1962), pp. 322-348.
22. Stephen Brachlow, "Puritan Theology and General Baptist Origins", *The Baptist Quarterly*, XXXI, no. 4 (October 1985), p. 179.
23. William R. Estep, Jr., "On the Origins of English Baptists", *Baptist History and Heritage*, XXII, no. 2 (April 1987), pp. 19, 23.
24. L. Kretzschmar, "The Neglected Heritage: An Examination of the Anabaptist Roots of the South African Baptist Churches", *Studia Historicae Ecclesiasticae*, XVI, no. 2 (1990), pp. 138-144.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 144-147.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 138.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 155.
28. *Ibid.*, pp. 147-152.
29. *Ibid.*, 152-153.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 153.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 156.
32. Ian Sellers, "Edwardians, Anabaptists and the Problem of Baptist Origins", *The Baptist Quarterly*, XXIX, no. 3 (July 1981), pp. 97-112.
33. Kretzschmar, "Pietism, Politics and Mission: An Examination of the Views and Activities of South African Baptists", p. 104.

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 112-113.
35. *Ibid.*, pp. 106-107.
36. *Ibid.*, pp. 106-107.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 106.
38. *Ibid.*, pp. 105-106.
39. *Ibid.*, pp. 108-109.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 109.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 110.
42. *Ibid.*, pp. 113-114.
43. Louise Kretzschmar, "A Theology of Dominance - an Alternative History of the South African Baptist Union", in Des Hoffmeister and Brian J. Gurney (eds.), *The Barkly West National Awareness Workshop* (Johannesburg: The Awareness Campaign Committee of the Baptist Convention of Southern Africa, 1990), pp. 24, 26.
44. *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.
45. *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28.
46. *Ibid.*, pp. 28, 30 n. 17.
47. *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.
48. *Ibid.*, pp. 30, 32 n.29.
49. When interviewed in Johannesburg on 16 March 1991, Kretzschmar indicated that she would have signed the *Kairos Document* "with reservations" had she been given an opportunity to do so, which her domicile in the Transkei in 1985 prevented.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
52. Interview with David Walker, Pietermaritzburg, 5 March 1991.
53. David Walker, "Evangelicals and Apartheid. An Inquiry Into Some Predispositions", *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, no. 67 (June 1989), p. 46.
54. For an incisive discussion of these usages in the British Isles, see most conveniently the entry "Evangelical" in the *Oxford English Dictionary*.
55. Henry Warner Bowden (ed.), Robert Baird, *Religion in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970 [1856]), pp. 209-275.

56. An incisive treatment of the development of intellectual competence amongst "evangelicals" in recent decades is Mark A. Noll, "Evangelicals and the Study of the Bible", in George Marsden (ed.), *Evangelicalism and Modern America* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984), pp. 103-121.
57. Robert K. Johnston, *Evangelicals at an Impasse: Biblical Authority in Perspective* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979), vii-viii.
58. Mark A. Noll, "Children of the Reformation in a Brave New World: Why 'American Evangelicals' Differ from 'Lutheran Evangelicals'", *Dialog*, XXIV, no. 3 (Summer 1985), pp. 176-180; Mark Noll, "Evangelicals and Reformed: Two Streams, One Source", *The Reformed Journal*, XXXI, no. 4 (April 1981), pp. 8-14.
59. Noll seeks to flesh out his definition by identifying such "evangelical" institutions as Wheaton, Westmont, and Gordon colleges as members of the Christian College Coalition; see "Children of the Reformation in a Brave New World", p. 176. In fact, they belong to the related Christian College Consortium.
60. *Ibid.*, pp. 176, 178.
61. George Marsden, "The Evangelical Denomination", in Marsden (ed.), *Evangelicalism in Modern America*, vii-xix.
62. John W. de Gruchy, "The Great Evangelical Reversal. South African Reflections", *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, no. 24 (September 1978), pp. 45-57.
63. Walker, "Evangelicals and Apartheid. An Inquiry Into Some Predispositions", pp. 46-47.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
66. Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795-1865* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).
67. New York: Harper & Row, 1976.
68. Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1957).
69. Norris Magnuson, *Salvation in the Slums: Evangelical Social Work, 1865-1920* (Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1977).
70. For a convenient and competent discussion of this development of political pluralism in the evangelical ranks, see Richard V. Pierard, "The New Religious Right in American Politics" in Marsden (ed.), *Evangelicalism and Modern America*, pp. 161-174, 206-212.

71. "A Study Finds No Connection Between Christian Beliefs and Political Party Affiliation", *Christianity Today*, XXVIII, no. 18 (14 December 1984), pp. 61-62; Stuart Rothenberg and Frank Newport, *The Evangelical Voter: Religion and Politics in America* (Washington, D.C.: Free Congress Research, 1984).
72. "CT Poll: What Do Christians Want from the Candidates?" *Christianity Today*, XXXII, no. 9 (17 June 1988), pp. 50-51.
73. *Ibid.*, pp. 49-52.
74. *Ibid.*, pp. 53-61.

CHAPTER III

ETHICS IN A BRITISH COLONIAL CONTEXT

Introduction

The earliest Baptist churches in southern Africa were born in a British colonial setting beginning during the 1820s, and for many years following its founding in 1877 the Baptist Union of South Africa was a predominantly imperial denomination which both manifested its British roots and clung tenaciously to its ethnic heritage. These factors influenced the stances which the Baptist Union as a whole and many of its ministers and prominent laymen took on public issues both before and after the constituting of the Union of South Africa in 1910, which officially ended the colonial status of Natal and the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope and also incorporated the former Orange Free State and the South African Republic into the new country. In terms of social ethics, these Christians did not always mirror prevailing Baptist positions in Britain (though often they did), but even when South African Baptists plied an independent course they often did so as bearers of an English Nonconformist legacy which shaped both their religious and their secular lives. Going beyond that particular factor which helped to determine their behaviour, however, their environment as relatively privileged British settlers surrounded by an overwhelming majority of indigenous people in the African subcontinent also left its unmistakeable stamp. Their colonial surroundings, in other words, influenced the axiology they had inherited from their British background and, consequently, their ethics.

One must make this preliminary judgement cautiously, however, for at least two reasons. First, for much of the nineteenth century little reliable source material exists to illuminate Baptist history and thought in the region. Secondly, as would often be the case after 1900 when pertinent written sources exist in abundance, Baptist commentators left few hints of how they arrived at recorded positions on public questions. As remarked in the Preface, they frequently made their pronouncements on such matters as race relations in Johannesburg or

the Second Anglo-Boer War without elucidating their reasoning with even a single Biblical reference. This not only calls into question oft-repeated generalisations about Baptists being Biblical deontologists but also raises the question whether those members of the denomination in southern Africa who shaped opinion in it and spoke on its behalf based their ethics less on Scriptural prescription than on ethnic and loyalties or other non-theological factors. A conclusive answer to that fundamental question may never be possible to formulate. In the present chapter, however, we shall consider it implicitly by examining the origins of the Baptist Union in its colonial milieu, consider some of the positions which its annual assembly and the editors of its periodical took on current issues, and, in some cases, compare these stances with what Baptists in the United Kingdom were saying about the same or corresponding matters.

The Birth of a Colonial Denomination

The early history of Baptists in southern Africa has never been comprehensively narrated; the sparsity of pertinent sources makes comprehensiveness virtually impossible. Convenient sketches exist in some of the works of Sydney Hudson-Reed and his colleagues, however, rendering a more detailed consideration of the formative period superfluous here.¹ For our purposes, it is sufficient to provide a historical skeleton indicating the birth of the Baptist Union of South Africa and the British colonial environment in which it was conceived and spent its formative years, pointing to factors which appear to have conditioned the social ethics of its leaders.

In brief, a small number of Baptists were present amongst the thousands of early British immigrants who settled in the eastern regions of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope during the 1820s. For more than a decade the former lacked a minister of their own persuasion but nevertheless appear to have worshipped fairly regularly in lay-led services at scattered locations, most notably at Grahamstown, then the second largest British municipality in the colony. In the early 1830s, however, the Baptist Missionary Society commissioned William Davies, an ordained pastor, to serve the church

at Grahamstown. He was thus the first Baptist clergyman to minister officially in southern Africa. Davies died within a few years, but not before helping to expand the organised Baptist presence in the region and helping to place it on a permanent if in places cracked foundation approximately four decades before the Baptist Union was constituted. That event took place on a very modest scale in Grahamstown in 1877. Initially it encompassed only three Anglophone congregations, viz. those at Grahamstown, Port Elizabeth, and Alice.

The role of the "Executive", the administrative leadership of the Baptist Union, in social ethics came under severe criticism by conservative members of the denomination during the 1980s. Similarly, disgruntled Baptists also questioned the propriety of the Baptist Union's annual assembly making pronouncements on public matters and insisted that this lay outside its declared purpose. It is therefore pertinent to examine briefly the initial purpose of that body. The constitution and bye-laws adopted in 1877 stipulated only two duties of the Executive, namely to administer the Baptist Union's funds and to prepare an annual report of the denomination's proceedings. The five "objects" of the Baptist Union included very little of a specific nature about ethics. Indeed, the only one of these which touched on public matters was a grandiose statement that the Baptist Union existed "to maintain the right of all men everywhere to freedom from legal disadvantage in matters purely religious".² The skeletal denominational structure, in other words, was intended to serve the co-operative interests of the diffuse Baptist congregations, not to influence public policies. The constitution and bye-laws would undergo several amendments, but only in the late 1980s were the parameters of the Executive's prerogative in speaking for the denomination on public matters specified, and even then some members contended that the leadership of the denomination did not have any legitimate role in this regard, as we shall see much later in the present study.

Numerically the Baptist Union grew rapidly during the last few decades of the nineteenth century. In 1881 its official membership numbered 928; by 1894 this figure had risen to 2 688.³ It remained a thoroughly white and predominantly English-speaking denomination during this period. This was a matter of concern to at least some of its leaders. In 1883 the president, Harry J. Batts, noted with disdain that

"the operations of our Union have thus far been confined to work among the European population, and nothing has been attempted for the dusky aborigines of the country".⁴ Three years later one of his successors, T.H. Grocott, voiced the same concern in similarly condescending terms characteristic of the British colonial mentality of that era: "While speaking of civilizing and Christianizing the heathen, I may remark that, up to the present time, our Union has not attempted to extend its organization amongst the native races of this Colony".⁵ This state of affairs continued until 1892. That year delegates to the annual assembly voted unanimously to establish the South African Baptist Missionary Society. Its stated purpose was "the diffusion of the Gospel of the Grace of Jesus Christ among the aborigines of this country".⁶

The rhetoric surrounding the formation of the South African Baptist Missionary Society raises the seminal matter of prevailing attitudes in the denomination towards the indigenes of the Cape Colony and elsewhere in southern Africa at that time. Again, there is not enough evidence with which to paint a comprehensive portrait. Nevertheless, extensive remarks on the subject by some of the leaders of the Baptist Union have been preserved. Some of the most salient, and arguably representative, may have been the presidential address which George W. Cross, one of the most prominent Victorian Baptists in southern Africa, delivered in 1889, twenty-two years after arriving in the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope. Speaking in King William's Town, this erstwhile Englishman declared that "north of us and south, west and east are Kafirs, and the vast majority of them are heathen". Cross consciously rejected what he termed "the *Romantic View*" of the native Africans which idealised the "heathen" as "ironjointed, supple-sinewed, with nothing to do but hunt, and dance, and hurl his lances in the sun, while his passions have 'ample scope and breathing space'". He similarly rebuffed "Rash Philanthropy" which ostensibly perceived the African "as an unsophisticated child of nature, everywhere outwitted and oppressed by the white men. His territory is taken, and one by one his liberties are filched from him, and he is as a sheep dumb before his shearers, a victim led as a lamb to the slaughter". Instead of these mistaken views, Cross asserted with an equal propensity for generalisation that "the heathen as we know him

is not unsophisticated; he is anything but a dumb sufferer; and the rule of any civilized Government, or the service of almost any European master, confers more security and liberty on the native than he ever enjoyed under a chief of his own colour, and laws and customs of his own people". This Baptist parson's simplistic anthropology led him to make several poorly informed statements with deep ethical implications. "In these respects the heathen about us is infinitely better off than the poor of the vast cities at home", he declared. "Here he has 'ample scope and room enough'. His wages more than suffice for his simple needs. He may build his house as large as he pleases, with materials close at hand, and it will cost little but labour". Cross' comprehension of migratory African labour and the conditions under which impoverished Africans lived in cities failed him when he extended his argument: "He can accumulate cattle, and if he has been a steady seervant, the approach of old age finds him a wealthy man. If he has left rural life for service in our cities, and so entering more to the centre of civilization finds his needs multiplied, he wages are increased, and in any case they more than suffice for his wants". Cross sought to justify the social status of African labourers by comparing it with that of the ostensibly even more indigent working class of Britain: "Think of the sweaters' dens, where girls and women toil for 16 hours out of the 24, in rooms reeking with dirt and pestilence. Think of the land-grabbers and jerry-builders, who have filched away every breathing space and green thing from the poor, and thrown up their sheds which they name in mockery 'gardens'". To his mind, this absolved British colonials of any responsibility for the poverty of the Africans in their midst, because the principal criticism of their imperial behaviour towards these indigenes came from hypocrites in the United Kingdom whom Cross and other like-minded Baptists near the southern tip of the African continent could with some justification label hypocrites and thus discount their critiques. "When we hear these things from home it is no wonder that we resent the interference from England of many so-called philanthropists", he declared. Cross suggested that such individuals in the old country might do well to remember the words of Jesus, "Cease to oppress the poor at your own gates" and went so far as to accuse them of driving "to heathenism the children who by heritage are Christ's".⁷

Though blatantly an exponent of the British colonial mind in many respects, Cross was neither entirely disrespectful of the Nguni peoples nor uncritical of imperialism. Traditional African religion was, of course, anathema to this Christian. He declared that "the Heathenism about us is nothing short of diabolical in its *amaquetta* and *intonjani* rites; its *smelling out* and its *witch-craft*. It believes in an unseen power, but that power is wholly evil. A man has been known to murder a babe that he might anoint himself with its warm blood, and so qualify to practice [*sic*] witch-craft". Cross also believed that the treatment of women and the elderly in Xhosa society, dominated by certain masculine values, left much to be desired. He described how amongst migratory "Kafirs" able-bodied men carried virtually nothing while women and the aged were forced to serve as beasts of burden. "Dark and unlovely is the old age of a heathen mother", Cross concluded. "Ill-clad, underfed, o'erlaboured, the jest of the younger, undesired and uncared for. Oh! bitter are the dregs in her cup of life. Murdered babe and abandoned mother! The system that begets them is *devilish*". Nevertheless, this Englishman could declare in the same speech that "the Kafir is heroic in suffering and with mental faculties marvellously acute", traits which underscored "the native dignity of manhood, the Kafir being as we have said a man".⁸

Cross was not so naive as to believe that colonialism was in itself a panacea for the perceived indigenous ills of African society in the Eastern Cape. As a colonialist and pastor of a colonial church, he took a generally positive attitude towards the imperialist enterprise in general, finding it an opportunity for poverty-stricken Britons to improve their worldly lot. "The new settler sees the possibility of rising, and of rising rapidly; vistas of boundless wealth open before him; he sees men, just such as himself, becoming rich beyond the dreams of avarice", Cross declared without reserve. "To prosper and rise in the social scale becomes his laudable ambition". But these ostensibly pious immigrants, when they came into contact with African religion, tended to lose their own moral strictures and focus all their attention on the acquisition of wealth. Consequently, "he foreswears religion, or changes his church for one that will introduce him into a higher social circle, or he joins a congregation for the mere sake of his business interests. This, in too many instances, is the story of a

colonization". Cross was thus not optimistic about European civilisation inevitably exercising a beneficial influence on the Africans. He rejected the notion that European traders generally contributed to the advancement of indigenous peoples, declaring that in practice "trade goes with red clay as willingly as with cotton cloth, with guns as willingly as with ploughs, with brandy *rather than with books*. By the brandy and gin of Commerce Heathendom is set on fire of Hell". Predictably, Cross proclaimed that "the only force that is capable of conquering this foe [*i.e.* Heathendom] is a religious force". Foreshadowing what would become a prevailing attitude amongst white Baptists in South Africa, he reasoned that "the aim of the Law, having regard to public decency, may put down some of its grosser manifestations, but . . . the impotency of legislation stands confessed. You cannot make men moral by law".⁹

Without engaging in broad speculation, one can mention that during the early history of the Baptist Union it almost moved in a direction which could have had a great influence on its prophetic voice in social ethics. In 1880 a Baptist delegation visited the session of the Congregational Union at Grahamstown and discussed with the leadership of the latter denomination the prospect of merging these two predominantly British bodies. That the Baptists should take the initiative in this undoubtedly stemmed from the similar polity of the two denominations. The Congregationalist leaders and their Baptist guests did not agree on a comprehensive merger, but they quickly adopted a proposal which provided for the establishment of joint congregations wherever the number of either Baptists or Congregationalists was too small to justify the creation of separate churches. The Congregationalist churches approved this recommendation before the end of 1880.¹⁰ The Baptists failed to reach a consensus on the matter at their assembly in 1881, however, because some of the delegates rejected the idea as "impracticable" or even "impossible". This form of co-operation thus never developed between the two denominations.¹¹ It seems plausible that had a merger or other intimate relationship developed between the Baptists and Congregationalists, the latter, who included a much larger number of other than European, especially Coloured members, and who generally adopted more liberal positions on social ethical matters, would have

exercised considerable influence and led the merged denomination in a direction which the Baptist Union never took.

Not all the European Baptists in the Cape Colony at that time were of British stock, although it was they who not only dominated the Baptist Union numerically but also set the course and determined the ethnic loyalty of the neophyte denomination. By the 1870s there was also a small but noteworthy German Baptist element in the colony. These settlers owed their presence there in part to an immigration scheme of the late 1850s in which the British government allowed German soldiers who had fought in the Crimean War to participate and settle in the colony. The plan also attracted many German families, who soon outnumbered the military veterans in the Eastern Cape. Only five of these early German immigrants are known to have been Baptists. Nevertheless, they founded a small church in 1861 under the leadership of a stone mason and lay preacher named Carsten Langhein. Seven years later they received their first German Baptist pastor, Carl Hugo Gutsche, who conducted a very effective ministry and helped to build up several churches within a few years.¹² Eventually the German Baptists, who long remained a separate proto-denomination, aligned with the Baptist Union. Both before and after that merger, however, the Anglophone Baptists were unquestionably the normative group which supplied most of the denomination's leadership and eventually shaped its public statements and image.

The inclusion of other non-British ethnic churches also came only after the formation of the Baptist Union. Not until 1888 did an Afrikaans-speaking church, that at Sugar-loaf in the Orange Free State, join the wider fellowship. As indicated earlier, the South African Baptist Missionary Society, which eventually helped to gather many black congregations, came into being in 1892. Coloured Baptist churches also began only at a later time. Outreach to Indians in Natal was first undertaken early in the twentieth century. The Baptist Union, in other words, was a multicultural but nevertheless emphatically English denomination which well before the end of the nineteenth century encompassed congregations both in the British colonies of Natal and the Cape and in the Boer republics of the Orange Free State and the South African Republic.

It is not possible to know much about the social ethics of the Baptist Union during its first decade of two. For the first seventeen years of its existence it did not have a periodical, and the reports of its annual conventions are sparse for that early period. Other written sources are scattered and shed little light on positions the denomination took on public issues. Its monthly journal, *The South African Baptist*, initially appeared in 1894 and reveals a fair amount about the views of its early editors and other denominational leaders. How representative these churchmen were of the general membership, of course, is for all practical purposes impossible to ascertain. The only evidence of more widely held opinions is the resolutions which the Annual Assembly passed, and there is no assurance that those statements accurately reflected the majority of the members whom the delegates represented.

In any case, for the first few decades of South African Baptist history very little of a specific, documentable nature is known about relations between these immigrant Christians and the indigenous peoples in whose proximity they settled. The Baptists themselves do not appear to have recorded much about the matter, and there is virtually no independent testimony. William Davies left one pertinent account which may shed more light on his own perspective and prejudices than about race relations as such. In a defensive response to what he perceived as one-sided portrayals of colonial treatment of the African population of the Cape in the British press and churches during the 1830s, especially as depicted by Congregationalist John Philip of the London Missionary Society, Davies insisted that fairness had generally prevailed. "I understand that in our native land Christian sympathy is turned almost exclusively towards the native", he groused. "Every instance of suffering amongst them is repeated in doleful accent in the parlour, in the pulpit, and on the missionary platform". Davies thought this was an unfair caricature of actual conditions, because "nothing is said about the Poor Settlers, only 'that they are wicked christians': - nothing is said about our houses burnt, - nothing is said about our wives and our children driven to the bush in the dead of night to hide themselves from the point of the blood-stained assegai . . .". Instead of noting these and various other African atrocities which he described in lurid terms, British

commentators dwelt on "the supposed outrages which the Settlers have committed against the natives". Davies conceded that "now and then solitary acts of impropriety and injustice might have been committed", but he insisted that they had been magnified far out of proportion. As a result, he explained, "the Settlers, as a body have been blamed, yea, branded with infamy, as cruel, and blood-thirsty oppressors". Davies' own generalised assessment of these immigrants was that "they are as industrious, as honourable, as free from being guilty of rapine, plunder, and outrage against their neighbours, whether white or black, as any given number of men in England or anywhere else".¹³ This settlers' pastor skirted the underlying issue of the dispossession of indigenous land. Had his defensive statements on race relations been widely known amongst his parishioners, it might be possible to regard him as a fountainhead of an ongoing rhetorical tradition amongst South African Baptists. As they were not, however, the import of Davies' words lies chiefly in their illustrative value as examples of white defensiveness and the related inability to perceive, let alone deal with, fundamental issues of interethnic relations.

By the end of the nineteenth century the context of relations between British colonists and indigenous Africans had changed enormously in southern Africa. Such momentous events as the discovery of diamonds at Kimberley and gold at Johannesburg attracted large numbers of black labourers to those and other cities, where they came into much closer proximity with whites than previously had been the case. White entrepreneurs availed themselves of this seemingly inexhaustible supply of cheap labour to conduct their business. They employed various means of control, most notably the enactment of pass laws, to keep their labour force in check. Wages were abysmally low, and urban blacks consequently were compelled to live in squalid housing. Various other laws blatantly discriminated against this urban African proletariat. Rarely did the Baptist Union raise a prophetic voice against this discrimination and economic exploitation; neither, for that matter, did most other Christians, including many of the missionaries who began to conduct urban evangelisation during this period.

One partial exception to this general indictment was a resolution which the Baptist Union passed at its assembly in 1894 and which has

found a secure niche in the denomination's historiography. Delegates resolved "that this Union strongly condemns the recent wholesale flogging of natives in Johannesburg, for walking upon the pavements of streets, as an unjust, inhuman, unChristian and cruel procedure, and instructs that a copy of this resolution be sent to the President of the Transvaal Republic".¹⁴ Incidents such as those referred to had received considerable journalistic publicity in southern Africa and some in Britain and Europe as well and become symbolic of mistreatment of black Africans in the young City of Gold. The Baptist Union's resolution was among the first of a long if highly irregular sequence of generally ineffective public statements. It is noteworthy for at least two reasons which in effect served as precedents to subsequent resolutions. First, although it identified as "unChristian" the meting out of corporal punishment for merely walking on the pavement of a white-dominated city, it did not specify how such an action violated Christian principles. Presumably that seemed self-evident to the men who drafted the resolution. Secondly, it dealt in truncated fashion with a highly visible action but did not broach underlying issues, such as the wider question of the general economic exploitation of migratory labourers. Nothing in this resolution or most subsequent ones which the Baptist Union passed sought to apply explicitly Christian ethics or Christian anthropology to contemporary moral questions.

Over against this commendable if at the time almost unique episode in the Baptist history of southern Africa is the enthusiastic support which *The South African Baptist* lent the expansion of the British Empire in its rape of Matabeleland during the mid-1890s. In brief, relations between that country and white governments in southern Africa had gone through several phases since the second quarter of the nineteenth century, when Boers clashed with black indigenes in what is now the northern part of the Transvaal. In 1853, however, Chief Mzilikazi concluded treaties of friendship and mutual assistance with these European intruders, placing his people and territory in present-day Zimbabwe under the hegemony of the Boers. Nearly four decades of relative calm ended after British expansionist Cecil John Rhodes secured a charter from the British government which gave him nearly unlimited control of the area north of the Limpopo River. Aiming

to subject the Matabele to his authority, he used Leander Starr Jameson and a mercenary force to wrest control first of Mashonaland and in October 1893 of Matabeleland from their African residents and Chief Lobengula, who was killed in the hostilities. Rhodes' Chartered Company then became the *de facto* government of present-day Zimbabwe. The Matabele rebelled against this regime in 1896 and enjoyed a partial victory in their struggle for independence but were subsequently crushed by another mercenary force. Their tribal system was thus virtually destroyed.

The Baptist Union, like several other denominations and missionary societies, quickly perceived in this expansion of the British Empire a possible opportunity its recently founded South African Baptist Missionary Society to establish a field. By that time it had become relatively difficult to secure sites in either the British colonies of Natal and the Cape or in two Boer republics. At the Baptist assembly in March 1893, therefore, the delegates resolved "that an instruction be given to the Executive to take every opportunity of ascertaining the position of any places in Mashonaland where operations for the carrying on of Christian work may be begun and suitable sites secured".¹⁵ There is no record of discussion at that or any subsequent annual assembly of the morality of the British acquisition of yet another colony. To most of these beneficiaries of imperialism, the acquisition of yet another colony under Victorian hegemony does not appear to have posed an ethical problem.

The committee appointed in 1893 reported at the assembly the following year that it had secured from Rhodes a promise of three farms of 3 000 acres each as well as six stands in townships for mission churches and parsonages. In addition to these grants of land, Rhodes had personally contributed £100 towards the Baptist missionary cause and assured the committee that "liberal monetary support" would be forthcoming from the Chartered Company. The committee thus urged the assembly in 1894 to accept these grants and that "one of our number be sent to England in order to arouse an interest in this work, and, if possible, to obtain men and means to take up the work without delay". The Baptist Union approved these recommendations "provided that the conditions attending the gifts are such as we are able to comply with".¹⁶ By 1895 American Baptists co-operating with the South

African Baptist Missionary Society had launched its venture in Rhodesia by occupying stands in both Bulawayo and Salisbury and beginning to hold services of worship regularly in both towns. Trustees of the Baptist Union had also secured the title to a farm near Salisbury.¹⁷

Notwithstanding the ease with which the delegates to the assembly had found it to participate directly in colonial expansion, there was apparently some subsequent discussion of the matter within the denomination, as indeed there was in Britain. The editor of *The South African Baptist* unabashedly defended this blatantly imperialistic episode and sought to justify it on facile Christian grounds. It is conceivable that neither he nor other Baptist leaders would have expressed their opinions of the matter publicly had not the Chartered Company offered to open the territory to missionary endeavours and grant tracts of land to mission societies, as the delegates to the 1893 assembly had hoped. The South African Baptist acceptance of land obtained by violence caused a minor furore in Britain, where some Baptists and other Christians suggested that such offers be declined. This reaction prompted the editor of *The South African Baptist* to enter the debate. He summarily dismissed the arguments of critics of the move by accusing them of impeding the geographical advance of Christianity and thereby jeopardising human souls. "This kind of logic means that the Matabele, who are supposed to be the sinned against, are to be without the Gospel because Englishmen have sinned in obtaining their land", he declared. "We do not think the sins of Englishmen are to be visited in this manner upon the natives of the Chartered Company's territories". To seal his counter-argument, this editor justified the move as obedience to divine intervention in history, for "if God overrules the sins of Englishmen and causes a door for missionary enterprise to open through their wrong doing, shall we not enter that door?" Arguing obliquely from history, but failing to adduce any specific facts, he asserted that "a thorough knowledge of the events that led to the recent war we believe would change the opinions that many of our critics hold about it, or at any rate considerably modify their views". With regard to this issue, at least, the editor took a position which at least on the surface smacks of moral nihilism. He announced that "we do not care to enter upon a

discussion as to whether that war was wrong or not, because we feel that that is not the point at issue in this controversy. Independently of the rightness or wrongness of the war we feel we are justified in acting as we have done".¹⁸ What appears to have been determinative was that the denomination, which had launched its South African Baptist Missionary Society two years earlier, had gained a potential field in which its missionaries could evangelise people previously unreached with the Gospel. The message which they proclaimed at that time presumably did not entail anything similar to what several decades later would be loosely termed "liberation theology"; that would have been quite out of keeping with the emphasis on individual salvation which Baptists emphasised in both Britain and southern Africa, despite some inclusion of a secondary social message. That it was imperial violence and not more peaceful means which provided the setting in which this could take place some Baptists probably viewed as unfortunate from a worldly perspective, regardless of whether they also regarded it as divine providence. The end, in other words, of facilitating evangelism, justified the means of availing the denomination of historical circumstance, especially if the latter could be perceived as part of the overarching plan of a sovereign God for the propagation of the Gospel.

To some colonial Baptists of that day, "imperialism" was not a term with unsavoury connotations but one reflecting a state of affairs to be praised as part of God's work in the world and thus something in which the Baptist Union of South Africa should consciously participate. A speaker at the denomination's annual assembly in 1898 praised imperialism as a development which "gives dignity and sense of power such as no Roman had in the days of Augustus Cæsar It will cast out all things 'made in Germany' and hate Russia with a perfect hatred".¹⁹

In a similar vein, a Baptist minister preaching at Port Elizabeth on I Corinthians 16:9 during the Second Anglo-Boer War placed the local churches into a grand design of divine purpose in Africa. "The Protestant Evangelical Church has always been a blessing to the people to whom it has come and to the lands which have found it a home", he pronounced. In two ways it performed "patriotic service. First, it could "dissipate race animosities" by, for example, leading

both British settlers and Afrikaners "into a perfect nobleness of loyalty, mutual esteem, and unity". Secondly, the church could execute a valuable civil function by contributing to the solution of "the native problem". "To educate and enfranchise this mass of raw humanity without first trying to bring it under the power of the Gospel would be to blunder hideously", this preacher proclaimed. The church was to serve as the vanguard of imperial expansion "by going with the Gospel first, and the Gospel alone for a time, to every man, into every hut, into every location, and unto every tribe. By subduing them to Christ, both they and we and our land will be saved".²⁰ What these blatantly secular functions of the church had to do with Paul's propagation of Christianity in Ephesus is nowhere explained in this sermon.

At least one prominent Baptist clergyman, Forbes Jackson of the Baptist South African Colonial and Missionary Aid Society, had adopted a more refined position on the general question of the secular function of the denomination early in the twentieth century as the official colonial period neared its end. In addition to proclaiming the salvation of individuals and seeking to promote post-war reconciliation of the races in the region, he declared, the church should work to establish the general brotherhood of mankind in southern Africa. This was not necessarily cheap reconciliation without justice. Going beyond prevailing white attitudes in the region, and with only slight condescension, Jackson told his audience that "Baptists stand not only for Brotherhood of Peoples, but for the Freedom of all Races, and when the hour comes for pleading and for securing, the equality of all who are fit to be citizens, whatever their colour". He thought it regrettable that "there are men whose aims are as selfish as their eyes are blind, who think the native is preordained as the white man's burden carrier, the more ignorant the better". Education should therefore remain one priority of missionary endeavours. Racial equality, in other words, did not spring from any specific theological framework, but was contingent on the Africans' attainment of an unspecified European cultural niveau.²¹

British Baptist Colonial Loyalty

Despite obvious differences which set some colonial Baptists apart from the liberal strains in nineteenth-century British politics, there is no reason to believe that those members of the denomination whose personal or ancestral roots lay in the British Isles severed their emotional ties with the old country. To be sure, in southern Africa few Baptists found relevant certain social ethical matters which concerned many of their denominational cousins in Britain. As D.W. Bebbington has pointed out, British Baptists, both at their conventions and in their periodicals, frequently voiced strong opinions on several issues of the Victorian era. To cite but a few examples, during the 1870s they overwhelmingly supported repeal of the Contagious Disease Acts of 1864, 1866, 1869 which mandated trimonthly medical examinations for prostitutes who operated near army camps and naval bases. In the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, moreover, many Baptist ministers were actively involved in temperance movements, one of the relatively few causes which also affected many of their denominational fellows in southern Africa and would continue to do so for decades. Beginning in the 1870s, *The Baptist Magazine* and *The Baptist* frequently carried opinions on the perennial question of home rule for Ireland; no more than the editors of and contributors to many other Nonconformist periodicals did they speak with one voice on this emotional matter.²² One will search the minutes of the annual assemblies of the Baptist Union of South Africa in vain for any mention of some of these and other topics then current in the United Kingdom.

In other respects, however, it was clear that these Baptists at or near the southern tip of the African continent chose to remain tethered to Britain in various ways while simultaneously seeking to preserve cordial relations with the government of Paul Kruger in the South African Republic, whose relationship with the British Empire grew increasingly tense in the late 1890s. On the occasion of Victoria's golden jubilee in 1887, the delegates of the Baptist Union assembled in Grahamstown passed a clearly imperialist resolution commending her rule. Relying on the standard rhetoric of the day, they invoked the divine in declaring that they desired "to place on record our devout thankfulness to Almighty God for having so graciously preserved the

life of her Majesty, our Sovereign Lady the Queen, and for having so abundantly blessed those realms over which she has swayed her sceptre for fifty years".²³

By then, however, not all Baptists in southern Africa resided in Victoria's domains. The discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand in the mid-1880s attracted increasing numbers of them to Johannesburg and environs. Anglophone Baptist churches began to appear on the highveld before the end of the decade. The members of these young congregations were thus emotionally attached to the British Empire while residing in the South African Republic under the leadership of President Paul Kruger. In 1899, a few months before the outbreak of the Second Anglo-Boer War the difficulty of walking the tightrope of dual loyalties, to use the term liberally, became evident at the twenty-second annual assembly of the Baptist Union, held in 1899 in Pretoria. This was the first time the convention met in that country; all of its previous meetings had been in either Natal or the Cape Colony. Compromising their venerable principle of separation of church and state, the Baptists invited Kruger to address them. In introducing this esteemed speaker, the president of the Union, George Cross, who then ministered to the church in Grahamstown, departed from the lampooning tradition which had developed towards Kruger both in Britain and the English-language press in southern Africa generally by praising him to the rafters as "a strong, God-fearing ruler, one entrusted by God with the sword of the State, called by God's ministry for the good of this State". Cross also noted Kruger's support of the *Hervormde Kerk*, the established church of the country, and referred to "the marvellous rise of this State and its wonderful deliverance", though from what it had been delivered he did not state. What Cross' understanding of the relationship between church and state was in the Baptist tradition is not clear. He added that "we have rejoiced in you as an upholder of our precious Protestant Faith" and that "we are here to co-operate with Your Honour in all work for the People's good". Kruger's speech, delivered from the pulpit, was printed *in toto* in an English translation in the annual Baptist handbook, where it was accompanied by laudatory remarks by an anonymous compiler of the "Notes of the Session" who declared that the president's "mind seems saturated with Bible thoughts and imagery, and his speech is full of

Biblical allusions and quotations". Concluding the 1899 assembly, a non-Baptist, State Secretary Reitz, presided at the denomination's *soirée* in what was reported to be "a very happy manner" and gave a short address in which he gave "generous praise" to the Dutch-speaking Baptists in the Orange Free State, of which he had previously served as head of state.²⁴

Not all South African Baptists accepted this cozy if short-lived and utterly superficial relationship with the government of the South African Republic. Kruger's appearance at the assembly and Cross' adulatory introduction of him in those tense times precipitated a minor storm in the English-dominated denomination when J.B. Heard, the Baptist minister in Pietermaritzburg, took exception to them in the columns of the *British Weekly* and cited them as his reasons for resigning from the Baptist Union. These actions drew a sharp rebuke in *The South African Baptist*, whose editor insisted that Kruger's appearance merely reflected "the ordinary courtesies that are being constantly repeated in all civilized, not to say Christian, communities".²⁵ Heard defended his action, calling the incident at the 1899 Assembly a "semi-religious farce" and declaring that Cross' words to Kruger were "more than some of us could swallow".²⁶

This incident revealed that Baptists in the region had differing views of the relationship their denomination should have with at least the resented head of a country with which the fatherland of many of them was on the verge of war. It tells us very little about their commitment to the broader principle of separation of church and state, however. The matter faded into the background when the war erupted a few months later and the overwhelmingly Anglophone Baptist Union, through its individual members and geographical centre in the Cape, found itself in effect on the British side. The loyalty of these Baptists to the Crown was never in question. Indeed, they often used the pages of their denominational periodical to express strongly pro-British sentiments, some of which went beyond Nonconformist opinion in Britain. Nowhere was this more manifest than in their reactions to the Second Anglo-Boer War, which violently shook southern Africa from 1899 until 1902. Popular sentiment in Britain was largely in support of the British cause. Much recent British, South African, and other historiography acknowledges the blatantly imperialistic aims of British

policy regarding the South African Republic and the Orange Free State, which lost their independence during the war. At the time, however, the British public was told that the primary aim of military intervention in those two landlocked countries, especially the former, was to protect the interests of the *Uitlander* population, which undeniably suffered a certain amount of discrimination while simultaneously availing itself of the economic advantages the region offered. British colonists in both Natal and the Cape generally accepted this rationale, and many volunteered to fight in the war. To the extent that it can be empirically verified, the principal professed Baptist reaction in those two colonies to the war was no less jingoistic than those of many churchmen in England or non-Baptists in the colonies. Alfred Hall, a minister in Port Elizabeth who edited *The South African Baptist*, repeatedly and unabashedly proclaimed pro-British stances in that organ. A month after the outbreak of the war, he declared that "religion and the cause of England [*sic*]" would survive the hostilities, despite the divisions which he acknowledged the conflict had already brought to some Baptist families in southern Africa.²⁷ Hall wrote early in 1900 that "Britain's cause cannot be so bad after all or else the English-speaking world must be stricken with moral blindness, which we do not for a moment believe". This editor further thought that the co-ordination of the Royal Navy and the willingness of Australia and other parts of the British Empire to send troops to the front had "proved that all the Queen's subjects are in a very true sense one family".²⁸

Hall was poorly informed about the last-named point, probably owing to the slowness of communications at that time. It is not true, as Richard Price has asserted, that of all the churches [in Britain] only the Baptist presented a united front against the war".²⁹ As such scholars as Bebbington and Gregor Cuthbertson have shown, that denomination was deeply divided on the matter. The latter historian's insightful analysis of Nonconformist reactions to the war makes the contours of this particularly clear. As late as a few days before the outbreak of hostilities in October 1899, Cuthbertson demonstrates, the National Council of Evangelical Free Churches protested against the impending war.³⁰ That sentiment, however, did not represent general Nonconformist attitudes after the conflagration began. Cuthbertson

concludes that the British free churches, especially their middle-class members, distanced themselves from their "former criticism of British imperial foreign policy and succumbed to the structural forces of imperialism, militarism and capitalism. Consequently, the majority of nonconformists supported war against the Boers . . .".³¹ Nevertheless, some Baptists, a decided minority continued in the opposition. Two Baptist ministers, in fact, gained prominence in the movement to end hostilities. Charles F. Aked of Liverpool, a noted pro-Boer, enjoyed considerable stature within the National Council of Evangelical Free Churches which, however, did not remain united with respect to the question of opposing the war. A counterpart in London, the scholarly Fabian socialist Dr John Clifford, gained much more recognition as a leader of the anti-war movement, both through his pamphlet of January 1900, *Brotherhood and the war in South Africa*, an incisive analysis of the pretexts which the British government had issued to legitimize its invasion of the Boer republics, and his position as executive chairman of the Stop-the-War Committee. As Cuthbertson notes, Clifford's "fierce condemnation" of the concentration camps into which General Kitchener's forces herded Boer women and children "stood against the prevailing silence of nonconformity on the conduct of the war . . .".³² These two men did not, however, by any means wield decisive influence on opinion within their denomination. Neither of its two periodicals, *The Baptist Magazine* and *The Baptist Times*, supported the criticisms of the war effort which Clifford, Aked, or other like-minded ministers voiced. Cuthbertson concludes that while both supporters and opponents of the war effort claimed massive Baptist followings, the denomination was in fact ambiguous.³³ In light of the fact that it did not have either a broad pacifist tradition or a history of unqualified support of imperial expansion, this is hardly surprising.

However divided the Baptists in Britain were over the war, in Cape Town the Baptist Union evinced no compunction about sending an uncritical "loyal address" to the governor of the Cape Colony in 1901.³⁴ Hall, meanwhile, had continued to rail against "the ignorant and credulous commandoes" of the Boer republics who had chosen to "tilt against the windmill of British power". Reflecting a widely held attitude of cultural and religious hegemony, he looked forward to the conclusion of hostilities, when British settlers and Afrikaners would be

able jointly "to address themselves to their great mission of evangelizing and civilizing the natives - a task with the success of which the permanent well-being of South Africa is inextricably bound up".³⁵ Entirely absent from the pages of *The South African Baptist* or the minutes of the wartime assemblies of the Baptist Union, however, is any discussion whatsoever of the Christian ethical implications of the battle for regional hegemony. Not even in a jingoistic sense did Hall attempt to marshal even the most tenuous Biblical or other theological evidence or create a specifically Christian case for his position. For that matter, this editor did not betray any understanding of the conflagration which went beyond what he presumably had read in the secular press. At no point, moreover, did *The South African Baptist* carry anything which hinted of a debate on the matter or would have allowed readers to ponder the reasons for and against military intervention, and nothing of that sort took place at the yearly conventions of the denomination.

Only when the war dragged on into 1901 was a dissenting voice sounded in the denominational journal. In January of that year G.W. Cross, one of the Baptist Union's most prominent clergymen, wrote of the "awful desolations" which both Boers and Britons were suffering. "No more terrible judgment could be passed upon England than that she would be doomed to continue this war till the Boer people are utterly destroyed".³⁶

Mohandas K. Gandhi and Joseph J. Doke

As a noteworthy exception to what appears to have been the prevailing colonial mentality of white Baptists in southern Africa before the establishment of the Union in 1910 stands the close relationship between Mohandas K. Gandhi and the Baptist minister Joseph J. Doke, his first biographer and one of his outspoken European supporters in Johannesburg. This English pastor's son initially emigrated to southern Africa in 1882 and began a ministry at Graaff-Reinet shortly thereafter. Doke returned to England a few years later, visited India, and served a Baptist congregation for approximately seven years in Christchurch, New Zealand. In 1903 he

sailed back to South Africa, serving a church in Grahamstown before receiving a call to Johannesburg in 1907. In that turbulent city, to which observers had repeatedly applied such metaphors as a "den of iniquity" and a "moral slough", Doke became the chairman of the Social Reform Committee of the Witwatersrand Church Council, thereby simultaneously displaying considerably more interest in both ethics and interdenominational endeavours than appear to have been typical of his fellow South African Baptists at that time. As James D. Hunt has noted, Doke soon became the target of verbal abuse for ironically suggesting that poorly remunerated girls employed in shops would be financially compelled to turn to prostitution to supplement their meagre incomes.³⁷

The Indian boycott of the registration offices in the Transvaal was in progress when Doke arrived in Johannesburg, and through it he learnt of Gandhi. He called on the Indian leader in late December 1907 and found him to be "a man of great culture" who spoke flawless English and had an engaging personality.³⁸ Doke was immediately won over to the Indian cause. Hunt attributes this in part to Doke's experience with a passive resistance campaign a few years earlier over the Education Act in England.³⁹ In any case, Doke began a few days later to write a series of letters to *The Transvaal Leader* in which he declared that he had "no wish to meddle with the political or commercial problems" connected with the Indian protest movement in South Africa but insisted that his support of it did not contradict this desire because Gandhi's protest was "neither political nor commercial" but rather "essentially religious". By this the Baptist minister meant *inter alia* "liberty of conscience", a cherished theme in his denominational ethical heritage to which he would return in subsequent protests. Appealing rhetorically to both religious and national sentiments, Doke reasoned that "it is both un-English and un-Christian to force a law upon a subject people which tramples on their religious convictions, unless the convictions involved are immoral, cruel, or dangerous. It is our glory that we respect conscience". He insisted without detailed explanation that the campaign was a religious one and wondered "whether the Christian people of Johannesburg have made any serious attempt to find out if there is a religious difficulty or not" and suggested that their attitude could be compared with the

aloofness of the priest and the Levite in the Lukan parable of the Good Samaritan. Apart from this allusion, however, Doke did not attempt to present a Biblical or other theological basis for his defence of the Indian protest campaign.⁴⁰

Not all influential Europeans in Johannesburg agreed with Doke's assertions. An editor of the Johannesburg daily *The Star* replied in a leading article a day later that the law mandating Indian registration was not an offence to religion. In his rejoinder, carried in the *Transvaal Leader*, Doke explained in at moderate length why he believed it was precisely that to adherents of both Islam and Hinduism, although his logic was not entirely defensible. He noted that the statute contained a religious test by referring to "Mahommedans" and singling them out for regulation. This was incorrect. The text of the law, as quoted by Gandhi, referred explicitly "to the persons belonging to any of the native races of Asia, including the so-called coolies, Arabs, Malays, and Mahommedan subjects of the Turkish Dominion". The poorly written statute, in other words, was obviously discriminatory, but it discriminated against Asians generally, not merely those who belonged to one or more specific religious sub-groups of the Asian population in South Africa. Doke also pointed out that it required those who registered to give the names of their wives and mothers. This was offensive to Hindus. "Anyone conversant with Oriental peoples knows that it is counted a sin and a shame to divulge the names of the women in the family", he generalised. Doke also took exception to the mandatory fingerprinting of these Asians, as it implied that they were criminals. All of these requirements, Doke explained, were offensive to Moslems.⁴¹ With this action, Hunt points out, made Doke "visible to the public as a supporter of, and a spokesman for, the Indian cause, a position he was not to relinquish to the end of his life".⁴²

Doke and six of his colleagues in Johannesburg, including fellow Baptist minister Owen Owens, then sent a letter to Colonial Secretary Jan Smuts, printed in several of the Johannesburg newspapers, demanding that the government defer to Indian sensitivities by dropping the requirements concerning fingerprinting and listing of mothers and wives, as the former involved a "criminal taint" and the latter "violates the religious caste customs of the Hindoo people".⁴³

Before the end of January Doke and other supporters of Gandhi helped him to arrange a meeting with Smuts which resulted in the Indian leader's release from a brief period of incarceration and a compromise on the issue of Indian registration.

Doke found the compromise morally tolerable. He defended it rhetorically in *The Transvaal Leader*, wedding religious rhetoric and an appeal to British imperial patriotism. Alluding to Micah 6:8, Doke declared that "those colonists who do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with their God do not desire to heal disabilities upon these men, for whom Christ died. They want to be assured that the immigration from Asiatic countries shall be wisely, firmly, and righteously restricted".⁴⁴ Practical, including economic, considerations, in other words, tempered Doke's perception of the issue. Precisely what was righteous about the settlement he did not specify. At any rate, he did not mask the fact that he had a decidedly imperialist mind-set; in fact, he implicitly stressed his loyalty, which appears to have been quite typical in the context of its time and place, to emphasise his intimacy of feeling with other British subjects on the Witwatersrand. Doke underscored the supposed global implications of the issue in yet another letter to *The Transvaal Leader*: "The crisis just now is an Imperial crisis! Our Empire is in danger through the pressure of this Act, and the results far beyond our Colony bid fair to be disastrous! . . . I would suggest earnestly that every Imperialist and lover of our Empire should enquire anxiously what this alternative is". That alternative, of course, was the repeal of the controversial law. "Is this alternative so terribly that General Smuts is justified in imperilling the Empire by refusings to consider it?" he asked rhetorically.⁴⁵

Doke proclaimed his support of the Indian campaign against registration not merely in the press but also from his pulpit at Central Baptist Church. On 12 January he preached that the Asians in the protest movement could be compared with sixteenth-century Christian martyrs in England. Doke declared that "the moment has come when the Christian Churches, the Christian Endeavour Societies, the Y.M.C.A., the Church Council, the Missionary Societies, with every minister of every denomination, should refuse to stand aside silently while these men are suffering, but should at least investigate the

question for themselves, and act accordingly". The editor of *Indian Opinion* reproduced part of this sermon in the columns of that periodical.⁴⁶

The relationship between Doke and Gandhi was cemented in February 1908 when the latter walked to the Registration Office with the apparent intention of being the first Indian to register voluntarily but was viciously attacked by compatriots who opposed the compromise. Doke, already at that office, heard of the assault almost immediately after it had taken place and rushed to the scene to find his bloodied friend on the street. The Baptist minister took him to his manse, where he remained convalescent for more than a week.⁴⁷ The ordeal also made an impression on Doke's teen-aged son, Clement Martyn, who recalled four decades later that it had been an honour to accommodate the renowned Indian activist in his room.

Doke was so supportive of the Indian protest movement and impressed with Gandhi that in 1909 he became the first of the latter's several biographers. Both the title - *M.K. Gandhi: An Indian Patriot in South Africa* - of the short book he wrote for publication in England indicate the context and presuppositions from which he wrote. No more than most other Baptists or other British Christians of his era did Doke completely transcend the emotional bonds of the imperialism which so profoundly affected his life and ministry. Writing primarily for his countrymen in Britain, he emphasised repeatedly that notwithstanding his criticism of certain aspects of imperial policy Gandhi was a loyal subject of the Crown who had served the British during the Second Anglo-Boer War and who advocated the integration of Indians in the Transvaal into the life of that conquered land. Yet Doke did not kneel uncritically before the altar of imperialism. He took to task both the political and religious establishments for failing to acknowledge and respect the full humanity of the Indians of South Africa. Their struggle, Doke declared, was "a token of the awakening of the Asiatics to a sense of their manhood, the token that they do not mean to play a servile or degraded part in our society; it is their claim, put forward in suffering, to be treated by Christians in a Christian way. This is the wonderful vision which Government and Churches alike have failed to see".⁴⁸

Equally germane to the present study is the inclusive perception of Christian spirituality which Doke implicitly espoused in his defence of Gandhi. Probably few subsequent Baptists in South Africa would have been so generous in acknowledging the legitimacy of the spirituality of a non-Christian. Doke had to concede that "Mr Gandhi is not a Christian in any orthodox sense" but suggested that "perhaps orthodox Christianity has itself to blame for this". He explained to the British readers of his biography that "there is little inducement in these Colonies for an Indian to recognise the loveliness of Christ under the disguise in which Christianity clothes her Lord" and declared that the churches in Johannesburg had evinced scant interest in the evangelisation of the Indians and Chinese in their midst. Doke sought briefly to describe Gandhi's eclectic spirituality, admitting the difficulty of this task. "I question whether any system of religion can absolutely hold him", he admitted. "His views are too closely allied with Christianity to be entirely Hindu; and too deeply saturated with Hinduism to be called Christian, while his sympathies are so wide and catholic, that one would imagine 'he has reached a point where the formulæ of sects are meaningless'". Probably perceiving in Gandhi a linkage which resonated with his own understanding of the relationship of faith and action, Doke reiterated that "the argument so frequently used against the Passive Resistance campaign, that 'it is simply a political affair, with moral elements in it, but having no relation to religion,' is to him a contradiction in terms".⁴⁹ Precisely what about Gandhi's spirituality in general or his appreciation of Christianity Doke found particularly appealing is difficult to ascertain. It seems plausible, however, that the former's respect for the ethics espoused in the Sermon on the Mount and *de facto* partial acceptance of a Christian ethic of the imitation of Christ was significant in winning Doke's confidence and support. In any case, in this early and unique incident of a South African Baptist becoming prominently involved in a major public dispute involving race relations, Doke evinced much more respect for the religious traditions and attendant dignity of non-Christians than nearly any subsequent member of the denomination would show for several decades.

The Bambata Uprising of 1906

The so-called "Bambata Rebellion" of 1906 was the last of the major armed clashes between Zulus and white colonists in Natal. After striking fear into the hearts of settlers during much of that year, it ended with the ignominious defeat of a relatively small band of Zulus under a minor chieftain who had protested against the imposition of a "hut tax" on the indigenous population. The reactions of the Baptist Union to the events surrounding this brief but stormy episode of South African history cast further light on the mind-set of the members at that time.⁵⁰

To place this into context, it should be noted that at their assembly in 1905, Baptists had passed a resolution in favour of "native" land tenure, an issue much debated in the years prior to the formal creation of the Union of South Africa in 1910. This was reconfirmed in October 1906, when it was resolved that "this Assembly protests against proposed legislation to deprive natives of the right to own landed property". Again reflecting a patently paternalistic mentality, the delegates added that they recognised "the absolute necessity of missionary work amongst the natives being carried on under European supervision" but denied that this implied the necessity of European missionaries residing on every station. Finally, in a related but essentially different matter, they revealed that they did not have a strict understanding of the separation of church and state by expressing their opposition to a rule which the Natal Education Department had recently issued prohibiting services of worship from being held in government-aided school buildings.⁵¹

Strikingly absent from the minutes of the 1906 assembly, however, is any discussion of the Bambata rebellion, the factors which gave rise to it, or suggestions for preventing similar violence from occurring in the future. The only "public questions" discussed at that meeting were those mentioned in the immediately preceding paragraph, gambling, temperance, and, curiously enough, religious equality and liberty on the island of Malta. This is not to say that all Baptist churches remained silent on everything pertaining to the uprising. In September 1906 the secretary of the Natal Baptist Association, a regional body within the Baptist Union, wrote to the minister of defence "to

acknowledge its gratitude to Almighty God for the deliverance of this colony during the recent rebellion, and, while deploring the loss of so many natives during the military operations, recognises the absolute necessity of the punitive measures adopted. . . ". The Natal Baptist Association simultaneously informed the minister that it "places on record its tribute to the heroism, wisdom, & power of the Militia & Volunteer forces engaged therein".⁵² There is also evidence, though not a great deal, of not merely colonial patriotic but also critically pietistic reactions to the some aspects of the military intervention or at least the mobilisation which accompanied it. In May 1906, for example, the Baptist congregation in Pietermaritzburg, the capital of Natal, protested to the prime minister against the practice of the militia engaging in parades on Sundays.⁵³ In this instance the protest may have been effective. In any case, the prime minister's secretary informed the secretary of the Natal Baptist Association almost immediately that the parade initially scheduled for the following Sunday had been cancelled.⁵⁴

Early Pietistic Resolutions

At a relatively early stage the Baptist Union launched its perennial practice of passing resolutions and petitioning the government on matters pertaining to such matters as public gambling and legal control of the distribution of alcoholic beverages. A few examples of this will suffice to convey the moralistic tone of this central denominational concern. They also cast light on such aspects of the colonial Baptist mentality as the undeniable if unintentional and probably unconscious racism which is evident in some though by no means all of the resolutions.

One of the earliest twentieth-century instances of pietistic resolution-making took place at the assembly in 1905. At that time the Baptist Union appealed to the educational authorities in the four colonies which would soon coalesce to form the Union of South Africa "to introduce teaching on the nature and effect of alcohol in relation to health and social life into the public and State-aided schools and colleges". Delegates to the assembly also urged the government of the

Cape Colony "to legislate for the prohibition of the sale of alcoholic liquors to natives and declared that they deprecated "any proposal to issue cheap (or any other) licences for the sale of Colonial wines in cafes, tea rooms, and the like" and recommended "that a Bill be introduced into the several legislative bodies of South Africa, making it illegal for farmers and other persons to supply their labourers with alcoholic liquors, either as a gift or as a remuneration for services rendered". Moving from alcohol to other narcotics, the assembly stated that it was "deeply impressed by the deteriorating effects physical, mental, and moral effects of the cigarette habit upon the rising generation" and urged that the minimum legal age for purchasing cigarettes be raised from fourteen to sixteen years "for the purpose of protecting our boys". No mention was made of the protection of girls in this regard. Copies of these resolutions were sent to governmental officials throughout South Africa.⁵⁵

Another early instance of this pietistic emphasis occurred in 1908 in the wake of legislation to licence more institutions where African peoples could purchase alcohol. Delegates to the annual assembly expressed their "great regret at the recent attempts of the Cape Parliament to introduce legislation in regard to the drink business among the natives" on the ground that this "would be disastrous to the natives themselves and inimical to the best interests of the Colony". The Baptist Union revealed its typically colonial paternalistic view of the government's role *vis-à-vis* the indigenous population: "It reminds the Government of its duty, which before God it dare not neglect, to guard the interests of the millions of natives committed to its care, whose physical and moral existence are threatened". A rudimentary strain of economic ethics was also present in the rationale underlying this resolution: "It objects on economic grounds to the fostering and encouraging of any one business which can only thrive to the detriment of other business and the ruin of the people among whom it is carried on". Finally, the Baptist Union encouraged its members to exercise their political rights judiciously in this regard by suggesting that they refrain from voting for candidates who did not "respect the Christian sentiment of this country in regard to this great question".⁵⁶

These resolutions thus set four precedents which the Baptist Union would inconsistently - and perhaps unconsciously - follow for decades. They focused to some extent on the behaviour of the "natives" and acknowledged the already existing paternalism of the government in regulating this. Secondly, they raised a mildly prophetic voice by addressing the government about what was arguably a secular matter, though one with long-standing links to traditional Christian morality. Thirdly, they referred obliquely to Christian ethical principles but not explicitly to any Biblical or other theological rationale which formed the basis of its resolution. And finally, the Baptist Union placed one foot into the political arena by specifying a criterion on which candidates for office should be evaluated. It should be emphasised, however, that delegates to subsequent annual assemblies were not obliged to adhere to these precedents and that on many occasions they did not do so. Nevertheless, these resolutions were early examples of moderate political activism of the sort which many Baptists, especially those of a politically conservative persuasion, have regarded as absent from their denominational tradition.

Much of the same spirit was manifest in a resolution passed in 1911 concerning "Indecent Publications, Pictures, Bioscopes, etc.". The delegates to the assembly that year resolved "that in view of the large numbers of uncivilised and semi-civilised Natives living among us it is imperatively necessary that more stringent legislation be passed as regards the importation, sale and exhibition of objectionable matter in this connection". No rationale was put forth for linking the perceived incomplete state of civilisation of the indigenes with these unspecified publications, nor did the resolution contain any standard for determining what kinds of materials were "objectionable".⁵⁷

Despite the undeniable racism inherent in many of the early resolutions, members of the Baptist Union also evinced sensitivity to the potential injustice which popular racist prejudices could produce. In 1911 the assembly touched on the judicial process as such in this regard. Delegates resolved that "in regard to the recent miscarriage of justice the Assembly is of opinion that where serious charges of offence against the person are being tried, and one party concerned

is white and the other coloured, such cases should not be tried by jury, but by a Court of Judges".⁵⁸

Another example of the Baptist Union raising a voice on public issues early in the twentieth-century involved the place of religious education in the public schools. In 1910 the denomination resolved that "no sectarian or ecclesiastical teaching be introduced into State Schools, but that it be left to the local authorities as to the use of selected portions of Scripture suitable to the capacities of the children and treated in an ethical and literary spirit".⁵⁹ In related forms, most notably the "Christian National Education" policy which the National Party implemented after its accession to power in 1948, the general question of the role of religious instruction in public schools would continue to face the Baptist Union for several more decades. At no time, however, did South African Baptists succeed in shaping national policy in this regard.

Conclusion

An initial *caveat* is in order when drawing conclusions about the social ethics of these British colonial Baptists in southern Africa prior to the constituting of the Union of South Africa. Since relatively little can be empirically known about the matter in general, the responsible historian or theologian must avoid committing invalid inductive inferences by extrapolating his or her findings and declaring that they are representative of the denomination as a whole during the colonial era. A failure to exercise adequate caution led to many of the overextended generalisations which marred some of the previous works on the subject cited in the immediately preceding chapter. At most we can infer from the relatively limited extant evidence that the most prominent leading Baptist voices of the period before the constituting of the Union of South Africa in 1910 declared thus and so, and that such measurable indicators as the responses of the delegates to the annual assemblies and *The South African Baptist* to such matters as the Second Anglo-Boer War and the acceptance of missionary glebes in recently conquered Matabeleland, while interesting in themselves, do not really provide a comprehensive picture of colonial attitudes and

behaviour. Viewed in a wider context including the positions which the Baptist Union of South Africa as a denomination and many of its members would more clearly express after 1910, however, these early expressions take on added meaning as harbingers of related subsequent developments.

It is tempting, and to some extent meaningful, to draw basic comparisons between what we have concluded about Baptists in southern Africa during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries on the one hand and the generalisations which Charles Villa-Vicencio makes about what he terms the "English-speaking churches" (*i.e.* Anglicans, Presbyterians, Methodists, and Congregationalists) there during the same period on the other. Had he chosen to include British colonial Baptists in this recent and provocative piece of scholarship, would they have conformed to his portrayal of the cluster of Anglophone denominations?

The answer to that question cannot be a categorical yes or no, as should become evident when one first surveys the inconsistent Baptist behaviour and rhetoric and then reviews Villa-Vicencio's most salient points, several of which are this disillusioned liberal scholar's accusations of conscious or unconscious ecclesiastical collaboration with imperialistic hegemony over African peoples. He is manifestly displeased with much of what he finds in missionary conduct and attitudes towards indigenes, especially in the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope, even by ostensible liberals like John Philip.

Villa-Vicencio correctly notes that the English-speaking churches in southern Africa were born in a "milieu of colonial expansionism" and that many of their nineteenth-century clergymen were missionaries to Africans who simultaneously ministered to congregations comprising European colonists. One inevitable consequence of this dual role was that such pastors faced the "central dilemma" of "how to minister to the needs and well-being of both the white settlers and the indigenous population at the same time". Villa-Vicencio acknowledges that these men frequently sought "to act as the conscience of the settlers by speaking out on behalf of the indigenous people in the struggle for land, human rights and social justice" but also states that their conflicting tasks prevented them from making "unequivocal" commitments to the people whom they were evangelising. Within this

self-contradictory framework, moreover, ministers from the British Isles shared international condescension towards the black Africans, regarding them as culturally inferior. Consequently, their missionary endeavours tended to incorporate both the evangelisation of the indigenes and efforts to "uplift" them through the transmission of many aspects of European culture to the African sub-continent.⁶⁰ Much of this applies *mutatis mutandis* to Baptists in colonial southern Africa; one example after another cited in the present chapter fits Villa-Vicencio's generalisations fairly well. Had he taken into account the Baptist Union in a more inclusive definition of the "English-speaking churches", his case would have been stronger. True, one could nuance Villa-Vicencio's somewhat one-sided argument by broaching such courageous individuals as Joseph Doke, who were just as much part of the denomination's history as were their colleagues who less ambiguously reflected the British colonial mentality. But as I have taken pains to point out, however, even Doke was a rhetorical imperialist who repeatedly expressed concern for the security of British intercontinental hegemony. Less culturally captive, and more encouraging from a progressive viewpoint were some of the resolutions which the annual assemblies passed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Again, however, the overall impression one gains from a perusal of those statements and a consideration of the weak or indeed non-existent theological foundations on which they rested is one of superficiality, an ostensibly benevolent racist mentality, and only partial relevance to the deeply rooted social problems burdening southern African society. In these ways and others the period of direct British hegemony in southern Africa moulded Baptist social ethics there in ways which foreshadowed much of what was to evolve during the half-century existence of the Union of South Africa. From an early stage Baptist Christian social ethics was by and large deeply beholden to the colonial mentality so evident in the denomination.

Endnotes

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5. *The South African Baptist Hand-Book for 1886-87* (Grahamstown: T.H. Grocott, 1886), p. 9.
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22. D.W. Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience: Chapels and politics, 1870-1914* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1982), pp. 38-39, 46-48, 84-91.
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26. J.B. Heard (Pietermaritzburg) to *The South African Baptist*, 24 November 1899, in *The South African Baptist*, VI, no. 66 (January 1900), p. 92.
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28. Alfred Hall, "The Great War", *The South African Baptist*, VI, no. 66 (January 1900), pp. 85-86. Richard Price has argued that British Baptists generally opposed the war; see *An Imperial War and the British Working Class: Working-class Attitudes and Reactions to the Boer War, 1899-1902* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 13. For a more nuanced view of the matter, see D.W. Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience: Chapels and politics, 1870-1914* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1982), p. 122.
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CHAPTER IV

SOCIAL ETHICS IN THE UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA BEFORE 1948

Introduction

Between 1910, when the Union of South Africa was constituted, and 1948, when the National Party acceded to power and initiated a new phase in the history of the country, South African society underwent momentous changes. Many of these posed unprecedented ethical problems for Baptists and other Christians in the country. A few of the most salient ones can be cited here. The Act of Union itself precipitated some of these. Freed from British colonial status, the new country had to provide for its own defence, a fact which prompted lengthy parliamentary debates early in the second decade of the century and led to the formation of a largely voluntary military force, though one which the government could augment through a mild form of conscription. The Act of Union failed to solve the vexing question of suffrage for the black African majority and the other non-European ethnic groups in South Africa. In its wake, the long-standing issue of black land tenure was exacerbated by the Natives Land Act of 1913, through which white politicians designated a mere 13 per cent of the country's territory for black ownership, a pivotal move which would disquiet many indigenes and continue to haunt South African politics for another eighty years. The failure to deal adequately with the problem of indigenous land tenure, coupled with poor rural economic development, rapid population growth, and the lure of employment in the cities, prompted a demographic revolution; the black urbanisation which had reached noteworthy proportions by the 1880s continued to accelerate during the twentieth century, especially after 1920 and during the Second World War. The macrocosmic structure of the South African economy altered radically during the years between the world wars. Hitherto it had rested on the twin pillars of agriculture and mining; after 1920 the manufacturing sector forged ahead. Labour unrest accompanied this development, and, in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution, struck fear into the hearts of many defensive whites. Cutting across racial lines, but pitting one ethnic group

against another, labour movements with varying degrees of political radicalism spawned such organisations as the ICU, which critics labelled "communist" and which many churchmen attacked as virtually antithetical to the spirit of Christianity. Fear of black upward social mobility in the labour force also led poor urban Afrikaners and their Anglophone counterparts to ally in the so-called "Pact" government during the 1920s.

The Baptist Union of South Africa and the members of its individual congregations were not especially well prepared to respond to the ethical implications of these and other challenges. Throughout the period under consideration in the present chapter, the denomination was comprised almost exclusively white members, chiefly people whose personal or ancestral roots lay in the British Isles but also an increasing number of ethnic Germans and Afrikaners. Missionary work which had been organised in the early 1890s expanded during the twentieth century, but in most instances black, Coloured, and Indian congregations which Baptists formed remained outside the Baptist Union, thereby paralleling a pattern well-established in other multiracial denominations. South African Baptists did not have a theological college until the 1950s, so they continued to rely largely on British institutions for theological education until their own was established in Johannesburg. In many instances Baptist ministers who had been born in either England or Scotland emigrated to South Africa to accept calls there. This fact, a continuation of a phenomenon discussed in the immediately preceding chapter, appears to have left at least a minor mark on social ethics. As we shall see in this and subsequent chapters, for several decades some British-born and South African-born Baptists who had received their theological training in the United Kingdom took stronger stances against racist and militaristic policies than did their colleagues who were educated exclusively in South Africa. Even the former, however, evinced the virtually inevitable influence of their privileged post-colonial status. To the extent that one can speak of a geographical concentration within the Baptist Union, it remained in the Cape Province, not least in the eastern part of the Cape, although the denomination grew to fully national proportions well before the *terminus ad quem* of this chapter.

Our focus here will be on a relatively small number of issues on which South African Baptists spoke and acted during the first forty-eight years of the Union period. It will be seen that a few repeatedly raised prophetic voices on public questions and that delegates to the denomination's annual assemblies continued their tradition of passing resolutions. The continuity in the latter matter involved a second level in that, as had been the case before 1910, these statements often lacked even rudimentary explicit theological underpinnings. When Baptist commentators did express specifically Biblical or other Christian arguments for taking certain stances, they operated in a prescriptive or deontological mode. As we shall see, however, there is great reason to believe that social or other environmental factors determined their positions to a considerable degree. In turbulent South Africa, as elsewhere, during those chaotic years Christian ethics was often a captive of the culture in which Christians lived.

The Defence Bill of 1912

One of the first issues which briefly gained Baptists' attention in the history of the Union surfaced in 1912 and would reappear as a much greater controversy some six decades later was that of military conscription. In an episode of South African political history which has received relatively little attention in the pertinent professional literature, the government of the Union of South Africa introduced its Defence Bill, one fruit of the Imperial Defence Conference held in 1911, in parliament early the following year and included in it a clause providing for compulsory military service. The reactions of various denominations and individual church leaders to this seminal piece of legislation have never received proper scholarly attention and could themselves be the subject of a separate volume. For our purposes, a contextual consideration of the Baptist position on the matter, showing at least tangential continuity with the role of Joseph J. Doke in the Indian campaign against registration a few years earlier, provides almost an ideal starting point for the present chapter.

While the Defence Bill was being debated both in parliament and the South African press, Doke brought the issue directly into the

Baptist Union initially in April 1912 by writing a letter about it to *The South African Baptist*. In this brief piece he presented an argument more nuanced than those in most of the letters which subsequently appeared in that periodical. He attacked the proposed legislation not on Biblical grounds or on the basis of pacifism but on the venerable Baptist principle of freedom of conscience. Not one to muzzle himself on a matter which he regarded as a frontal assault on that pillar of his denominational heritage, Doke declared that the statute might be more aptly called "a Bill for establishing military despotism in South Africa". He appealing to readers' sense of denominational pride by invoking unspecified predecessors from the Baptist pantheon of saints: "In past days our people fought splendidly, and suffered heroically, for the sake of civil and religious liberty. They resisted the principle of compulsion to the death". Doke came very close to conceding that the Baptist tradition did not necessarily reflect an unequivocal Biblical position on the broader issue of Christian involvement in military activity. Indeed, he noted that "it is not so much a question regarding our view of the necessity of military organisations - we have various ideas of that, but of maintaining the inalienable right of the citizen to decide great moral and religious questions for himself". Conscription, Doke reasoned, *ipso facto* eroded or negated that right. Whether Doke's close association with Gandhi had directly influenced the former's stance on this bill is unclear, although it seems plausible that the nonviolence of the latter's *satyagraha* techniques may have deepened Doke's aversion to compulsory military service. On the other hand, it is entirely possible that Doke would have opposed the Defence Bill even if he had never heard of the renowned Indian leader. His own Nonconformist heritage in Britain could have led him to assume a similar position on the matter.¹

J. Thorp Legg agreed wholeheartedly with Doke. In a letter to *The South African Baptist*, he concurred that the Defence Bill implied "military despotism" but took Doke's case two intimately related steps further, both of which could have been relevant to subsequent Baptist social ethics in South Africa had they been heeded. First, Legg questioned the fundamental validity of military action in resolving interracial strife. He asserted that the Bambata uprising of 1906 could have been quelled with the deployment of "a few police doing their

duty in an ordinary peaceful way" instead of mobilising large numbers of colonial troops. The latter course of action, Legg believed, had merely resulted in "the increase of enmity even after the so-called war has been ended". Besides being impractical and counterproductive, the Defence Bill and its presupposed consequences seemed essentially inimical to the Christian faith, although precisely why Legg believed that it was "all wrong" is unclear in his letter. In any case, perhaps reflecting Gandhian influence, he declared that the Baptist Union should respond to the Defence Bill with civil disobedience: "If we cannot prevent its becoming a Statute Law of the country we must form ourselves into a passive resistance community and determine never while the country puts up with such a law to give it our countenance in any shape or form".² Not until the 1950s would calls for civil disobedience to a proposed statute again appear in the pages of *The South African Baptist*.

Delegates to the annual assembly of the Baptist Union, which took place in Johannesburg in October 1912, discussed the matter at length. Probably owing to the influence of Doke, who was still a pastor in that city, they adopted a resolution which may have been a compromise, although the proceedings of that parley are not recorded in sufficient detail to ascertain whether that was the case. At any rate, the Baptist Union did not subscribe to the civil disobedience for which Legg had called. Instead, the resolution declared that the Baptist tradition had "always emphasised the sacredness of conscience, and has stood for civil and religious liberty". Consequently, the delegates recorded their "regret that the principle of compulsion should have been embodied in the South African Defence Act" and urged the parliament to amend the statute so as to abolish conscription.³ This resolution was relatively weakly worded if assayed by the touchstone of the most critical voices which had been raised against it. Moreover, the meta-ethical foundation on which it rested incorporated nothing more than denominational tradition; there was not the slightest hint of Biblical prescription or any other appeal to Christian Scriptures to bolster it. It was yet another example of an ostensibly very Biblically inclined denomination apparently ignoring the Bible in its efforts to apply its faith to an urgent moral problem.

The Baptist Union failed in its battle against conscription during the half-century of the Union of South Africa, and beginning in the 1970s some of its luminaries publicly opposed campaigns to end compulsory military service in the Republic of South Africa. As early as 1915 there was a sign of accommodation of the legislation which had been enacted three years previously. The denomination sought to have one of its ministers appointed a military chaplain, a move which did not, of course, necessarily imply formal approval of the Defence Bill *in toto* but at least suggested that the Baptist Union was willing to accommodate its provisions. Initially the South African government refused to make the requested appointment, a move which rankled Thomas Sloane, a member of the Bulwer Road Baptist Church in Durban, who vented his anger in a letter to *The South African Baptist*. He noted that there were then Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, and, finally, Congregationalist chaplains and wondered whether the government had practised religious discrimination in naming its military personnel. Sloane also criticised the leadership of the Baptist Union for not pressing its case vigorously after initially receiving a negative reply from the government to its application. Rather than merely corresponding with governmental bureaucrats, he believed, the denomination should have sent a delegation to Pretoria to argue its case personally. No more than most other writers of letters to *The South African Baptist* at that time did Sloane broach any explicitly Christian principles when presenting his case.⁴

The Question of Direct Political Involvement

At various times during the twentieth century, especially since the 1950s, South African Baptists have debated the question of the extent to which their denomination and, particularly its clergymen, should become directly involved in political life. This issue became acute in some quarters when the South African Council of Churches, of which the Baptist Union was a member until 1976, began to raise a strongly prophetic voice against the racist policies of the national government. There is evidence that the general matter also concerned Baptists early in the century. *The South African Baptist* occasionally carried

articles on the subject during the first two decades of the Union period. A brief examination of a small number of these pieces, paying especial attention to the arguments presented in them as related to the Baptist social ethical tradition, may help to illuminate both relevant attitudes and beliefs at that time and illustrate some of the limits of the same with regard to subsequent applications of the Christian faith to problems which have bedevilled South African society. The Baptist Union never adopted a consistent policy on either clerical or lay participation in politics, but the concern which some expressed early in the century nevertheless sheds light on how they perceived relations between church and state, both in general and specifically with regard to their own denominational tradition.

C.H. Clapp wrote in 1914 the longest article on this topic which appeared in *The South African Baptist* for several decades. He based his remarks on approximately sixteen years in the ministry in England and South Africa. He tipped his hand by acknowledging with obvious displeasure that some Baptists "demand that because a man is a minister he must have nothing to do with matters that pertain to the highest good of the town and country in which he happens to be placed". This attitude, Clapp asserted, both implied a denial of basic rights and militated against the best interests of the community. The "ordinary privileges of a man" were not denied to men in other walks of life, he wrote in a post-Enlightenment mode, "but because a man is a minister, and for this reason alone, he must keep his mouth shut and be dumb. No matter how gifted and capable he may be, nor even though he be possessed of all the necessary qualities and capacities of leadership, able to influence people's lives and thoughts and opinions, if he is a minister he must not exercise those powers in what he conceives to be a good cause". Clapp delineated three categories of "people who would keep the minister out of politics". First, there were those who were "uncommonly good" and regarded the political arena as morally beneath the worthiness of their clergymen; theirs was the "fear of endangering the truth for which the minister is supposed to stand. . . . The pure Gospel, according to the saintly objection, is too pure to allow it to be concerned with purely mundane matters". Secondly, morally depraved members of congregations, the "uncommonly bad", also said, "Let the minister stick to preaching the

pure Gospel", ostensibly because they dreaded the lofty moral standards he might impose on them by bringing Christian ethics into the public sphere. They too spoke of the "pure Gospel" to which they demanded their pastors adhere, but to Clapp their use of this phrase was "simply maudlin hypocrisy". Clapp found it "difficult to define" his third category but clearly held no brief its members, as they embodied hypocrisy and opportunistic social mobility. These were largely people who "occupy high places in Church and community, and are always fearful lest the minister, coming into contact with them on other occasions, and in different circumstances than their characteristically unctuous rectitude of the sanctuary and the Sabbath, might get to know of things and see things which may not be likely to enhance his opinion of or his respect for them".⁵

Regardless of the camp from which people who asked Clapp about his opinion of clerical participation in politics came, his answer was the same. Put succinctly, he believed that "no man who is a real man as well as being a minister should be debarred from taking part in Politics because of his profession". Clapp clearly had an appreciation of the Baptist legacy of the separation of church and state and qualified his answer by stating that "of course, he would take part in such matters not as a minister or in any sense as a representative man, but simply and only as an individual, as any other man". Going a step further, Clapp reasoned that clergymen not only could but indeed should become involved: "The minister needs a little Politics, and Politics needs him; but it needs him *as a Man*, a man of intelligence, integrity, high purpose, rather than as a minister". Conversely, any pastor who was isolated from the public arena seemed undesirably sheltered to this immigrant clergyman: "If he is a real man he will be helped by getting away from the inevitable coddling to which many ministers (and most of them like it) are subject". Clapp was careful to explain, however, that he drew a strict line of demarcation between the individual clergyman as the church as far as political activity was concerned: "I am not advocating the turning of the Pulpit into a platform for the advocacy of certain political views" as the politicisation of the church "would be entirely out of place".⁶

Clapp did not use the term "social gospel", but he left little doubt that his understanding of the public doing of the Word overlapped

with that of many counterparts in Britain and North America who employed that label. He cited several areas in which Christians could contribute to an amelioration of social evil by the direct application of their ethical standards. Clapp acknowledged that "the drink curse" was a blight on the landscape of humanity but regarded it as essentially symptomatic of more deeply rooted ills. "Excessively prolonged labour exhausts the system and makes it to crave for artificial stimulus", he declared. Furthermore, "excessively low wages, with no prospect of rising in the world, beget a spirit of recklessness which makes men ready to turn to any thing that promises to bring a gleam of brightness into their monotonous lives". Thirdly, "ill-furnished and insanitary abodes drive forth their inmates to seek the brightness and comfort elsewhere, which cannot be found in their homes". To Clapp, it seemed manifest that clerical attempts to attack these problems from outside the political sphere had been at most "partially successful" and that while "philanthropy has invented schemes for the amelioration of every kind of human woe . . . it is evident that multiply these agencies as we may, they only touch the fringe of things". He therefore advocated navigating "further upstream" to get at the sources of the social maladies from which South African society suffered. Whereas prior to the advent of democracy in the English-speaking world ministers of the Gospel had appealed to royalty for a redress of public ills, the possibility for righting them through legislation now existed. Hence, Clapp believed, "we must help them [i.e. the Baptist laity] to send to seats in Municipality and Assembly and Council and Senate men of public spirit and noble purpose, who will not act for their own interest or for the interest of faction, but for the good of the whole community, and they must see to it that the laws and their administration are such as will not make evil-doing easy". He presciently added a note of caution to his idealistic optimism: "The minister interested and participating in politics will find himself up against all kinds of vested interests, he will be misunderstood and wilfully and deliberately misrepresented. He might quite unconsciously and without intention become the spokesman of a party" but insisted that "these are not sufficient reasons surely for declining one's duty". Clapp concluded his remarks by asking rhetorically, "Shall the minister have part in politics?" His answer was

categorical: "Yes, if he be a man as well as minister; if not, politics and life generally are better without him".⁷

Clapp's article was without precedent in *The South African Baptist*, and decades would pass before that periodical carried anything similar to it. Nothing in the minutes of the annual assemblies or any other source indicates that his position was more than an anomaly in this period of the denomination's history. In the context of its time, Clapp's call was a bold step, though one which reflects the spirit of its time. His concern, to the extent that the article reveals it, did not go beyond what countless other churchmen and other people in much of Europe and North America were calling for in terms of the reform of exploitative labour laws. Moreover, nothing in Clapp's comments applied distinctively to South Africa in terms of the most glaring exploitation there, namely the economic subjugation of African and other non-European labour, though of course he may have been particularly concerned about this without specifically broaching it. It should also be noted that no more than most other South African Baptists of that or subsequent eras who published their views of the public role of Christian ethics did Clapp give his readers even the most rudimentary meta-ethical framework which they could use in applying their faith to social issues. His was a voice apparently crying without appreciable form in the wilderness, and there is no evidence that it made any direct impact. To the extent that Clapp's denominational fellows dealt either as a denomination or specifically as individual Baptists with social ethics, most of them continued to rivet their attention primarily on such matters as liquor control (as opposed to factors which stimulated immoderate consumption of alcohol), censorship of the film industry, and gambling.

Nevertheless, from time to time South African Baptists continued to comment on their public role as Christians. In 1927, for instance, *The South African Baptist* carried a pair of articles on the subject by two mayors who had been asked to state their views of their "responsibility in regard to civic affairs". One could hardly have stated the case for Christian social and political engagement more explicitly. Alf. Law Palmer, then mayor of Johannesburg, declared categorically that "if Christianity is not applicable to politics then Christianity is an antiquated delusion". This Baptist politician did not

develop a case for theocracy as such, but he believed that "the real responsibility for controlling the destinies of a city or a nation" rested with "God's own people", although he did not define the latter phrase. Palmer also asserted that no-one was "more likely to maintain the peace of the world than the followers of the Prince of Peace" and that no-one was better positioned to "make the laws of the city or country conform to the divine law than the men of God". His was a common sense approach to the role of the church in this, namely "to preach the whole gospel; then to use every gift and power God has given, in order to give practical effect to the preaching". In this brief article, however, Palmer did not specify what kind of responses to contemporary issues were most in accordance with Christian ethics.⁸

Palmer's denominational fellow and counterpart in Germiston, T. Stark, expressed his views on the matter even more succinctly while not providing even the most spartan meta-ethical framework to support them. He averred that it was the "bounden duty" of every "true citizen" to take pride in the town of which he or she was a resident. At the core of Stark's programme of Baptist political involvement lay "local affairs as they affect us from a health point of view". The "modern Christian", he believed, should thus be concerned about such diverse issues as the creation and maintenance of playgrounds for children, efficient and affordable transport, and "the best hours and conditions for all the employees so controlled". Stark did not broach such issues as urban racial segregation and African involvement in labour movements.⁹

One of the longest and most closely reasoned Baptist statements on Christian political involvement before the Second World War was that which W.E. Cursons delivered to the annual assembly in East London in 1938. He perceived the Baptist Union as standing midway between the poles of total detachment from politics (which he illustrated by citing the case of an evangelist who boasted that he never exercised his right to vote) and what he termed "social service - good national and even international citizenship". Cursons lamented that until the middle of the nineteenth century British Baptists had stood close to the first extreme as part of what he termed "the church's indifference" but took pride in the political activism of such later Victorians as John Clifford and Joseph Parker. He quoted approvingly

several nineteenth and early twentieth-century British Nonconformists who stressed that Christian public involvement was not an option but a duty of faith in the modern world. In his own day, the South African Baptist Union supposedly stressed "that the claims of citizenship must not be disregarded by those who desire to live a full-orbed Christian life". Nevertheless, and presumably to the surprise of no-one who had investigated the matter, Curson perceived a glaring gap of hypocrisy between what the denomination professed to believe in terms of social ethics and how many of its members actually behaved. Seeking to call to the attention of the delegates to the annual assembly, he illustrated very general possibilities for exercising responsible Christian citizenship, considering first the community level. "Is it right for the Christian to abstain from taking an intelligent and active interest in the various sections of the local government - in other words, to shirk his duty as a citizen?" Cursons asked rhetorically. To this Baptist minister, it seemed self-evident that individuals could exert significance on the course of public policy and help to maintain the ostensibly pristine state of politics: "Let Christian folk not complain if poor local government prevails and abuses creep in". Cursons thought it equally if not more important for church members to become engaged in politics on the provincial and national levels. He emphasised his dissatisfaction with fellow believers who thought they had fulfilled [their] civic duties "merely by paying his taxes and keeping out of gaol". Cursons did not seek to disprove common assertions about "politics being a dirty business" but asked whether it would "be made any purer by Christian people refraining from taking a reasonable interest in it, and from doing their best to purify it?" He quoted approvingly a recent comment which Ramsay Muir had made in London and which he thought could be applied *mutatis mutandis* to Christians: "I am not sure that any teacher who says he or she is not interested in politics ought not at once to be kicked out of the profession. Society will break down and anarchy will follow unless individuals of society play their part in it, and more or less loyally".¹⁰

Cursons then applied these generalisations to the national and global situations which obtained in the late 1930s. Clearly alarmed by right-wing political developments in Germany and elsewhere in Europe,

he asserted that "unquestioned obedience does give to a state a fictitious front of unity and strength" and termed those lands which were succumbing to fascism "robot-states". Again relying on Muir, Cursons explained that three common attributes of the "robots" who inhabited them were "1. Submission, obedience, discipline and a readiness to accept your views ready-made without criticism. 2. Willingness to hate to order those whom your Government condemned. 3. Readiness to regard oneself as interestingly insignificant and valueless in comparison with the state". These characteristics, he believed, were entirely at odds with Christian doctrines of human nature and the state without, however, elaborating on those central teachings. Quoting the Swiss neo-orthodox theologian Emil Brunner, Cursons declared that "the totalitarian state is always an impossibility for the Christian. That state claims to be the only source of the unified life of the nation, the supreme sovereign power which has to declare ultimately what is to be or not to be in a country. A declaration of the absolute sovereignty [*sic*] is incompatible with Christianity". He also adduced a sentence from Paul Tillich in his argument against absolutism: "Since the valuation of every man as an image of God is a general Christian principle, every form of government has to be denied which disregards by its very structure this Christian valuation of man and treats him as a means for ends which are finally sub-personal, such as power, wealth, organisation, etc."¹¹

Cursons applied part of his essay to recent developments on the South African political scene and related them to one of the prominent episodes in the social ethical history of his denomination, namely J.J. Doke's support of Gandhi's campaign against compulsory Indian registration. Cursons explained that he had sympathised with Doke on that issue some three decades earlier and had admired Gandhi after meeting him personally. Recent history, however, had prompted him to question the moral validity of Gandhian passive resistance techniques as means of effecting political change. They had enjoyed a limited degree of success in southern Africa, Cursons admitted, "but when one considers to what length the Mahatma's Passive Resistance went in India, and the ferment and bloodshed it caused, one cannot help

asking oneself whether such a movement - certainly in so far as India is concerned - should have had the support of the Christian citizen". Yet this prominent Baptist did not categorically dismiss resistance to illegitimate authority. He reminded his audience that their denominational forebears had been the fountainhead of a proud tradition of dogged opposition to political tyranny in Britain. "Had it not been for the resistance, even to the death, of our forefathers, what amount of liberty of speech and of worship should we be enjoying to-day?" Cursons asked in a passage of perennial relevance to South Africa. "Should we be worthy possessors of so noble a heritage if in these days we tamely submitted to the violation of conscience and the imposition of all sorts of injustice and inequality?" Nevertheless, Cursons, like so many other Baptists and other South African Christians of his own, previous, and subsequent times, had qualms about extending this heritage to the African majority in his midst. In what he termed a "concrete case", he believed that "even the strongest opponent of the recently enacted Native laws would think very seriously before he raised the banner of Passive Resistance and called upon the Natives to flock under it". Passivity also seemed questionable in a Europe poised on the brink of war: "An[d] what shall be said as to the attitude that everyone of us presumably adopts towards war - its horrors and its futility? Should we adopt one of Passive Resistance if called upon to defend our country. . . ?" The ambiguities of ethical decision-making in a deeply troubled world, it seemed to Cursons, excluded facile answers to complicated questions. He thus found it prudent to reserve judgement rather than give his unqualified support to radical positions. "It may yet prove to be that the proper course to be adopted by the Christian citizen will be to do all in his power to spread abroad among his fellow-citizens the principles which he upholds, but loyally abiding by the decision of the majority as expressed by the government in power".¹²

Cursons' piece may have been the most detailed published case for social activism written by a South African Baptist for decades following the death of J.J. Doke, apart from editorials which C.M. Doke contributed to *The South African Baptist*. Yet even this essay was highly qualified and presented very little of a specific nature about how Christians should confront the major social issues of that time and

what Christians could do to ameliorate the suffering which such phenomena as pre-1948 segregation and attendant economic exploitation inflicted on millions of South Africans. To be sure, that was not Cursons' purpose in this piece. Yet its status as one of the most relevant commentaries of its time underscores the weakness of prophetic ministry in the Baptist Union during this period.

One could multiply examples of comments about Christian social ethics during this period, but apart from Cursons's essay they would not add up to anything approaching a systematic or consistent Baptist policy on the participation of either the clergy or the laity in political affairs. Very few commentators, including Cursons, adduced either Biblical or denominational evidence in support of an argument in favour of either denominational or individual involvement. Furthermore, it should be emphasised that the Baptist Union as such was never particularly active as a political force, although delegates to its annual assemblies continued to pass traditional resolutions on diverse matters, most notably those mentioned above concerning censorship, gambling, and the control of alcoholic beverages, as will be seen shortly.

To the extent that *The South African Baptist* is even a remotely representative indicator, the spiritual concerns of the members in general did not encompass the application of Christian ethics to any significant degree to most political issues prior to the First World War. This is not to say, however, that the Baptist Union remained consistently silent on purely political matters. Indeed, it preserved an element of continuity in raising a voice on several of them during this period. One was its support of war and its attachment to Britain. In the immediately preceding war we described at some length how the Baptist Union, especially the editor of *The South African Baptist*, openly voiced sympathy for the British imperial side during the Second Anglo-Boer War. In 1914 the young Union of South Africa found itself directly involved in what would later be called the Second World War. In one of its first actions in that conflagration, it send an armed force under erstwhile the Boer hero Louis Botha into German South West Africa (subsequently called Namibia) to wrest control of that colony from the German *Reich*. The Baptist Union lauded this move. Meeting a few months later at its annual assembly, delegates passed a

resolution declaring that "the Baptist Union congratulates General Botha upon the successful conclusion of the campaign in German S.W. and views with hopefulness the further work to be done for the country and the Empire under his continued leadership". Furthermore, they declared that "we sincerely sympathise with the Government in the trying circumstances through which the people of the country have passed" and, fully in harmony with their well-established denominational tradition, affirmed their "devotion to the King and his throne". Without a word of qualification or other caution, the delegates pledged themselves "to respond to every appeal that is made to us to enable them [*i.e.* the king and the British Empire] to carry the war to a victorious issue".¹³ A year later the assembly reaffirmed this resolution.¹⁴

South African Baptist support of the British effort in the war was not merely an expression of ethnic sentiment on the part of erstwhile colonists who traced their roots to England and Scotland. Less than a week after the hostilities erupted, on Sunday, 9 August 1914, the pastor of the German-speaking Baptist congregation at Stutterheim in the Eastern Cape, J.F. Niebuhr, proposed a timely resolution to his flock. "The German Baptist Church of Stutterheim hereby declare their sincere loyalty to The British Flag. Although we speak the German language we have no affiliation or any connection with Germany whatsoever", it read. "We hereby declare that we are again willing to stand by the British Flag and will fight for the Flag of the country in which we live. We are ready as men to do our part and are willing to give our sons, if needed, to protect life and property". The congregation responded by passing the resolution unanimously and singing "God Save the King".¹⁵

Baptist patriotism was not directed exclusively at the Crown. In 1916, the delegates placed on record their "adherence to the Constitution of the Union of South Africa, in its Imperial Association, and to support our Government in its inflexible determination to prosecute the war to a successful and triumphant conclusion". As in war, so also in peace. A few months after the armistice, delegates to the 1919 assembly placed its outcome into an overarching if unexplained moral framework. They expressed their "profound thankfulness" that "the great war of right against might" had drawn

to its close and their hope that the newly formed League of Nations would help to provide for a stable world order. The Baptist Union, most of whose members still had either personal or ancestral ties to England or Scotland, simultaneously voiced its opposition to the "agitation that advocates the setting up of a republican form of government in this country" and explicitly supported "the determination of the Union Government to maintain the connection with the British Empire, such connection being a guarantee of liberty and peace".¹⁶ How refusing to cut the imperial umbilical cord to London would affect international peace was not recorded, and the delegates who framed this resolution did not mention internal violence in South Africa, whose subsequent history would continue to yield a cornucopia of it. It is difficult to avoid the suspicion that the resolution was little more than an expression of both emotional bonding to the British Isles and a superficial belief that remaining in the Commonwealth would assure their tranquility. Moreover, one can hardly ignore the fact that the resolution of 1919 was conceived in the minds of white, Anglophone South Africans, whose notion of "liberty" was different from those which many of their indigenous compatriots presumably would have held had they been asked. Underlying all of this, and in keeping with established denominational practice, was an apparent lack of explicit Biblical reference or other specifically theological anchoring points. Meta-ethics, again, was *terra incognita* to the Baptist Union in its rudimentary social ethics.

This is hardly surprising when one seeks to gauge the social consciousness of the denomination by perusing its official periodical during the second and third decades of the twentieth century. Only on relatively rare occasions did editors, contributors of articles, and members who submitted letters to *The South African Baptist* touch on the matters which were continuing to cause misery and exploitation in the country during the inter-war years. Indeed, many of the articles which that periodical carried at that time could hardly have provided more than momentary escapes from the national tribulations of the time. The titles of a few will suffice to illustrate the point: "To-day in British Columbia" (1920), "The Country of Thomas Hardy" (1936), "King Edward VIII. God Bless Him!" (1936), and "Some Memories of Norway" (1940).

The Campaign against Roman Catholicism

Irrelevance came in other forms, as well. On many occasions prior to the Second World War the Baptist Union, both at its annual assemblies and in the pages of *The South African Baptist*, turned its attention to matters which were far removed from the difficulties impeding sorely needed justice and social harmony in the country. Among these was its campaign against the proliferation of Roman Catholicism in South Africa. Apprehensiveness about the Church of Rome had a venerable history in the Baptist tradition, stemming from the persecution of Nonconformists under Queen Mary in the middle of the seventeenth century. Deeply rooted prejudices, occasionally bolstered by theological arguments but more often reinforced by the mere mention of the spectre of Catholicism, surged anew in South Africa early in the twentieth century owing to at least two factors. First, the resumption of immigration following the termination of the Second Anglo-Boer War brought tens of thousands of Catholics to the Union, whose antecedent republics and colonies had been overwhelmingly Protestant. In no major area did the Roman Catholic Church encompass a majority of white South Africans prior to the influx of Lusophone immigrants following the Second World War. Nevertheless, the sprouting of architecturally distinctive Catholic churches and the highly visible presence of increasing numbers of priests and nuns wearing their traditional habits in most cities of South Africa agitated many urban Protestants. Hysterical rhetoric ensued as fears of Catholic influence and eventual dominance of education, politics, and other spheres of public life proliferated. In few dominations was this more obvious than in the Baptist Union. Almost simultaneously, Roman Catholic missionary work amongst indigenous peoples of South Africa, which had developed at little more than a glacial pace before the turn of the century, accelerated. Results were forthcoming; eventually the Roman Catholic Church would claim the loyalty of more South African blacks than nearly every other denomination. To the young South African Baptist Missionary Society, as to many of parallel organisations functioning in the region, this growth posed a serious threat. In one denominational and missionary

society periodical after another, warnings and complaints about the activities of Catholic missionaries became a *Leitmotiv*.

As early as 1910 the Baptist Union had begun to express itself on the perceived peril of Catholic penetration into educational endeavours of South Africa. Delegates resolved "that this Assembly calls the attention of the Baptist Churches of South Africa to the grave danger which is involved in the common practice of committing the education of Protestant children to Roman Catholic teachers". Much more than the objective acquisition of basic skills seemed to be at stake. The Baptist Union was "convinced that the atmosphere and influence of R.C. Schools, apart altogether from any direct attempt at proselytism, is calculated to subvert the faith of a child. . .".¹⁷ The following year the assembly reaffirmed this resolution and urged "all Ministers and Church members to exercise every effort to discontinue" the practice of "committing the education of their children to Romanist institutions. . .".¹⁸ In 1913, moreover, the Baptist Union went a step further by encouraging its constituent congregations to observe Reformation Sunday annually for the purpose of keeping the issue of Catholic education "and kindred matters before our people. . .".¹⁹ The extent to which this advice was heeded on the local level is impossible to ascertain. What is historiographically significant in this context is the negative stated purpose for commemorating the genesis of Protestantism. In any case, these means predictably failed to stem the advance of the feared Church of Rome. More than a decade later, in 1927, the annual assembly again considered the Catholic issue. Apparently having failed to learn from history, delegates at that parley did little more than repeat what their predecessors had said at previous assemblies. They expressed their desire "to warn our people of the danger of sending their young people to Roman Catholic institutions where an alien atmosphere with its subtle influence may undermine their faith" and urged "our Churches to maintain their witness to Protestant truth".²⁰

A decade later the Baptist Union continued and expanded both the thematic and geographical fronts of its ineffective rhetorical campaign by advising members to shun not only Catholic schools but also to refuse "to support Roman Catholic institutions, such as Sanatoria and Nursing Homes, as by such means the Roman Catholic system is

supported". This was during the Spanish Civil War, and in full harmony with well-established tradition the Baptist Union expressed its opinion on that bloody conflagration, though this time it did not do so in a strictly partisan political way. Instead, the South African Baptists declared its sympathy for the Protestant churches of Spain, particularly the Baptist ones and in general those Protestant congregations in war-torn areas of that country.²¹ At that point, in other words, there was apparently little if any reluctance in the Baptist Union to comment as a denomination on public issues of the day, even when they were on a different continent. Of course, in this instance the matter could be interpreted largely as one of sympathy for another member-church of the Baptist World Alliance, through which the resolution of sympathy for Protestants in Spain was transmitted. In 1938 the Baptist Union carried its warning a step further by including in what had becoming more frequent anti-Catholic resolutions a warning against contributing "street collections for Roman Catholic purposes".²² A year later Baptist rhetoric in this regard reached its apogee when the annual assembly passed a resolution which labelled the Roman Catholic church a "menace".²³

Near the end of the period considered in the present chapter, a Baptist minister from England, A.H.J. James, who had studied for a year at Wycliffe Bible College before serving a church for five years in his native land, was called to be the secretary of the strongly anti-Catholic Protestant Association of South Africa in 1944. He arrived in the country the following year. In 1945 the Baptist Union, with which he was affiliated without serving as a minister of a Baptist congregation in South Africa, declined to pass a resolution on "Romanism" but delegates to its annual assembly were nevertheless encouraged "to give full support" to James.²⁴ Principally through the pages of his casual periodical *Protestant Reveille*, James would remain an outspoken foe of Roman Catholicism until the 1990s. At the same time, however, this independent-minded clergyman frequently expressed relatively progressive views on a number of theological and social ethical matters, as will be seen in the subsequent chapters of the present study. He would also serve for many years on the Christian Citizenship Committee of the Baptist Union and play a formative role in resolutions which it presented to the denomination's

annual assembly. Anti-Catholicism, in other words, did not necessarily imply indifference to serious public issues confronting Baptists in South Africa any more than it had elsewhere. The point is that the Baptist Union devoted much of its attention to what history must judge to have been a virtually fruitless campaign against the proliferation of Roman Catholicism in South Africa during a crucial era of the nation's history when its time and energy could have more purposefully been expended on other matters. It might also be added that not a single one of the resolutions passed in this regard contained even a rudimentary theological argument. Apparently antipathy towards Roman Catholicism was so strong and widespread in amongst Baptists in South Africa that no such justification was deemed necessary.

The Continuation of Pietistic Resolutions

By no means, however, did the anti-Catholic campaign occupy centre stage of Baptist denominational consciousness during this period. As it had done during the colonial era, the Baptist Union paid a great deal of attention to such issues as the control of alcoholic beverages and other matters which entailed both social and personal ethics. The resolutions which delegates passed at the annual assemblies need not be described exhaustively here. Mention of a representative sample will suffice to indicate the concerns, prejudices, and meta-ethical limitations of the Baptist Union in this regard.

We can begin at the outset of the Union period. In 1910 the assembly continued its long-standing assault on the distribution of liquor. Delegates urged the government to restrict its sale to the indigenous African population. They declared that "there should be no further reduction in the Excise on brandy, and that the chief wine licences of the Cape Province should be brought under the provisions of the Innes Liquor Act".²⁵ This, as will be recalled from the immediately preceding chapter, was essentially a continuation of the Baptist Union's earlier endeavours to influence temperance legislation, particularly along racist lines.

The Baptist Union continued to petition the government to curb the sale of liquor and to do so partly along racial lines, although one gains the distinct impression that this was done in a spirit of compromise when it became apparent that a total prohibition of the liquor traffic on a national basis was simply not on the cards, at least in the short term. Nevertheless, the hope of an eventual ban did not completely disappear. In 1913, for instance, the annual assembly declared that it "deprecates" the easing of restrictions on the sale of alcohol to the "Natives" and urged the government to appoint a commission of inquiry "to consider the various Laws relating to the sale of liquor throughout the Union and the administration of the Laws with a view to levelling up in the direction of prohibiting the sale". At that time the delegates to the assembly also encouraged the government to pay special heed to the indigenous population should pertinent legislation be significantly amended. Precisely what they had in mind, however, they did not specify. The assembly did not direct its advice solely to the government, but also exhorted the congregations of the Baptist Union to observe the second Sunday of November as "Temperance Sunday".²⁶ In 1921 the assembly passed a resolution stating that its delegates were "unanimously in favour of the total prohibition of the import and manufacture of alcoholic liquors".²⁷ Two years later it applied its previous, partly racial resolutions on the subject to recent demographic developments by addressing the phenomenon of urban brewing and distribution of traditional African beer according to the terms of recent legislation regulating urban segregation and the financing of its administration partly through the concomitant regulation of the liquor traffic, a subject to be discussed in greater detail later in the present chapter. This time delegates did not confront the government directly, but urged members of Baptist congregations "to take active steps to oppose any proposals to institute native brewing of beer in locations, or setting up of municipal native beer shops under the native beer clauses of the Native (Urban Areas) Act, wherever and whenever notice of such proposals may be given".²⁸

By 1926 the Baptist Union had appointed a "Temperance Committee" which for several years served as the denomination's principal voice on questions involving the control of alcohol. One of its tasks was to

report to the annual assemblies on the issue and propose means of formulating an effective policy. As such it was a forerunner of the "Christian Citizenship Committee" which came into being during the 1960s. In one of its first actions, the Temperance Committee proposed in 1926 a resolution which gave the government's recent policies a review which was at once laudatory and critical. The resolution also contained one element which indicated that Baptist thinking about alcohol still contained a racial strain. This statement credited the government with establishing a uniform early closing hour for establishments which sold alcoholic beverages, prohibiting the sale of alcohol to people under eighteen years of age, and restricting the sale of yeast and methylated spirits. On the other hand, the Temperance Committee censured the civil authorities for no fewer than five measures which it believed were "highly inimical" to the cause of temperance, namely "the elimination of Local Option, the suggested extension of licences to cafés and tea rooms, the extension of the 'tot' system, the Government sale of wine and beer to Natives, and the re-establishment of Country canteens in the Orange Free State".²⁹

The racial dimension of the almost annual resolutions against the liberalisation of national alcohol policies became even more evident during the 1930s. In 1931 the assembly expressed its "grave concern" about the proposed introduction of the "tot" system already widespread in the Cape Province, in the Transvaal, "drinking clubs for non-Europeans in the Cape Province", and the licensing of cafés and tea rooms to serve light wines.³⁰ In 1938, moreover, the assembly passed and sent to the government a resolution declaring that "any increase in drinking facilities among Natives would be dangerous alike to Bantu welfare and European safety" and that it therefore disapproved "of all proposals bringing European liquors within legal reach of the native peoples" and asked the government "to give no countenance to such proposals". The same resolution also declared that "a large section of the coloured people" were beholden to "the worst consequences of alcoholism" and implored the government to heed suggestions recently made in a report by the Cape Coloured Commission, including *inter alia* "the placing of all sales [of alcohol] to coloured persons for off-consumption on a police permit system and the addition of an excise on all fortified wine".³¹ This resolution may

have represented the apogee of well-intended racial discrimination in white Baptists' efforts to counter the debilitating effects of alcohol on South African society and particularly, relating this explicitly to the security of their own ethnic group.

By 1942, midway through the Second World War, the Baptist Union virtually admitted that it had lost its battle against the ongoing proliferation of the immoderate use of alcohol and other vices. The personal habits of millions of South Africans remained untouched by its crusade. A resolution passed at the assembly that year conceded that at least in the short term there was little chance of victory in the absence of a public consensus on the matter:

Having protested for years past by resolutions to our Government, after earnest consideration thereof in our Annual Assemblies, regarding the growing evils of drunkenness, immorality, gambling and other social evils in our national life, and now admitting with sorrow that no effectual notice has been taken thereof, but being more concerned than ever over the extent of these evils which so grievously sap our national vitality, and, furthermore, being desperately exercised by the general outlook of this world-wide war, with its assault on personal liberty, which personal liberty is the very foundation of sound democratic government under which religious liberty is assured --

We, the members of the Baptist Assembly of South Africa, now in session, declare our conviction that our cause in this world-wide struggle will continue to suffer heart-aching reverses until such a demand shall come from the people as will compel our politicians to deal fundamentally with the drink trade, which trade is the chief and very evident source of national inefficiency, weakness, misery and crime, resulting in terrible, but avoidable, wastage in man power. . . . we cannot in truth believe we may surely hope for present victory.³²

The realisation that without broad public support resolutions directed at the government had little chance of influencing public policy did not in itself prove to be effective, as we shall see in subsequent

chapters. After the end of the Second World War, the Baptist Union would resume its practice of petitioning the government on a variety of social ethical matters, generally making equally little impact.

Gambling occupied a less prominent and persistent place in the Baptists' pietistic *syllabus errorum*. The Baptist Union never became nearly so preoccupied with countering this manifold pastime as it was with temperance, but early in the twentieth century it began to pass resolutions on it from time to time. One of the first came in 1907. The Union declared that it deplored "the increased betting and gambling among the people" on the grounds that it was "demoralising and mischievous". No effort to link these deprecating adjectives to Biblical or other theologies was expressed. The delegates to the assembly nevertheless sought to influence national policy during that period of gestation of the Union of South Africa by petitioning the British colonial administration of the region "not to heed the clamour which desires to legalise these evils" but to "encourage legislation whenever possible which aims at their lessening". The Baptist Union sought to wage the war against wagering on two fronts by appealing simultaneously to the ministers of its member churches "to bring this matter urgently before their congregations whenever opportunity offers".³³ Four years later the denomination praised the government of the young Union of South Africa for acting a moderate Draft Betting Bill, believing too confidently that this measure "a step toward the total abolition of betting". Delegates to the assembly in 1911 also advocated direct ecclesiastical influence on the legislative process (as opposed to that by individual Baptists acting in their capacity as citizens of the Union of South Africa) by encouraging "all Baptist Churches and congregations to give the Government all possible support in this effort to purify the life of the country".³⁴ Unlike some of the resolutions concerning the distribution of alcoholic beverages passed during this and other eras, these statements did not contain any explicit or implicit racial elements. The bane of gambling was apparently perceived as one which did not observe ethnic lines, and African participation in it was probably not regarded as posing any appreciable threat to the position of the whites.

One particular dimension of gambling which not only Christians of pietistic bent but also many church members who would disavow that

sobriquet have opposed but which others have sought to harness for ecclesiastical purposes is the multifaceted phenomenon of religious organisations raising funds through raffles and the like. The Baptist Union initially spoke out against this in 1921, making clear its conviction that this form of speculation was not morally superior to gambling *extra ecclesiam*. In a resolution passed that year, delegates vowed that "this Assembly condemns gambling, betting, and games of chance, and particularly disapproves of guessing competition, drawing for articles, etc., at sales and bazaars in connection with our Churches". In the same statement, the assembly insinuated itself into the financial policies of the young state without recorded dissent by categorically condemning its practice of collecting revenue through lotteries "in any form".³⁵

The Baptist Union continued to sing in essentially the same tune for decades, though not every year. Rarely did even the most rudimentary arguments of theological motivation accompany resolutions on gambling. When they did, they were poorly developed and usually shed very little light on the meta-ethical thinking underlying the positions taken. Surprisingly, moreover, in light of the generally prescriptive nature of Baptist ethics, little attempt was made to include any Biblical planks in these simple platforms. Indeed, one of the relatively well-developed resolutions, passed in 1932, reveals a teleological strain in Baptist ethical thought. At that time, the annual assembly declared:

Convinced that gambling in any form whatever, however specious or attractive, is contrary to Christian ethics and ultimately disastrous to Christian character and social well-being, this Assembly most strongly appeals to all our people, old and young, to take a definite stand against every kind of gambling and to avoid all appearance of evil in regard to practices which are working untold harm, such as the organization of sweepstakes, raffles, etc., in connection with churches, business places, colleges, and schools.³⁶

From time to time new forms of gambling arose or proliferated in South Africa which prompted the Baptist Union to take up the cudgels

against other foes on either the provincial or the national level. One such instance took place in 1934 when the Transvaal Provincial Council proposed legislation to allow the extension of facilities for dog racing. The resolution passed in response to this move simply expressed the denomination's "great regret" about it and urged the council to "refuse all such projects". In a related resolution of that year directed at the government of the Union of South Africa, the assembly shed a few additional photons on its teleological reasons for opposing gambling in general. In all its forms, the delegates asserted, it was dangerous to "the commercial integrity and financial stability of the State, and especially also to the moral character of the people". It particularly irked these representatives that the national government was considering proposals to institute governmental lotteries as a means of increasing its revenue.³⁷ Similarly, a year later the assembly voiced its protest against "the deification of pleasure" with regard to sexual morality, the public observance of Sunday, and gambling. Representatives decried the proliferation of slot machines and other gaming apparatuses in restaurants, hotels, and other public places. They appealed to the minister of justice to initiate legislation to "reduce or if possible eliminate the danger which is becoming increasingly serious through gambling and pilfering habits being engendered in the young".³⁸

When dealing with such perceived social maladies as the liberal distribution of alcoholic beverages and legalised gambling, South African Baptists were acting on a relatively firm tradition of social involvement which they had brought to the region from Britain. Had they attempted to do so, they could also have readily found Biblical ammunition which would have fitted the calibre of the prescriptive deontological ethics which appears to have lain behind many of their pronouncements but which was rarely made explicit. On the other hand, the twentieth century brought entirely new ethical problems which obviously could not be addressed by simplistically turning to the Old Testament or the New for quick, prescriptive solutions and which were without direct precedent in British ecclesiastical history. One of the first was the motion picture industry, which dramatically changed life, particularly the use of leisure time, in South African cities nearly as much as it did in Europe, North America, and

elsewhere. Film production never really gelled in South Africa, despite considerable local interest and repeated efforts to place on firm ground the modest beginnings which were made during the first third of the century. Nevertheless, virtually from the outset many Baptists expressed dismay with cinematography and regarded this new phenomenon as a threat to public moral standards in South Africa. Rarely did they explain their opposition to films and, even less so than in their responses to alcohol and gambling did they attempt to present a meta-ethical or other theoretical basis for their position. Nevertheless, efforts to limit the burgeoning popularity of the cinema became a persistent if entirely superficial theme in Baptist social ethics.

The first denominational response to this new development in entertainment came in 1911, *i.e.* during an era when the Baptist Union was enacting resolutions aimed specifically at the distribution of alcoholic beverages amongst indigenous Africans and other non-Europeans in South Africa. It was part of an omnibus resolution which contained a blatant racist motivation. "That in view of the large numbers of uncivilised and semi-civilised Natives living among us", the delegates to the assembly that year declared, "it is imperatively necessary that more stringent legislation be passed as regards the importation, sale and exhibition of objectionable matter in this connection". It is difficult not to infer from the text of this resolution that it was essentially an expression of sexual fear and, intimately related to this, part of the larger strategy of racial control. Copies of the resolution were sent to the administrations of the four provinces, the prime minister, and the minister of justice of the new Union of South Africa.³³

The degree of censorship imposed on imported and locally produced films and printed matter rarely appears to have satisfied South African Baptists in general. Again and again delegates to the annual assemblies demanded more stringent governmental control. The racial dimension remained prominent in these petitions. In 1924, for instance, the assembly declared that it appreciated both the endeavours of the Board of Film Censors to use its power of discretion and unspecified "difficulties" which that body faced, but it also insisted that "stricter supervision should be exercised over pictures

shown to young people and Natives in the bioscopes of the country, and reaffirms the opinion that a common censorship of films should be established for the whole Union".

The 1924 "Statement of Belief"

At the annual assembly held in Durban in October 1924, the Baptist Union adopted a brief creed consisting of eleven articles. In an accompanying resolution of anonymous authorship, delegates appear to have been responding to the theological instability of the time in stating that "a point has been reached in our denominational history at which a fresh statement of our beliefs in unambiguous current phraseology is desirable". The cursory statement of faith which they drafted was arguably much less unambiguous than intended, and subsequently it came under attack, especially by Baptists who regarded themselves as loyal sons of the Calvinist tradition, as theologically inadequate. It did, however, emphasise the inspiration of the Old and New Testaments without seeking to define how the Scriptures were inspired, affirmed such consensus doctrines as those of the Trinity, the creation of mankind in the image in the image of God and the fall of mankind in conventional language. The article on ecclesiology mentioned explicitly both the universal and local churches. Eschatology was limited to an eleven-word statement affirming belief in "the personal return of the Lord Jesus Christ". The doctrine of the Atonement was essentially Anselmian, referring to the death of Jesus Christ as "a substitutionary sacrifice according to the Scriptures" and declaring that "all who believe in Him are justified on the ground of His shed blood". Almost nothing in this skeletal creed touched on ethics. The only partial exception to this generalisation was in the fourth article and pertained to human nature. All human beings "inherit sinful nature which issues "in the case of those who reach moral responsibility) actual transgression involving personal guilt".⁴⁰ This statement provided virtually no meta-ethical guidance to Baptists, however. On the surface, that would seem anomalous in its historical context, for at the same assembly the Baptist Union passed several resolutions pertaining to both personal and social ethics. One might

reasonably surmise from this, together with the weakness of the article on Creation which specifies little beyond a statement about the sinful nature of humanity, that ethical concerns were still at most a secondary theological matter for the Baptists who attended the assembly, or at least those who drafted the confession. For that matter, had a doctrine or doctrines explicitly pertinent to Christian ethics been included in the creed, they would neither have necessarily reflected the moral concerns of the Baptist Union as a whole nor been binding on either its individual congregations or their members. The congregational polity of the denomination would not have allowed that. As one official of the Baptist Union put it graphically at the time, "Churches may throw the statement in the waste paper basket if they like".⁴¹

The Quest for Political Relevance: Race Relations

While many of the resolutions which the Baptist Union passed between the founding of the Union of South Africa and the accession of the National Party to power in 1948 failed to touch on the worsening race relations which set the stage for subsequent violent conflict in the country, on occasion it did in fact address them. Furthermore, beginning in the 1920s *The South African Baptist* occasionally carried articles and editorials which sought to call to the attention of readers the gravity of this general matter and of specific concerns within it. In retrospect little of this seems radical; indeed, much of what was written during the economically and socially turbulent 1920s and 1930s it could be interpreted within the context of the more general white South African endeavour to maintain racial hegemony within that society by granting minor reforms and thereby take the wind out of the sails of potential revolution. Yet such an explanation papers over the obvious sincerity of some Baptists' expressed concerns for justice *per se*. Nor does it shed any light on the theological basis, however poorly expressed, which underlay at least some of the Baptist commentary and actions at that time.

Perhaps no individual of the inter-war era pricked the consciences and opened the eyes of his fellow Baptists to the critical importance

of improving race relations in South Africa more than Clement Martyn Doke. A son of Joseph J. Doke, he was born in Bristol in 1893 and emigrated to the Transvaal when his father accepted a call to Johannesburg. He was thus present as a teenager in that city when the elder Doke assisted Gandhi in the Indian campaign against registration and struck up a cordial relationship with the great Indian leader which prompted the young man to continue to correspond with him occasionally for decades. This experience appears to have left its mark on Clement Doke who, like his father, became a champion of human rights in South Africa.

Doke accompanied his father on a tour of the Copper Belt in North Western Rhodesia (eventually Zambia) in 1914. It was on this journey that the elder Doke contracted enteric fever and died. Clement then served as a missionary in Lambaland from 1914 until 1921. His burning professional interest, however, was African languages, and it was that field which proved to be his *métier* in which he made a mark second to that of no other scholar in South Africa. After a period at the London School of Oriental Languages, Doke was appointed Senior Lecturer in the newly created Dept of Bantu Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand in 1923. The following year he received a D.Litt. there on a thesis about the phonetics of Zulu. Doke then studied a bewildering list of African languages. He delved into the phonetics of the San of the north-western Kalahari Desert and edited Jacottet's *Sesuto Grammar*. This increasingly prominent and versatile linguist published frequently on the Lamba, Ila, and Zulu languages. His well-known *Text Book of Zulu Grammar* appeared in 1927. Doke spent part of 1929 in Southern Rhodesia as a Carnegie Travelling Research Fellow, studying philology and phonetics of the languages indigenous to that country; for the remainder of 1929 he was seconded by the University of the Witwatersrand to the government of Southern Rhodesia to report on the possibility of unifying the forty-three dialects of the Shona language group. In the meantime he had begun to work on two major lexicographical projects, namely his *Zulu-English Dictionary* and *English-Lamba Dictionary*. Eventually Doke received doctorates *honoris causa* from his *alma mater* and Rhodes University. Though not formally theologically educated, he was without question one of the most erudite members of the Baptist Union of South Africa. Shortly after

returning to South Africa from his stint at a missionary in Lambaland, Doke became editor of *The South African Baptist* in 1922. The talented linguist, though lacking in journalistic and formal theological preparation, held this position with only brief interruptions until 1947. Throughout this period he was also a professor of African languages at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. In this capacity he soon became a conspicuous champion of moderately liberal causes during the particularly racist political era dominated by the "Pact" coalition government of the National Party and the Labour Party. What on the surface may seem incongruous is that despite his stature as a social reformer, Doke was a keen premillenarian who awaited the imminent Second Advent of Jesus Christ.⁴² His eschatology, in other words, did not preclude at least the possibility of an optimistic perception of social ethics. Nothing in his editorials and other articles published in *The South African Baptist* suggests that he attempted to force historical events into a dispensationalist framework, perceived disruptive social or political forces as being the work of the Antichrist or signs that the Parousia was at hand, or committed any of the other theological gaucheries which strongly millenarian Christians who both wrote frequently and commented on contemporary political life have been wont to make since the nineteenth century.

One of Doke's first major endeavours to raise the level of consciousness among his fellow Baptists concerning tense race relations during the 1920s was a lengthy review he wrote of J.H. Oldham's *Christianity and the Race Problem*⁴³ Doke quoted this volume, which in its day was moderately progressive but which, read several decades later, seems paternalistic and generally irrelevant, approvingly and at length. He began his review of it, however, by commenting about the gravity of the "Native Problem" in South Africa, particularly in the wake of recent incidents which smacked of a severe racial bias in the country's judicial system. "If we are to regain the confidence of the native population", Doke wrote in the apparent belief that white South Africa once had enjoyed such confidence, "here is one place in which it is most important to reform: *justice must be dispensed evenly*". Presaging much later developments concerning the socio-political role of the so-called "black homelands" or "bantustans" within South Africa, the young editor thought another matter which

had caused race relations to become strained was the proposed annexation of Basutoland (later Lesotho) and "making it a dumping place for millions of segregated natives, while it is sheer nonsense, of which no school-boy should be guilty" as it gave "the native the impression that he is being trifled with and exploited". Writing in very general terms, Doke asserted that "the principles of Christ's teaching must be the basis upon which we should approach this whole problem". If European Christians in South Africa continued to ignore Christian ethics when dealing with the "native problem", he believed, "we are doomed to failure". Despite the great history of missionary undertakings in South Africa, Christianity had remained in the eyes of many whites there primarily the religion of their own ethnic group, in Doke's perception. He urged readers to remember that Jesus Christ had died "for black as well as for white" and suggested that this realisation could serve as a "powerful incentive to justice" in the land. Doke did not explain, however, whether by this he meant that he accepted an Abelardian concept of the Atonement which would provide part of the foundation for Christian ethics, including interracial justice, or related the Crucifixion to a broader and more acute understanding of ethics which might compel white South Africans to remember that the indigenes of the country were equal to them in the inclusive sight of God. A third possible explanation is that the amateur theologian Doke realised that some whites misinterpreted the account of Noah's sons in Genesis 9 so as to regard Africans in general as being under the curse of Ham and sought to counter this eisegesis by emphasising that the Atonement, applying as it did to people irrespective of their ethnic identity, had rendered such a belief untenable. This is yet another example, particularly frustrating because of both its link to one of the most intellectually gifted and socially concerned persons in the history of the Baptist Union and its immediate relevance to social ethics at the most fundamental level, of the absence of an adequate theological explanation for a position expressed on a contemporary issue.⁴⁴

Doke's virtually uncritical parroting of Oldham's book provides valuable insight into his social thinking during the 1920s and, in a few places, the neophyte editor's understanding of how Christian faith applied to the South African public scene at that time, especially with

regard to racial matters. A few of the most elemental tenets which Doke elected to place before the readers of his periodical can be cited here. He praised particularly two chapters of Oldham's volume, namely those titled the "Fact of Inequality" and the "Truth of Equality". Doke agreed with Oldham that racial disparities were inescapably part of reality and should not be overlooked, though Doke did not elaborate on this. Yet he also concurred, again without explanation, that the "truth of equality" underlay "every race no matter what colour, creed or state of civilisation". The Baptist editor predicted that while historically speaking nationalism had been the bane of Europe, "in the future the world is to be chastised with the scorpions of racialism". He also agreed with Oldham that "the policy of exploitation received a powerful reinforcement in the nineteenth century with the Darwinian conception of organic evolution" and that "it must not be supposed that the government of subject peoples is undertaken, or in existing circumstances can be expected to be undertaken, from purely philanthropic motives".⁴⁵

Doke did not print much pertaining directly to race relations in South Africa for two more years. In January 1927, however, the Federal Council of the Dutch Reformed Church called an interracial, interdenominational council in Cape Town to discuss certain policies of the Pact government which had exacerbated racial tensions in the country. This was modelled to some extent on the large conference which had taken place in Johannesburg in 1923. Doke found the event sufficiently important to report it at length and in unabashedly personal terms. He praised the speeches which such individuals as J.D. Rheinallt Jones, who would be one of the founders of the South African Institute of Race Relations, and Professor Jabavu of what was then called Fort Hare College. On the other hand, Doke dismissed A. Champion, who represented the ICU, because "his manner was unfortunately rather too presumptuous and his language exaggerated". Jabavu and M. Pelem impressed him more than any of the white speakers. "We have seldom heard questions answered in a more perfect and statesmanlike manner than they were by Mr. Jabavu", wrote Doke, "nor do we ever remember listening to a more polished 19th century style of oratory than was contained in Mr. Pelem's paper on the Economic position of the Natives". To Doke's dismay, not all speakers

refrained from broaching the twin concerns of racial purity and self-interest. He singled out the chairman of the conference, the Dutch Reformed minister D.S. Botha, for making an appeal to European "self-preservation" in his opening address. Doke commented, "Surely the Christian's duty is to remember that he who would save his own soul shall lose it". He contrasted this position with that which a Dr Henderson presented in a "convincing paper". Doke found this much more defensible in terms of Christian ethics and quoted the final paragraph of Henderson's speech, timely words which would ring true several decades later. "The trend of native policy at present, everyone recognises, is towards saving the white race. It is rather shameful to admit it, but the impulse is ". Henderson had linked this theme to a critique of the Pact government's religious rhetoric in invoking the name of God in defence of its racial policies: "It is the whites, everyone knows, that have been infringing racial purity. If our leaders, in a spirit of racial selfishness, take to playing at providence, what are our prospects? The destiny of the South African whites is not in their hands but in His who requires of us to do do justly and love mercy". Doke concluded his report on the conference by quoting without theological or other comment the resolutions which the delegates had passed concerning land tenure, the economic situation of the indigenous population, and the Native Council's Bill. Some of the most salient points in these resolutions were that "the Government should place as few restrictions as possible upon the acquisition of land by natives", that the conference "welcomed all measures towards the improvement of the natives' economic position", and that "the Government appoint a commission to enquire into the economic position of the natives".⁴⁶

Doke's concern for racial justice extended not only to the South African government's relations with black indigenes but also to a resolution of the so-called "Indian question" which had pricked his father's conscience during the first decade of the century. He therefore welcomed the enactment in 1927 of legislation concerning Asians in South Africa which he believed would open the door to just treatment of them. Doke expressed relief that an earlier version of the bill had not been forced through parliament, for if it had "a grave injustice would have been wrought upon the Indian people in South

Africa . . . and a bad moral effect on the people of South Africa". He regarded bill as amended as an "amicable and Christian" resolution of the matter and, in the wake of less fortuitous laws recently enacted was gratified that it appeared to prove that even "the most contentious matters" could be resolved through negotiation, rendering it unnecessary to "resort to drastic, one-sided and often unjust legislation". Within this framework, one clause in the law struck Doke as having "special significance". In the condescendingly benevolent spirit then prevalent in moderately progressive white circles, it read: "The Union Government firmly believe in and adhere to the principle that it is the duty of every civilised Government to devise ways and means and to take all possible steps for the uplifting of every section of their permanent population", including the Indians of South Africa, "who will remain part of the permanent population [and thus] should not be allowed to lag behind any other sections of the people".⁴⁷

A final instance of Doke's journalistic concern about race relations before the Second World War related to ecclesiology. In 1935 he praised the Diocese of Johannesburg of the Church of the Province in Johannesburg for resisting compulsory segregation of one of its parishes. When diocesan officials announced their plans to construct a chapel in the Orange Grove district of Johannesburg, some Anglicans and non-Anglicans insisted that a clause be inserted into the trust deed prohibiting the building from being used by non-Europeans. The diocese resisted this pressure, a move which won Doke's respect. "In the Anglican Church to-day no priest has the right to repel a confirmed non-European who presents himself for communion", he informed readers of *The South African Baptist*. "We admire this stand against [the] colour bar, and sincerely hope that, even though the church may have to be erected elsewhere, no such concession will be made to racial objectors".⁴⁸ Although this journalistic reaction was limited to a development in another denomination, it could have served as a minor precedent for the resistance which Baptists and Christians in other communions afforded when the government sought with partial success in 1957 to impose stiff legal restrictions on the integration of worship in South Africa. That was essentially a different matter, however, one which will be described in detail in a subsequent chapter.

Doke continued to raise a prophetic voice within the Baptist Union for decades, both before and after his tenure at the helm of *The South African Baptist* ended in 1947. We shall return to his post-World War II comments and activities in the immediately following chapter. For the present, it is important to keep his role in perspective. Doke, as indicated earlier, may have been the most outspoken social critic in the denomination during the 1920s and 1930s. It would be quite wrong to infer that the opinions which this African linguist and erstwhile missionary expressed during those decades represented white Baptist social and political thought in general. It would be equal facile to assume that merely because he occupied one of the most influential positions in the Baptist Union that he in fact wielded noteworthy influence in it. The extent to which Doke actually shaped what his denominational fellows believed and how they addressed problems facing their country cannot be empirically demonstrated but only surmised.

Resolutions Pertaining to Race Relations and Social Justice

There is no reason to believe that in practice the Baptist Union ever fulfilled the obvious hopes of men like C.M. Doke in its policies and actions relating to the application of Christian ethics to public issues. Nevertheless, at least on the surface the denomination compiled a noteworthy record of criticising *some* governmental policies which many observers exacerbated race relations and proposing means for attempting to ameliorate them. Several of the most significant ones prior to the accession of the National Party to power in 1948 will serve to illustrate both the degree of denominational social concern during the period under consideration and the cultural captivity of ethical thought amongst South African Baptists at that time.

The consideration of the Natives (Urban Areas) Bill in parliament in 1922 provides a convenient starting point. That statute, which laid much of the foundation for urban racial segregation on a national basis (which in fact had been practised for decades on a piecemeal local basis) was arguably one of the most consequential pieces of legislation in South African history. There is no evidence that the

Baptist Union gave the racial components of the measure the detailed study which they deserved. Instead, delegates to the 1922 assembly afforded it only, a traditionally pietistic consideration by declaring that they welcomed its provisions in general but urged the government to "delete the clauses relating to municipal native beer establishments". They also stated, however, that if the government refused to excise these sections from the bill, they would regard it as their obligation to oppose by all possible means its passage in parliament.⁴⁹

This is not to suggest that the Baptist Union was entirely oblivious to the gravity of interracial tensions affecting the country during the 1920s and some of the consequences of those strains. In general, white Baptists appear to have condoned the underlying principle of segregation as a basic strategy for dealing with them, although rarely did they say so explicitly. This was at most a secondary matter behind what seemed to be more pressing concerns, namely those pertaining to personal morality and the unrestricted exercise of religion. In 1924, for instance, the assembly took note of without criticising "the efforts being made to locate Natives in special villages under Municipal control". At the same time the assembly appealed to the authorities "to provide that all recognised religious denominations and workers have free access to these areas on equal terms and conditions".⁵⁰

In 1925 the assembly addressed the problem of racial tensions directly, though in an entirely effete way which probably failed to make a dent in it. The delegates resolved: "This Assembly, concerned at the growing suspicion between the European and native populations of this country, expressed its conviction that all questions connected with the adjustment of the relationship between the races should not be dealt with on party lines. Every possible effort should be made to secure the application of Christian principles". They also warned that "disaster faces us if selfish and racial considerations are allowed to rule in these matters". In a third oblique assertion the assembly suggested that "only by conference, goodwill, co-operation and justice can we arrive at a satisfactory and permanent settlement".⁵¹ This concern could hardly have been expected to bear fruit or set the stage for further action, however, because it both lacked a meta-

ethical basis and failed to cast any light on specific problems. Subsequent considerations of whatever the difficulties obliquely referred to, in other words, would have to begin afresh.

Much the same could be said about a resolution which the assembly passed in 1927 concerning "Native Questions". That parley, held in Cape Town, celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the Baptist Union but did not dignify the occasion by elevating the discussion of social ethics to a theologically higher altitude than that at which it had flown for half a century. In utterly general terms the delegates urged members of the denomination "to give earnest thought to all questions touching the welfare of the native peoples of this country with a view to a Christian treatment of all such questions". The only moderately specific element in the resolution was an expression of approval of the efforts which the national government and several municipalities had made "to ameliorate the appalling housing conditions obtaining in most of our larger centres" and words of encouragement to these bodies to continue to provide shelter for the most indigent South Africans so as "to abolish the present deplorable overcrowding".⁵² Nothing in this resolution appealed directly to the consciences of Baptists, and it did not contain any hint that the men who drafted it understood the sources of poverty in South Africa. It was thus little more than praise of inadequate and inconsistent efforts to treat the symptoms of deeply rooted social ills.

Four years later the Baptist World Alliance, the international umbrella organisation which included many but far from all of the denominations which bore the "Baptist" label, issued one of its first statements on racism in South Africa. It urged the government of that country to keep in mind "the necessity of absolutely fair treatment of the native peoples in all legal enactments touching their affairs". The BWA also declared that the system of taxation which obtained in South Africa was "fundamentally unjust" and warned the government that its policies "cannot continue with impunity and without recoil upon the white peoples of the country". The Baptist Union of South Africa associated itself with this statement at its assembly in 1931 and stated with characteristic obliqueness that it "protests against any injustice to the peoples whose rights as men and women are the same as those of the more favoured races and whose well-being and development

concern the white community, especially that part of the community which calls itself Christian".⁵³ Again, however, there is no evidence of Baptists adopting more specific policies or even nuancing this general protest in such a way that would allow it to serve as the rhetorical basis of a plan of action to counter repressive laws or otherwise challenge the government.

In fairness to the denomination, however, it should be emphasised that just one year later it finally adopted more precise resolutions which placed certain governmental policies under a low-powered loupe. Precisely what galvanised the Baptist Union at that time is difficult to ascertain. It may well have been the influence of men like C.M. Doke. In any case, the delegates at the 1932 assembly appealed to what they may have believed was a genuine rhetorical and prophetic tradition when they challenged the "job reservation" policies of the Pact government. They asserted with no mean exaggeration that

this Assembly of Baptists who have stood all through their history for civil and religious liberty and equity, expressed its strong indignation at the Government's apparent policy of repression towards the Native peoples, especially in the matter of replacing Native labour by European labour where Natives have for so long done the necessary work faithfully and well, and earnestly protests against a flagrant injustice.⁵⁴

A year later the assembly again emphasised this concern, this time stressing the negative consequences of job reservation to the whites of South Africa. The resolution passed at that time deplored "the increasing restriction on avenues of employment for Natives" and asserted that "a policy of selfishness and fear on the part of the white races of this country will issue not only in injustice to, and repression of, the Native races, but will react upon themselves to their detriment and undoing".⁵⁵ In lieu of Christian meta-ethics, in other words, the drafters of the resolution merely made an unveiled appeal to racial self-interest.

During the remainder of the 1930s and into the 1940s the Baptist Union continued to take almost annual stands against racist governmental policies, thereby creating an ethical-rhetorical tradition

which could have served it well as a bulwark against the implementation of full-scale apartheid a few years later. The Baptist Union also spoke out occasionally on purely economic matters which were not directly related to racial tensions. At the 1934 assembly, for example, delegates passed a resolution stating that it viewed "with deep concern" the chronically high rate of unemployment in the country, although they did not pinpoint reasons for it or suggest what could be done to counter unemployment as such. Instead, they requested the Minister for Labour "to take into earnest consideration the amelioration of the conditions under which Relief Workers are employed, particularly in respect of the daily remuneration and hours of labour of such workers".⁵⁶ Again, the languid response of the denomination was one of assuaging the symptoms of a deeply rooted socio-economic problem rather than addressing its causes.

At the same time, the Baptist Union addressed the question of the "Native Poll Tax", an issue which was hotly debated in South Africa for several years during the 1930s. The resolution about it, directed squarely at the government, declared that "the Native Poll Tax bears oppressively upon many Natives, and further that it introduces into Native legislation the principle flat rate taxation which discriminates against the Native peoples". Shifting to a pragmatic gear, the delegates expressed their conviction that "the vast majority of the Natives in the Union are law-abiding, that they recognise the meaning and necessity of taxation, and that they are prepared to pay any taxation within their means". No more than in most of their previous or subsequent resolutions did the delegates seek to present even the most rudimentary meta-ethical basis for these words. Instead, they merely asserted that "the Poll Tax cannot be justified on any moral or economic grounds" and urged upon the government "its immediate replacement by some more equitable and just means of raising revenue for Native services".⁵⁷ One obvious presupposition in this was the continuation of an essentially segregated society in which the dominant whites would administer the indigenous African population. At that time there was not the faintest hint in the Baptist Union or, for that matter, in most other white churches in South Africa, of a call for the transition to a democratic, nonracial society. Three years later the Baptist Union passed a similar resolution calling for the repeal of the

poll tax, the abolition of prison sentences for failure to pay it, and "the introduction of more equitable taxation". What was implied in the last-named demand is impossible to ascertain with any precision. Yet the delegates were less restrained in acting on the matter; they sent copies of the resolution to the governments of the Union of South Africa and, *mutatis mutandis*, Southern Rhodesia.⁵⁸ In this respect, the Baptist Union was adhering to its well-developed tradition of addressing civil authorities on public issues, thus further developing a precedent of which many South African Baptists in later decades have been unaware, as we shall see in subsequent chapters. In 1939 the government of South Africa announced its intention to mitigate the effects of the poll tax on the black population, a move which caused the Baptist Union to issue a commendatory resolution at its assembly that year.⁵⁹

In the meantime the denomination had broadened slightly its expressed consciousness of racism in South Africa. In 1938 the assembly, while recognising but not in any way defining what it called the "legitimate pride of race", recorded its "deep sorrow for, and abhorrence of, all racial bitterness and hatred" and called upon all Baptists to bring a Christian spirit to bear upon "all matters involving race relationships and to use every possible endeavour to foster mutual respect and love between those of different nationalities". What triggered this resolution is difficult to determine. The only specific aspect of racism specified in the resolution was "anti-semitic propaganda", which was mentioned in a separate paragraph which also implored South African Baptists to maintain what was too ambivalently called "the New Testament attitude of mind and heart towards the Jewish people". This, however, does not appear to have been the only kind of "racial bitterness and hatred" which had prompted the resolution. In yet another paragraph, the resolution declared the gratitude of the Baptist Union that it encompassed "Afrikaans, German, Indian, Bantu and British Christians".⁶⁰

Three years later the Baptist Union passed a multiple resolution dealing with three aspects of race relations. The overarching concern was that the government's undefined "resolve to administrate for the social and economic welfare of all classes and races in the Union to ensure a better standard of living" continue. First, delegates called

for "an extension of educational facilities" without specifying whether by this they meant *inter alia* an increase in the number of mission schools which received public financial support, the opening of additional schools not under the administration of mission boards, or some third alternative. There is no reason to believe that the framers of the resolution had racial integration of schools in mind. Secondly, they called for an abolition of the poll tax, which was still in force. Thirdly, delegates encouraged the government to use as soon as possible information which a commission of enquiry into the health and living conditions of urban blacks had gathered and on the basis of those data "to legislate for a higher standard of living".⁶¹ Though brief, this was one of the most incisive and forthright statements which the Baptist Union had directed at the government until that time on matters which did not deal simply with questions of personal morality but rather on the role of the government in improving the lot of black South Africans, particularly in the urban sector which was growing almost exponentially during the war and would continue to expand rapidly after the conclusion of hostilities. It signalled an ongoing evolution of Baptist attitudes regarding the nature of relations between church and state, especially in terms of what the former could ask of the latter without presenting any kind of justification for doing so.

Yet the evolution of the Baptist social consciousness and the willingness of the Baptist Union to raise a prophetic voice against social injustice did not proceed in a straight line. For the duration of the Second World War the resolutions which the Union passed at its annual assemblies were relatively vague and weak, arguably representing a step backward in terms of their potential effectiveness. In 1942 it declared obliquely that "God has a plan for the world, including South Africa, and . . . this plan has in view the happiness and prosperity of every individual, irrespective of race or colour". The Baptist Union further appealed to all Christians "to consider how the eternal principles of Christian justice can be applied in the political, economic and social spheres in the many different communities in the Union" and endeavour to "put these principles into action in everyday life, and National policy, and that plans ought to be prepared with this end in view".⁶² Several years would go by, however,

before the Baptist Union itself began to draft such "plans" and move beyond aloof generalisations in any meaningful way.

Endnotes

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24. *The South African Baptist Hand-Book for 1945-1946* (Grahamstown: Grocott & Sherry, n.d.), p. 75.
25. *The South African Baptist Hand-Book for 1910-11*, p. 28.
26. *The South African Baptist Hand-Book for 1913-14*, p. 21.
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60. *The South African Baptist Hand-Book for 1938-1939*, pp. 74-75.
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CHAPTER V

ACCOMMODATING APARTHEID, 1948-1980

Introduction

The year 1948 has long been regarded as a watershed in the political history of South Africa, one which also had great repercussions in the country's religious history, especially with regard to Christian social ethics. That year the National Party led by former Dutch Reformed Church minister Daniel F. Malan won a narrow victory in the parliamentary elections after promising the electorate to impose *apartheid*, a recently coined term which would soon become known around the world, on South African society, thereby coordinating and making more thorough the inconsistent system of racial segregation which had developed piecemeal since the nineteenth century. Since the 1970s shifts in historiographical analysis have tended to emphasise the continuities of the post-1948 era of Nationalist domination with the unfolding of both Anglophone and Afrikaans hegemony which had preceded it, particularly in the far-reaching realm of race relations. Nevertheless, 1948 was an important year in terms of various denominations' reactions to the national crisis in South Africa, not simply because the political changes it brought elicited different reactions in the church, for some Christian bodies responded with alarm to what they regarded as a grave turn in the nation's history while others hardly reacted at all, but also because from that time onward it became increasingly difficult for them to ignore completely the issue of racial domination. This was the case with the Baptist Union, which both in the late 1940s and occasionally during the immediately following decade raised a weak and ineffective prophetic voice but which, by and large, accepted the imposition of apartheid and by 1960 had reached a state of virtual silence with regard to it. In this respect white South African Baptists differed little from many other white Anglophone Protestants in the country, although some denominations, perhaps most notably the Church of the Province of South Africa and the Methodist Church, were the arenas of bitter internal strife between *de facto* supporters and opponents

of apartheid. Indeed, no major denomination, including the Baptist Union, spoke with one voice prior to the 1960s, and none was able to impede in any significant way the extension of racial segregation during the governments of Malan, Strydom, Verwoerd, or Vorster.

In the present chapter we shall first establish the context of various denominational and other churchly reactions to and participation in the development of official apartheid in South Africa, emphasising the plurality of responses to it between 1948 and the 1980s. Against this background we shall then go into considerably more depth in looking at how the Baptist Union in general and individual members of it met or avoided the ethical issues which the imposition and unfolding of apartheid posed. This is, to be sure, a broad topic. In order to manage it effectively, we shall concentrate on a relatively small number of issues, such as the parliamentary election of 1948, the enactment of early apartheid legislation, the Bantu Education Act of 1953, and the Native Laws Amendment Act of 1957. Following these sections, we shall consider such challenges to apartheid as the SACC's "Message to the People of South Africa" issued in 1968, paying particular attention to the Baptist role in them. Throughout the present chapter, we shall seek to maintain a dual focus on actions and theology. It will be seen that in general Baptists who commented on social ethics after 1948 tended to do so with more apparent theological sophistication than hitherto had been the case, but that many of their arguments continued to assume and emphasise the individualistic pietism which had characterised the preceding era. Moreover, it will be apparent that many of the arguments which they put forth still reflected the cultural captivity of threatened, middle-class whites in a post-colonial environment and were replete with errors of fact and logic. At times the theological content, though more obvious than previously, was very tenuous, notwithstanding the establishment of Baptist theological colleges in South Africa beginning in the 1950s and the gradual improvement of white Baptist academic standards during the latter half of the twentieth century.

Denominational Reactions to the Revolution of 1948

As John W. de Gruchy, Charles Villa-Vicencio, and others have shown, Christian denominations and other ecclesiastical agencies in South Africa reacted in various ways to the blatantly racist platform on which the National Party ran in 1948 and to its victory in the parliamentary election of that year and continued to do so for decades after the Nationalist accession to power.¹ That the leadership and general membership of the Dutch Reformed churches not only supported the National Party platform through the press and from the pulpit but, owing to the high percentage of members of that organisation who also belonged to Dutch Reformed churches and in numerous instances were ministers in them, also contributed substantially to the ideological and even theological underpinnings of apartheid, is too well known to require substantiation here. The relatively liberal voices of such Dutch Reformed theologians as B.B. Keet and Ben Marais were too few and too weak to stop the juggernaut of institutionalised racism and the theological support it enjoyed. Generally speaking, in the so-called English-speaking churches apartheid and Nationalist rule received mixed reviews and were the objects of protests which varied from effete and virtually meaningless to quite vocal but only marginally effective. Villa-Vicencio, representing one pole of critical historical comment, has denounced the generally accommodating response of the Anglophone churches after 1948. He acknowledges the voices which some of these denominations raised against apartheid but argues that "only on one obvious occasion did this protest threaten to become resistance, and that was when [Minister of Native Affairs Hendrik F.] Verwoerd introduced the famous church clause designed to impose racial segregation in the worship services of these churches". In general, Villa-Vicencio contends, "the institutional churches were left to protest without being part of the forces of resistance". He finds the only meaningful Christian opposition to the "ever-encroaching state tyranny" and the implementation of apartheid during this era in extra-ecclesiastical groups.² Taking a more nuanced approach to the subject, de Gruchy subdivides the denominational landscape of South Africa during the years after the elections of May 1948, pointing out that many English-speaking

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Christians in various denominations across much of the theological spectrum did in fact speak out and that numerous opportunities for united action, some of them also involving Dutch Reformed members, arose but fell victim to ethnic rivalries and other factors. De Gruchy even mentions the Baptist Union along with Presbyterians, Methodists, and others as part of the broad, critical reaction to the threats which the government of D.F. Malan made to non-white suffrage and parliamentary representation in 1948.³ On the whole, however, as indicated in Chapter II of the present study, he has little to say about Baptist responses to public ethical questions. Reflecting his own noteworthy participation in the SACC, de Gruchy emphasises the role of that organisation in protests against apartheid.

Before turning to the Baptist Union and considering the reactions which it as a denomination and individual members of its constituent churches made to apartheid beginning in 1948, it may be useful for purposes of comparison to survey briefly the positions which what eventually became one of the largest denominations in South Africa, namely the Roman Catholic Church, took on the matter during the late 1940s and the 1950s. This is not to suggest that this communion more closely resembled the Baptist Union in terms of social ethics than did any of the numerically smaller ones. It merely means that a meaningful comparison can be drawn between these two denominations, one which has been overlooked but which can be eye-opening, despite their many differences and the deeply entrenched tradition of anti-Catholicism amongst many Baptists. At first glance such a comparison might seem useless and merely provocative, given the glaring differences separating the meta-ethical presuppositions and the politics of these two bodies. South African Baptists have generally paid at least lip service to Biblical prescriptive ethics, and while Roman Catholics in South Africa and elsewhere have also made frequent use of the Bible in developing positions on such social ethical issues as race relations they also have a major tradition of papal encyclicals and other aspects of their ecclesiastical tradition on which to build. Furthermore, the Baptist Union has upheld its cardinal principle of congregational polity and, concomitantly, the limitations of its Executive to establish policy for or speak on behalf of the local churches. The Roman Catholic Church, by contrast, has preserved its hierarchical polity, despite

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enormous internal ethnic cleavages. The highly structured but nevertheless varied nature of the Church of Rome lends itself to such comparisons, not merely because its powerful episcopal voices in South Africa have been so prominent and clearly representative of part of Catholic opinion there, but also because they themselves varied somewhat, as did lesser clerical and lay voices. In this respect, a certain if obviously imperfect parallel with the Baptist Union (and, for that matter, with many other Protestant denominations) is apparent. As we shall see, at times the elected officials of the Baptist Union spoke out inconsistently on social ethics and especially apartheid, as did the collective delegates to the annual assemblies, but they did not speak for an ethically homogeneous denomination. One obvious difference which should be underscored before we continue is that the Catholic hierarchy in South Africa could not only speak out on behalf of the denomination but also determine its policies to a much greater extent than could the leaders of the Baptist Union.

The task of reviewing Roman Catholic responses to the implementation of institutionalised racism on a national scale is facilitated by the publication in 1989 of Garth Abraham's study of *The Catholic Church and Apartheid*, subtitled "The response of the Catholic Church in South Africa to the first decade of National Party rule 1948-1957". The subtitle is only slightly misleading, because Abraham underscores the plurality of Catholic responses during this decade. This was virtually inescapable for numerous reasons, one of them being the fact that by the middle of the twentieth century the hierarchy in South Africa was still white and largely of Irish extraction, whereas a majority of the members were black Africans. In brief, he points out that the principal official response of the Roman Catholic Church to the Malan government was initially conciliatory, not one of direct confrontation, despite the critical voices of certain prelates from the outset and despite the belief of the ordinaries that they should advocate gradual racial integration and the ending of the migratory labour policy as means of creating a more just and well-ordered society. Yet there were divided opinions on whether the church should become involved in political matters, owing *inter alia* to the inconsistencies in papal encyclicals on the relationship of the church to the modern, industrial world, different interpretations of the

implications of Romans 13, rhetorical friction between the Roman Catholic Church on the one hand and the Dutch Reformed Church and the National Party on the other involving the *Roomse-gevaar* mentality of many Afrikaners, and the recent opposition of the church to both Marxism and National Socialism. The hierarchy believed that Catholicism was operating in a basically hostile environment. "In the interests of security and survival the Church adopted an essentially conciliatory or conservative strategy in her relations with the government", Abraham believes. "She went out of her way to find common cause with the Nationalists and to counter any assumption of disloyalty to South Africa by means of a policy of moderation and negotiation". This was entirely inadequate for meeting the challenges which social ethical problems posed. Abraham continues: "The adoption of this conciliatory strategy posed serious problems for the Catholic laity in search of guidance and direction on political issues from their prelates. The laity were forced to rely almost exclusively on the Catholic press", a reliance which Abraham believes was not entirely negative because the ordinaries who contributed to and edited such publications as the newspaper *The Southern Cross* were thereby able to offer at least a small measure of advice on social issues, more so than many parish priests supposedly did. Yet editorial opinion in that weekly was by no means consistently critical of apartheid. Among other things, it either countenanced or condoned the Immorality Act and Mixed Marriages Act. Partly because of this, Abraham can generalise that during the late 1940s and early 1950s some Protestant denominations, especially the Methodist Church and the Church of the Province of South Africa, had stronger and more credible stances in the areas of social ethics involving race relations than did the Roman Catholic Church in South Africa.⁴

This strategy of accommodation gradually changed during the 1950s. Abraham cogently attributes major shifts in it to two crucial moves which the South African government made to extend its policy of racial social engineering and which threatened the functioning of the Roman Catholic Church itself as well as that of many other denominations. The first was the Bantu Education Act of 1953, which enabled the government to withdraw most of its financial support of the mission schools which for several decades had provided most of

the education which black South Africans received. Because of this statute, most churches and missionary agencies were compelled to surrender their schools to the government, which promised to administer them along lines which would continue to educate young blacks to occupy the lowest rungs of the social ladder. To a greater extent than virtually all other denominations, the Roman Catholic Church was able to provide alternative means of support for its schools and thus retain control of large numbers of them. Nevertheless, the Bantu Education Act, which most communions in South Africa and boards of overseas missionary societies which had administered schools there disliked intensely, caused many Catholics and other Christians to take a more openly critical attitude towards the South African government than had hitherto been the case. Secondly, in 1957 the government of J.G. Strijdom promulgated the Native Laws Amendment Bill with its "church clause" which threatened to make it impossible for blacks to attend services of worship in white areas without obtaining special permits for that purpose. This would have restricted both racially integrated worship (which, while not unheard of, was hardly the norm in any South African denomination during the 1950s) and exclusively black services in white neighbourhoods. A storm of protest ensued across much of the denominational spectrum. Even the Dutch Reformed Church, previously reluctant to criticise the government on matters of racial policy, entered the verbal fray to insist on the right of churches to determine how, when, and to whom they would proclaim the Gospel free of interference from the state. The Roman Catholic bishops reacted even more strongly and defiantly. They drafted a statement which was read at all Masses on 21 July 1957, i.e. after the bill became law. In it they declared categorically that "no other authority than the Hierarchy has competence to decide on admittance of persons to Catholic places of worship, [and further] that Catholic churches must and shall remain open to all without regard to their racial origin".⁵ The Native Laws Amendment Act and this reaction to it, in Abraham's interpretation, represented the final stage in a process of antagonisation between the Roman Catholic Church and the Nationalist-led government. To some extent the history of various other denominations' relations with the government paralleled this, with the Bantu Education Act and the law

of 1957 convincing many church leaders and lay members that apartheid was not merely at least questionable in terms of their social ethics but also represented a threat to the integrity and independence of the churches. Yet virtually all of them soon learnt to live with it, and there is no compelling reason to believe that the occasional protestations of both denominational bodies and what would later be known as the SACC represented a general rejection by the white laity of racial segregation in various forms.

The Baptist Union and the Early Years of the Nationalist Era

As a denomination, the Baptist Union did not become directly involved in the racism of partisan politics in 1948, as that would have been a blatant violation of its admittedly flexible understanding of the separation of church and state and of its emphasis on the autonomy of the local congregations. Nevertheless, the question of apartheid stimulated a heated debate within the denomination even before the fateful election of May 1948, one which revealed that some Baptists were still captive to the prevailing racism in South Africa. The existence of this controversy was due in part to the fact that C.M. Doke, the linguist at the University of the Witwatersrand who, like his father, had championed moderately liberal causes for decades, continued to edit *The South African Baptist* until the end of 1947. He was thus at the helm of that periodical when Nationalist politicians were beating the drum of racial segregation during the years immediately following the termination of the Second World War, making an unveiled racist appeal to the fears of whites who had been alarmed by accelerating black urbanisation during that conflagration.

Doke's writings underscore his essential commitment to Biblical prescriptive ethics, but that did not prevent him from excoriating other Christians who, in his opinion, were abusing Scripture to justify unethical causes. "We are burdened in South Africa with a most insidious evil, the anti-black complex, the colour bar, an attitude which makes a great number of the European inhabitants of this land regard the dark-skinned or darker-skinned inhabitants as definitely inferior in status", he wrote in October 1947 in response to the racist political

rhetoric which had gained currency. "This is a very evil attitude: it is one that is absolutely contrary to the spirit and teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ". It grieved Doke that many Christians, not all of them Dutch Reformed, sought to provide a Biblical foundation for apartheid. He explained that the "curse of Ham" mentioned in Genesis 9 and a *locus classicus* of Biblical racism in South Africa, was constantly misused in the erroneous belief that Ham was the progenitor of black Africans. "*The statement is absolutely false!*" Doke charged. He pointed out that God had not cursed Ham but rather his youngest son, Canaan, and that even a literal reading of this text had nothing to do with black Africa. Corroborating his argument and working from literalism, Doke added that some of Ham's descendants, such as Cush, Mizraim, and Phut, certainly do not appear as cursed figures in the Old Testament. The contemporary lesson to be learnt from a critical analysis of the political use of Genesis 9, he believed, was that "*no Scripture authority whatsoever exists for the un-Christian discrimination being practised in South Africa against the dark-skinned 'citizens' of this land*".⁶ This lengthy editorial was one of the hardest hitting statements on race which had appeared in the pages of *The South African Baptist* up to that time, although Doke did not mention the names of the individuals who had prompted him to take up his pen against their interpretation of Genesis 9.

In the same issue of the denominational periodical, and in anticipation of the 1947 annual assembly of the Baptist Union in Durban, Doke broached another aspect of dismal race relations in South Africa, namely hostility towards Indians. As noted in the chapter on Baptist ethics in colonial southern Africa, Doke's father had been a friend of Mohandas K. Gandhi, and C.M. Doke had maintained contact with that revered leader for decades. "The position of the Indian community in South Africa demands Christian statesmanship: if the spirit of Christ were applied in our relations with our Indian 'fellow-citizens' here, there would be no 'Indian problem'", he reasoned. To Doke, some of the practical implications of this seemed simple enough; Christians should "ban forever those God-dishonouring racial and colour feelings which disgrace the name of Christianity in South Africa".⁷ Precisely what the legal consequences of this should be, however, he did not indicate, nor did he go into any detail in

providing a Biblical or other theological basis for his editorial comments in this case.

It may be relevant to note at this juncture that there were limits to Doke's liberalism and that he was not entirely free of prejudice during the late 1940s. A central aspect of his intolerance resonated well with a historic bias in the Baptist tradition. He noted in *The South African Baptist* in November 1947 that the Protestant Association of South Africa, an organisation whose principal *raison d'être* was to resist the proliferation of Roman Catholicism in the country, vigorously opposed the South African government's scheme to import families from Austria and Italy to work on farms. "We agree with this attitude", wrote Doke. "Instead of importing unassimilable elements from Southern Europe, financial and other amenities should be provided so as to attract the large Native and Coloured labour service at our disposal".⁸ Religious bigotry, in other words, was not the exclusive province of political conservatives.

Doke's editorial criticising racist eisegesis in Genesis 9 inescapably ruffled the feathers of some readers, as he no doubt had intended. One such malcontent, F.W. Buckland of Port Elizabeth, wrote a vilifying letter in *The South African Baptist* explaining that he accepted Doke's correction of a commonly misunderstood Old Testament text but that even without the curse of Ham there was no legitimate place for racial equality in South Africa. Buckland sought to present his case initially on Biblical grounds, arguing that "in fact the idea of equality is nowhere recognised in the Bible", an assertion which leaves one wondering what he meant by equality. Buckland may have had in mind the venerable myth of white South Africans as a *volk* of divine destiny, a New Israel whom God had selected and sent to the African subcontinent as his elect. He argued that Jesus had chosen an inner circle of twelve apostles from his larger following, and that even within this smaller group he had occasionally selected three men with whom he had special fellowship. In the Old Testament, moreover, God had chosen Israel as his particular covenant people. From these texts, Buckland concluded that "in the international sphere as well as the individual we have inequality". How he reasoned from this to a defence of racial inequality in twentieth-century South Africa remains unclear. It soon becomes obvious, however, that Buckland's real concern was

not with theological niceties but rather with his own prosperity and status. Without adducing a shred of evidence to bolster a supposedly self-evident truth, he declared that "it is impossible to ignore the fact that to give equal political rights to Non-Europeans would mean handing over South Africa to witchcraft and Communism". Buckland underscored his belief that the Gospel was irrelevant to issues of economic and political equality. Jesus had not preached about economics and politics, he reasoned; why should we mention them in connection with Christianity today? Instead of such matters, Buckland believed, Christians should emphasise the Kingdom of God. "The ignorance of Christians, both ministers and laymen, concerning 'the Kingdom' is appalling", he wrote without apparent irony. Yet Buckland was willing to allow Christians of various races to mingle in the religious arena. "What is there to prevent a united prayer meeting in those places where we have both European and Bantu Churches?" he pleaded. "It would reveal our differences, but in many cases it would also reveal an underlying unity of the Spirit".⁹ Doke responded by questioning in effect Buckland's mastery of Scripture, but in doing so he did not quite deal directly with his adversary's argument. Doke suggested that Buckland read the first few verses of James 2, but that text deals with the oppression of the poor by the rich and says nothing about racial equality or inequality. On more solid ground, Doke pointed out that "nowhere in the Bible is there taught any discrimination according to race or colour" and informed readers in one of his final contributions to *The South African Baptist* that "we dissociate ourselves from the attitude of the writer".¹⁰

Doke's successor as editor of *The South African Baptist*, R.H. Philpott, commented disapprovingly on the new administration in the late 1940s and sought to call the implications of some of its policies to the attention of his readers but never became as pointedly critical as Doke had been. In July 1948, for instance, only a few weeks after the election, he stressed that "it is not our policy to hold any political bias" but stated obliquely that "there are, however, some matters of grave importance which, though they are fought out in the heat of party politics, come within the scope of the Christian message". What those issues were in 1948, though, Philpott left to his readers' imaginations.¹¹

Much more outspoken on social issues during the late 1940s and early 1950s was A.T. Babbs, a Baptist minister who frequently contributed essays to *The South African Baptist* under the pseudonym "The Pilgrim". These pieces generally represented what were by white Baptist standards of that era liberal positions near one end of a relatively narrow spectrum of opinion. Babbs' anonymity as an amateur social ethicist may have been a cardinal factor in allowing him to escape the wrath of more conservative Baptists. At the same time, however, he may have limited his effectiveness through moderation of the sort which Villa-Vicencio criticised roundly in his *Trapped in Apartheid*. As J.L. Green, who edited the denominational journal when Babbs died in 1953, explained in an obituary article, "Laws which operated detrimentally to his African fellow citizens were loathsome to him. Yet he refrained from too emphatic declamation lest he should create misunderstanding and prejudice the South African Baptist or cause division in the Churches".¹² A few examples will illustrate the kind of prophetic voice which Babbs raised during the first few years of Nationalist rule.

In 1949 Babbs could still hope that sorely needed socio-economic reforms would be forthcoming. His expression of this revealed not only an awareness of the relationship between economic frustrations and racial violence but also an assumption that Biblical ethics was somehow linked self-evidently to white rule. As Babbs put it in a commentary on the Durban riots of 1949, which pitted urban Zulus against the Indian population of that city, "The principles of New Testament Christianity - which stand for freedom and equality of opportunity for all - should be the basis of action by Europeans of both races, in whose hands the responsibility is surely and rightly placed".¹³ The behaviour of the Malan government quickly eroded whatever confidence Babbs may have had in it. An early sign of this appeared in an essay in 1949 when Babbs noted with regret that Malan had refused to receive a deputation from the Christian Council, a group of churchmen which included a representative of the Baptist Union.¹⁴ Later that year Babbs described the government's report on the Durban riots and wondered whether white South Africans would realise in time that the living conditions of blacks on the outskirts of Durban were "a disgrace to any civilised community" and were giving the

devil an opportunity to sow further violence.¹⁵ He also criticised the Nationalists for seeking to keep Africans in subordinate positions through the Native Building Workers' Bill, which he found particularly unsatisfactory because it excluded upward mobility in skilled trades.¹⁶ Racial violence in Johannesburg on 1 May 1950 prompted Babbs to call for negotiations between the government and leaders of various non-European groups in South Africa. He did not specify what reforms such a consultation should attempt to effect, but he stated in general terms that participants in it should aim at "a removal of the sense of frustration which is marring the happiness of the under-privileged classes". Babbs' understanding of sin was still primarily individualistic, although he called for an intensification of evangelistic outreach so that more people would accept Jesus Christ as their saviour and thus have a "Salvation that knows no distinctions and imparts to everyone who believes, the status and privileges of born again children of God".¹⁷ Precisely what this would entail in concrete, practical terms Babbs did not specify.

With a very moderately critical attitude emanating from the pages of *The South African Baptist*, it is not surprising that at its annual assemblies during the late 1940s and early 1950s the Baptist Union repeatedly raised a critical voice against the implementation of apartheid and the racism which underlay it. Under the rubric "Race Relations", the delegates to the assembly in 1948 declared that the denomination "deeply regrets any aspects of the Government's policy which may involve social and economic injustice and the breaking of solemn pledges given to the non-European people of the Union". They did not specify any ethical basis for this resolution but in a subsequent paragraph specified as objectionable "any tampering with the accepted Constitutional understanding that the franchise rights of non-Europeans will continue to be entrenched as provided in the South Africa Act". In the sphere of attitudes and emotions, moreover, the delegates professed that they were "gravely concerned at the rising tide of bitterness, and resentment, non-co-operation and hatred which is evident among those people concerned by any suggestion of the limitation of their existing rights and legitimate aspirations. . .". Whether this statement was intended as an early condemnation of protest movements by aggrieved blacks, Coloureds, and Indians, or as

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a vague admonition to the government that the imposition of further restrictions on the scant political rights which these ethnic groups had would lead to dire consequences is unclear from the resolution. In any case, the assembly explicitly dissociated itself from "any policy which would restrict or reduce the present rights of representation in Parliament or Senate of any section of the Community".¹³

A year later the Baptist Union intensified its criticism of both specific laws with which the Malan government had begun to implement its programme of apartheid and the ideology of "Christian National Education" which it was promoting. Delegates to the 1949 assembly noted "with alarm" what they perceived as "the increasing tension between the European and non-European races within the Union". They did not seek to establish definitively the causes of this, but they suggested that the factors encompassed both "deep-rooted prejudices and fears which dominate the attitude of the races towards each other" and "aspects of the Government policy that involve economic and political repression". At the same time the assembled delegates left no doubt that they would not indiscriminately support all forms of protest. Specifically, they were concerned about the "tendency" of non-whites "to seek refuge from economic and political frustration in the materialistic creed of Communism". The delegates continued the tradition of the assembly to offer advice to the government on specific policies. Most pointedly, the assembly declared that it "respectfully but strongly protests against the Mixed Marriages Act and earnestly urges its repeal". To obviate any misunderstanding about their motives and unwarranted suspicion of social liberalism, the delegates emphasised that "while Christian opinion generally deprecates mixed marriages as undesirable on grounds of social expediency, the present measure is contrary to the spirit [of the New Testament] and antidemocratic". Again, this was an oblique statement, a vague allusion to Scripture, although in contrast to many of the resolutions which the Baptist Union had passed in several previous decades it revealed some basic, explicit concern for Biblical ethics. An element of continuity linked this resolution on the Mixed Marriages Act to several of its predecessors, namely the perceived spectre of Marx. The promulgation of the statute, the delegates feared, had "already increased the

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bitterness and sense of frustration that are doing more than anything else to drive some of our people to Communism".¹⁹

The National Party's dedication to the implementation of Christian National Education inevitably rubbed the British nonconformist fur of many Baptists the wrong way. This Afrikaans interpretation of South African history stood in the tradition of Afrikaner nationalism and wedded ethnicity to Christianity by seeing the hand of God particularly in the story of the Afrikaans volk in the African sub-continent. It was, in effect, an endeavour to imbue South Africa's school systems with the notion that the Afrikaners were a people of divine destiny whom God had given a particular role to play in the leading of the Union of South Africa. In other words, Christian National Education was an ethnic eschatology which conceded that the task of implementing a Christian society had not yet been completed but that the schools should be under the control of Afrikaners who would dedicate them to its attainment. As a major step towards fulfilment of the goal of a neo-Calvinist, quasi-theocratic state, Afrikaans-speaking children were expected to participate in Dutch Reformed churches and subscribe to the doctrines which they taught. The Baptist Union declared that this vision of a volk Christianity taking precedence over individual regeneration was "contrary to the spirit of Christ and a denial of personal freedom". The freedom of the individual was thus subordinated to Dutch Reformed domination of cultural life in the broadest sense of the term. Delegates at the Baptist Union's 1949 assembly expressed "grave concern" about its implementation. They predicted that "it will result in driving a wedge between the Afrikaans-speaking and English-speaking communities, thus further accentuating racial differences in this country". In addition to heightening interethnic tension, representatives of the congregations feared for the future of the Afrikaans Baptist churches and expressed sympathy for any other Afrikaners who could not subscribe to Christian National Education. In a strongly worded resolution which relied heavily on the venerable Baptist principle of freedom of conscience, the Baptist Union consequently urged the Malan government and the administrations of the four provinces in the Union of South Africa "to repudiate unequivocally this flagrant attempt to impose upon the individual conscience of citizens of South Africa". The

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delegates did not pull punches in denouncing "most strongly" the government's concomitant subordination of education for non-whites so that "it does not occur at the cost of white education". In the words of the resolution, "This reflects neither the attitude of just trusteeship nor the spirit of Christ's teaching".²⁰

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The Malan government continued to implement apartheid through piecemeal legislation during the early 1950s, but Baptist responses to this, to the extent that they can be gauged through a perusal of the resolutions which the annual assemblies passed, lost some of their initial fervour and became quite inconsistent. This is not to say that white Baptists in general were insensitive to or incognizant of the persistence of structural racism in South Africa, but rather that they accepted much of it without raising a consistent, prophetic voice against it. A sampling from the years 1950 through 1953 will illustrate the point. In 1950, for instance, the denomination declared that it was "profoundly concerned regarding the deterioration of race relations in South Africa" and noted that "it has so far proved impossible to agree upon a Non-European policy which will meet the legitimate aspirations of all groups", a goal for which all South Africans should continue to strive. Implicit in this resolution is the assumption that South Africa should have separate policies for the separate races. At the same time the Baptist Union called for the development of local governments in the non-European townships, thereby tacitly accepting the recently passed Group Areas Act and other legislation which enabled the government to enforce residential segregation along racial lines. Hand-in-hand with this, the Baptist Union placed its *imprimatur* on the Population Registration Act, according to which all residents of South Africa were classified according to their ethnic identity, a statute which provided much of the basis for discriminatory treatment of the people so classified, and early twentieth-century land tenure legislation which allotted only about 13 per cent of the territory of South Africa for black ownership. Indeed, the resolution concerning the latter reflected the same kind of thinking about moderate economic development for rural black areas which the Tomlinson Commission would advocate a few years later and which long provided superficial legitimacy for the "homelands" or *bantustan* policy as a means of retarding black urbanisation. Simultaneously, the annual assembly

urged the government to make food more affordable for the poor and reinstitute an African school-feeding scheme. The emphasis, in other words, was on the amelioration of a system which was becoming well-entrenched but whose broad counters white Baptists tended to accept.²¹ Along a similar vein, a year later the annual assembly called in general terms for improvements in housing and in the rural areas which the Department of Native Affairs administered, as well as compulsory education for all non-European children in South Africa, and more governmental use of "Native labour" in the construction of housing for blacks in designated areas, but all within the existing framework of apartheid.²² Similar petitions emanated from the assembly in 1952, when delegates also implored the government to recruit more non-Europeans for public service. At that time, however, they also revealed once again that they looked askance at and viewed "with the greatest concern" black civil disobedience strategies as part of a larger campaign against "unjust laws". The resolutions dealing with these matters did not contain any explicit ethical arguments, Biblical or otherwise.²³

The denominational position became more strident in 1953, however, when the government announced its Bantu Education Act, which would remove most mission schools from their sponsoring agencies and place them under the supervision of the Department for Native Affairs as a transparent part of its strategy for the implementation of thoroughgoing apartheid. Like many of their Protestant and Roman Catholic counterparts in South Africa, as well as various mission boards overseas which administered schools there, the Baptist delegates reacted strongly against this move. There is no reason to believe that either as a matter of principle or for pragmatic reasons any white Baptists advocated wholesale racial integration of the schools in 1953. Their opposition to it sprang from other sources. To the editor of *The South African Baptist*, segregated education seemed to be a dinosaur, an institution which no longer was necessary or had a legitimate place in Christian society. In August 1952, a year before the Bantu Education Act was promulgated, he reproduced from *The Maritime Baptist* an article about Wayland College in Texas, whose trustees had recently voted to open its doors to Afro-Americans. "Race [sic] segregation has no justification in Christianity", readers were

told.²⁴ This categorical judgement did not reflect white South African Baptist opinion at any time, and it seems at least arguable that the existence of Baptist mission schools for black Africans played a minor role in confirming the system of educational segregation which the Bantu Education Act would restructure and place on what was perceived to be a permanent foundation. The larger issue, however, appears to have involved the encroachment of the government in what the churches regarded as their particular bailiwick. As the delegates to the 1953 assembly expressed it, the Baptist Union "considers that the Churches and Missionary bodies are essential for the full Christian education and development of our Non-European youth". Therefore, the assembly stated that it "views with concern the proposal that Missions shall be gradually excluded from the field of native education". Beyond this relatively mildly worded resolution, however, the Baptist Union did not go with regard to the Bantu Education Act, perhaps because the leaders and many of the other members believed that its passage and implementation was a *fait accompli*. In effect, of course, it was, and the South African Baptist Missionary Society had to give up its schools for lack of governmental financial support. It may be revealing that at the 1953 assembly delegates devoted more time to and passed more strongly worded resolutions concerning conventional matters of personal ethics, most notably protesting against the public schools teaching moderation instead of abstinence in the use of alcoholic beverages than about the impending nationalisation of their schools.²⁵

At the assembly a year later, when it became apparent how severely the Bantu Education Act would restrict the voices of the churches in religious instruction (notwithstanding Verwoerd's assurances to the contrary) and adversely affect the possibilities for black social advancement in South Africa, delegates belatedly spoke out more boldly. A tripartite resolution dealt with three aspects of the new law. The first expressed the assembly's concern that the Verwoerdian understanding of education for black Africans, which was to prepare them for almost exclusively for subordinate positions, would prevent most of the "Bantu people" from becoming "worthy members of society". The second was an outcry against "the gradual exclusion of the Christian Church from the field of education". In the third, for what appear to have been purely pragmatic reasons delegates

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expressed their objection to the provision of the Bantu Education Act that blacks must financially provide and maintain their own schools and urged the government to make special appropriations towards the attainment of those ends.²⁶

The Native Laws Amendment Act

A more intrepid spirit prevailed from the outset in the Baptist Union four years later, when the government, and particularly Minister of Native Affairs Verwoerd, sought to extend apartheid into the sanctuary. the Native Laws Amendment Act forbade integrated worship and worship by non-whites in white areas unless special permission was obtained from the Department of Native Affairs. As indicated earlier, many denominations, interdenominational agencies, and individual Christians viewed this as unnecessary, unwarranted, and a provocative infringement on the legitimate territory of the churches. Protests against the bill came from nearly all points of the denominational compass, from the Dutch Reformed churches to the Roman Catholic Church, and after the bill nevertheless became law in an amended form some denominations defiantly vowed to disregard it and conduct their worship as they saw fit. Probably owing to the magnitude and breadth of the protest, the government generally declined to enforce this "church clause" of the law. It was an episode of denominational history which some Baptists interviewed as part of the research for the present study cite as a rare example of Baptist and other ecclesiastical protests actually influencing public policy.

The debate over this bill took place chiefly early in 1957, i.e. several months before the annual assembly, which normally took place in October. The Executive of the Baptist Union therefore spoke on behalf of the denomination and roundly denounced the bill in a letter to the Minister of Native Affairs. The text was reprinted in *The South African Baptist*. The Executive informed this cabinet member that the Baptist Union had "encouraged parallel Churches for the European and Bantu" since the inception of its missionary society more than sixty years earlier but did not mention anything explicitly pertaining to race relations within the denomination. Precisely what logical place this had

in the argument of the letter is unclear. In any case, the Executive criticised the Native Laws Amendment Bill directly and registered a "protest against this proposed legislation which restricts the freedom of men to assemble in public worship". The Executive asserted that Baptists had been among the first Christians to struggle for the principle of religious freedom, which had been won only with "great sacrifice". True to their tradition, but reflecting a position which many denominations which did not have a deeply entrenched legacy of separation from governmental control also took, the Baptist leaders declared succinctly, "We cannot agree that access to worship should depend on the permission of any State authority". In addition to the freedom of the church to worship, a second and intimately related principle was at stake, namely the liberty of the church to be the church. Without going into detailed ecclesiology, the Executive explained that the unity of all believers was crucial to Christianity in terms of both faith and witness. When the church could no longer witness to its own unity, but stood divided along racial lines, it ceased to be vital. This was obedience to the Biblical commandment to be "one in Christ". In retrospect, one might wonder whether in their zeal to fend off the external challenge of the government to the supposed unity of South African Baptists across racial lines, white Baptist leaders lost an opportunity to make a critical self-examination and determine whether and to what extent the denomination was racially segregated quite apart from the social engineering of Verwoerd. But their mood was clearly not one of repentance. Alluding to Acts 5:29, they stated that in the event of a conflict of loyalties they had no choice but to exercise civil disobedience, *i.e.* "to obey God rather than man". The pending legislation, the Executive warned, "will compel law-abiding Baptists, together with members of many other churches, to violate the law. This we do not desire to do, but where conscience and legislation conflict we must take our stand with our conscience, whatever the consequences may be".²⁷

When delegates to the annual assembly met in Durban that October, they did not deal directly with the Native Laws Amendment Act but passed a lengthy resolution on "Race Relations". It was a conglomerate of generalities and specific criticism. The assembly urged the government of South Africa to "take into account the legitimate

national aspirations of the Non-European peoples of our land" and thought it unfortunate that "all too frequently these natural aspirations are regarded as communistic, antisocial or subversive". Precisely which "national aspirations" the drafters of this resolution had in mind is unclear. At any rate, the assembly, without employing the term "apartheid", obliquely stated that "through legislation which is intended to separate racial groups the Government is bringing frustration to many, and this may ultimately give way to violence". The resolution did not contain any Biblical or other theological arguments against the dissection of South African society along racial lines, merely the restatement of a *Leitmotiv* of white fears pertaining to this: "A frustrated people are a dangerous people". On a positive note, the assembly requested the government to convene a multiracial national conference to discuss interethnic tensions in the land. In some respects the resolution expressed support of Nationalist policies on matters of race, such as the building up of the black homelands according to the suggestions of the Tomlinson Report and, by doing so, hopefully, controlling the flow of economically dispossessed rural blacks into urban areas. Ameliorating this somewhat, delegates simultaneously urged the government to drop the practice of conducting massive raids to find blacks who lacked passes to live in cities. That procedure merely antagonised them and made them resent white authority. "In this way the sympathy and co-operation of large numbers of Africans are forfeited".²⁸ Again, it is difficult not to see in this resolution a generous measure of white defensiveness and a desire to preserve the social *status quo*.

The grave challenge of the Native Laws Amendment Act prompted A.T. Babbs' successor as "The Pilgrim" to write two highly critical essays in which he ploughed new ground in South African Baptist social ethics.²⁹ In the first he implied strongly that to a great extent both his own denomination and others in South Africa had become politically captive and were thus seldom able to raise a significant prophetic voice. "Have the Churches been silent too long?" he asked. "Have we allowed ourselves to be silenced by the legislation passed outlawing Communism and the tendency of some to consider all opposition to the Government as acts of treason?" Yet this writer lived in hope and saw signs that the Executive of the Baptist Union was

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reviving part of its heritage of bold nonconformity at a critical juncture of the nation's history. The letter which the Executive had sent to the Minister of Native Affairs was "what many of us have been waiting a long time for [and] . . . it makes thrilling reading". The anonymous Baptist "Pilgrim" went so far as to compare it to "the voice of John Bunyan", who had vowed, "I will stay in prison till the moss grows on my eyebrows rather than make a slaughterhouse of my conscience or a butchery of my principles". He urged his readers not to lose the supposedly rekindled passion of Christian defiance.³⁰

In his second essay on the subject, published three months later in August 1957, The Pilgrim addressed in a more general, theoretical manner relations between church and state and the role of the former in public issues. Keenly aware that some of his fellow Baptists, like many other Christians of various denominations both in South Africa and abroad, believed that the church as such should avoid social ethics, he asked pointedly, "Has the Church a voice in the present situation? Has she a right to say anything?" Standard answers to these queries, The Pilgrim noted, were that "the Church should mind its own business" and, concomitantly, avoid "dabbling in politics". In stating his own position, he emphasised that the role of the church was primarily to proclaim the Gospel and that it thus transcended the political arena. Nevertheless, to regard its bailiwick as somehow exclusively limited to the supernatural and the private spheres of life was naive, for "it is not always possible to keep the two, religion and politics, in water-tight compartments". In keeping with the general scope of his essay, The Pilgrim did not adduce specific illustrations of this, although one must assume that the Native Laws Amendment Act was near the centre of his consciousness as he wrote. "A Government may make laws which are in direct opposition to the principles of the Gospel, in which case the Church would be untrue to its charter if no voice was raised in defence of the Gospel", he reasoned without attempting to define the Gospel or establish its parameters. There is no hint of liberation or contextual theology in this, merely a conventional defence of the autonomy of the church and of its right to speak out on matters which challenged its teachings. The Pilgrim did not place all the blame for the church's general weakness in this regard on secular factors or institutions. Instead, apparently referring

to Christians internationally and interdenominationally, he stated that "it is to be feared that the Church in modern times has been far too slow to take its stand on some of the great moral issues and world problems, and has lost in influence and prestige inconsequence". In harmony with one of the most dominant tendencies of twentieth-century Christian theology, The Pilgrim then placed this assertion into the context of the Kingdom of God. He explained that "the true Christian position is that in becoming Christians we enter into a new relationship, first to God, then to all those who love God, and then to all the world".³¹ Again, he did not attempt in this piece to specify how this understanding of a new relationship between the sovereignty of God and interpersonal relations applied to social ethics in South Africa, but he laid part of the foundation on which he and other Baptist writers could have constructed well-defined approaches to dealing with public issues, not least apartheid. As we shall see, however, decades passed before significant numbers of well-educated Baptists joined in co-ordinated, sustained efforts to do so.

In the wake of the dispute over the Native Laws Amendment Bill and its "church clause", Baptists had relatively little to say about apartheid during the late 1950s. Why that was the case is uncertain, although it was by no means without precedent. As noted earlier, the protests against the government in 1953 and 1957 were arguably anomalies, exceptions in a decrescendo of expressed social conscience within the denomination. This is not to say that the Baptist Union remained totally silent. *The South African Baptist* occasionally carried further critical essays by The Pilgrim, and the annual assemblies continued to issue resolutions, although some of the latter betrayed the tacit acceptance of apartheid which characterised white Baptists in general after approximately a decade of Nationalist rule. The theme of some of these statements was improvement of living conditions for blacks who were suffering within the confines of the apartheid system; there is little evidence that the abolition of that deeply entrenched system was on the minds of many white Baptists. Separation and special treatment for the races were simply assumed.

In 1958, for example, the assembly noted that juvenile delinquency remained a major problem among the "Bantu" and linked this phenomenon to high rates of unemployment. To deal with the difficulty,

the assembly proposed not a fundamental overhauling of South African society or its economy, but urged the government to assist city councils to develop programmes in which the unemployed would receive suitable training and skills which would be in demand. At the same time, the assembly suggested that rather than further restricting interracial contacts the government take steps towards encouraging them "for the purpose of mutual good-will". What forms these "steps" should take, however, the resolution did not say, and how any delegate could have expected these vague words to have made any impact on South African society defies explanation. Slightly more concrete and indicative of a basic awareness of economic realities and exploitation was another resolution concerning public revenues. The assembly noted that "a majority of Bantu families subsist below the breadline already" and suggested that "the European population, which largely benefits by the native population, should bear the additional cost of rendering essential services to the Bantu". Again, however, the non-Biblical, defensive motivation for the resolution is apparent: "To those who already face serious shortages any additional taxation at this stage - without prior consultation with those most concerned - breeds dissatisfaction and tension".³²

Despite the obvious, if generally weak and oblique, political implications of the resolutions which the Baptist Union passed on racial matters during the late 1950s, the illusion of detachment from politics persisted. This even came to the fore in October 1959 when the assembly understood that the social crisis confronting the country had an inherent political dimension. At that time the Executive published an announcement expressing the denomination's "deepest concern [about] the hardships and injustices resulting from much of the Government's present policy, as for instance in the Group Areas Act". The Baptist leadership declined to propose even toothless statements about race relations, however, because with provincial elections at hand such resolutions "might be used unscrupulously for electioneering purposes".³³ At a critical juncture in South African history - a few months before the massacre at Sharpeville in March 1960 - the Baptist Union thus refrained from raising a prophetic voice concerning "hardships and injustices" of which its Executive was admittedly cognizant.

The Deepening Crisis in an Era of Decolonisation

(1) The bloodshed at Sharpeville coincided with the wave of decolonisation and resulting political and economic chaos which spread across much of Africa to shatter the vision of perpetual stability which many white South Africans had maintained during the relatively prosperous decade of the 1950s. To be sure, these changes did not sound the death-knell for that illusion; it soon awakened from dormancy as much of white South Africa returned to its porous cocoon of complacency until the Soweto riots of 1976 again caused some - including many churchmen and ecclesiastical agencies - to look more closely and with increasing alarm at the national crisis. Another such wave of consciousness began with the resurgence of violence in the mid-1980s and was one of the factors which eventually brought about the momentous changes under the presidency of F.W. de Klerk in the early 1990s. But during the early 1960s fear and trembling were particularly evident among appreciable numbers of Baptists in South Africa, and apprehensiveness about the future of the country in the wake of decolonisation to the north left deep imprints on their thinking about social ethics.

As we saw in the chapter dealing with the Union of South Africa before 1948, fears of communism, particularly the Marxist rhetoric of trade union movements during the 1920s, had influenced Baptist perceptions of domestic race relations. This legacy of fear never really died out. An almost constant stream of news regarding the Cold War in the Northern Hemisphere undoubtedly kept it on the minds of many South Africans, as did the publicity which not only the Nationalist government but various other political groups gave the activities of various communist organisations in South Africa during the 1950s. Decolonisation, however, appears to have given it a growth spurt, one which the Nationalists were only too happy to nurture. This inescapably exercised a profound and lasting influence on the social ethics of the Baptist Union as a whole and the ethical thinking of many of its members who commented on the subject. This is not to say that calls for social justice and - even less frequently - the abrogation of apartheid disappeared entirely from the denomination. But the ubiquitous spectre of communism and fear of chaos placed additional

blindness on the denomination and muffled much of the prophetic voice which a few diehard critics - chiefly foreign-born or foreign-educated - within it were still trying to raise.

Further inhibiting appropriate analysis and criticism of social injustices and their causes in South Africa which Baptists and many other Christians could have undertaken was the general acceptance of the government's ongoing rhetoric concerning the "total onslaught" strategy of world communism. South Africa, they believed, was threatened not only by possible internal and regional foment and disorder, but also, and more seriously, by a global conspiracy. This led to increased defensiveness with regard to the domestic *status quo* as attention in many quarters was distracted from racism and economic exploitation to focus on perceptions of threats on the national borders and the assumed complicity of internal reform movements with them in efforts to overturn the standing order and replace it with a puppet government which would ultimately be responsible to the Kremlin. It became a particularly nefarious foe of Christian social ethics because many church members believed the corollaries that their country was a manifestation of Christian principles and that Christendom itself was under siege and thus dug in even deeper against changes to the world of the familiar. Their *Weltanschauung* was thus reduced to a Manichean dualism in which Marx and Christ vied for dominance. Acceptance of this propaganda was thus further evidence of the cultural captivity of Christian ethics. However simplistic this may seem in retrospect, it clearly left its mark on the Baptist Union for at least two decades after 1960 and never completely expired. Letters to the editors of the denomination's periodicals frequently revealed their authors' reliance on it. Even relatively well-educated Baptists fell under the sway of the government's rhetoric in this regard.

Perhaps no more vivid illustration exists than in the scholarly works of Dr Reginald George Codrington, a graduate of the Baptist theological college in Johannesburg who in 1975 received a doctorate in education at the University of South Africa and served as an inspector of religious instruction in the public schools of the Transvaal. In his thesis, "A Fundamental Pedagogical Analysis and Evaluation of Religious Instruction and Biblical Studies", he declared categorically that "the great cleavage in the world in the second half

of the twentieth century is not between East and West, but between Communism and Christianity - 'each claiming for itself the inspiration that can guide men and nations towards the millennium'. In Codrington's reductionist world, "man is increasingly being called upon to make a choice between life totalitarianly [sic] controlled by Communism and one totally committed to Christ". From his perspective, the demons were on the march and advancing on the fortress of the Christian society he believed he inhabited: "No one can accuse the Communists of not knowing where they are going. Decades ago they told the world of their intentions - intentions which have been and are being fulfilled so clearly that only the blind cannot see them".³⁴

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Rather than addressing the social, political, and economic ills of South African society, Codrington believed that salvation lay partly in Christian education, a tenet he shared with Dutch Reformed advocates of Christian national education. In South Africa, he thought, this was being lost. "For some years, modern secular society has been insisting that education is the panacea for the world's evils", he declared without citing a single educationist or other person who thought the global cure was that simple. Codrington assured readers that he did not oppose education *per se*, but he believed that in recent times the Christian component in it had become intolerably shallow. Again, he placed this into a simplified, dualistic structure: "South African pupils, like those of other nations, are being subjected to the forces of secularism, pluralism, and radicalism", he generalised without either defining those key terms or explaining how they related to Christianity. "It is essential, therefore, that the religious foundation for education, so firmly entrenched in South Africa's heritage, should not be undermined and destroyed".³⁵ Nowhere did Codrington seek to gauge the results of nominally Christian education in South Africa or probe even the rhetorical relationship between it and the racism which underlay many of the country's most serious tribulations. There is no evidence that it ever occurred to him that certain interpretations of the Christian legacy, most obviously those associated with Afrikaner nationalism and its mythology, had for decades provided much of the justification of the politics which had brought about those national woes. Such an irony would not have fitted into his dualistic categories. As we shall see shortly, in his simplistic political perceptions

Codrington was not an exception within the Baptist Union, but actually quite representative of whites in it.

The Sharpeville massacre prompted a vast amount of both domestic and international condemnation of the South African government and apartheid, no small amount of it emanating from ecclesiastical quarters. News of the event and editorials about its significance and gravity appeared repeatedly in many denominational magazines. Perhaps most notably, the World Council of Churches arranged an interdenominational conference at Cottesloe, a suburb of Johannesburg, in December 1960, which even delegates from the two largest white Dutch Reformed denominations (the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk and the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk), both of which were still members of the WCC, attended. Surprisingly little, however, was said publicly in the Baptist Union, if the standard printed sources are even a remotely accurate gauge. The Executive issued a statement, though, expressing concern about what it called an "emergency" in South Africa. In a list of five "convictions", it emphasised that "every man is precious to God regardless of colour, race or cultural background" but did not profess a belief in fundamental human equality in any secular sense. Secondly, the statement declared that "it is the obligation of all Christians to live together in love" but did not clarify whether this implied *inter alia* a termination of apartheid. Thirdly, it professed that interracial harmony in South Africa was "possible" but suggested very few measures which could be taken towards the attainment of that eventuality. Fourthly, the statement called for the equal application of the law to all people and condemned lawlessness and violence as inimical to human society and "contrary to the teachings of Christ" but did not specify who or which institutions had been lawless or violent. Finally, it expressed the belief that "all race groups should be adequately represented in the governing of the country in which they live" but did not indicate whether this position, arguably racist by its very nature, implied proportional sharing of power on the basis of race. However truncated these "convictions" may seem in retrospect, in 1960 they represented a relatively progressive position for the Baptist Union and, for that matter, went well beyond what many Christians - perhaps including many Baptists - were willing to accept. In a concluding section, moreover, the drafters of the

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statement called for the government to end as soon as possible the state of emergency which it had declared shortly after the massacre, to bring the perpetrators to justice, and "to seek additional methods whereby all races may be more adequately represented in the government of this country". There is no reason to doubt that many Baptists, however much they may have wished to preserve white supremacy, found the massacre abhorrent. What the Baptist Union did not deal with, though, was the underlying issue of the pass laws which had led to the carnage at Sharpeville and, behind those restrictive statutes as they were administered at that time, the racist social engineering of the Nationalist government.³⁶ At its annual assembly, held in Johannesburg in October 1960, the denomination did not deal with these fundamental socio-political ills, choosing instead to direct its wrath at proposals to make "European liquor" available to African customers, the willingness of much of the public to countenance premarital sexual relations, and the admission of women to many bars in South Africa.³⁷ That these concerns were closer to the historic central ethical concerns of the Baptist Union hardly needs to be underscored.

During the early 1960s, as South African Christians of various denominations, ethnic groups, and ideological leanings discussed and took varying positions on contemporary domestic and international issues, members of the Baptist Union contributed fairly frequently to the resulting debates. No more than at any earlier stage of their history did they speak with one voice, not even when deliberating the interplay of the need for reform of interracial relations and the penetration of Marxism in postcolonial Africa. It is difficult and perhaps impossible to arrange these commentators neatly on an ideological spectrum. In a subsequent chapter we shall discuss the participation of Baptists in so-called "right-wing movements" during the 1970s and 1980s. In the 1960s antecedent bodies existed in South Africa but had not reached the level of prominence which they would later attain, and the visible role of Baptists in them was still minimal. Nevertheless, it is possible to differentiate obvious political leanings of certain prominent Baptists which affected the positions they took on social and political issues, notwithstanding seeming contradictions

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which makes it difficult to pigeonhole certain individuals and the conservative weighting of the denomination as a whole.

No better example of a conservative (if, it should be emphasised, inconsistently conservative) mainline South African Baptist commentator exists for the era of decolonisation under consideration than John Poorter. Born in Pretoria to Dutch immigrant parents in 1917, he was raised in the Dutch Reformed Church but educated at Anglophone schools. At age twenty-one Poorter underwent a conversion experience, affiliated with a Baptist group, and married a Baptist woman. He subsequently studied at the University of South Africa and received a Bachelor of Divinity at the University of Natal. Poorter entered the Baptist ministry in 1941 and became a well-regarded pastor of congregations in both South Africa and Southern Rhodesia. In 1957-1958 and 1964-1965 he served as president of the Baptist Union, and for several years he edited *The South African Baptist*. The early death of a son who was an officer in the South African Air Force, however, left emotional scars on Poorter, who left the parish ministry and entered the diplomatic service, serving initially in London. His career involved the promotion of international publicity for the South African government, whose racial policies were already under verbal fire in much of the world during the 1960s. After returning to South Africa in the early 1970s, Poorter edited *To the Point*, a weekly news magazine whose brief life ended shortly after it was disclosed during the "Muldergate" scandal that the Information Department had secretly subsidised that ostensibly independent journal.³⁸

The theological factors which influenced Poorter's social ethics are difficult to ascertain. When interviewed at length in 1991, he stated that his general theological identification was with "conservative evangelicals" as defined in British Nonconformity, but this is in itself nebulous and tells us little about his ethics. Poorter could not immediately state a single nineteenth or twentieth-century theologian who had significantly influenced him, although he subsequently cited Francis Schaeffer and C.S. Lewis as two such individuals. In a letter which he sent to the present writer two days later, Poorter mentioned two of his early mentors, A.H. Strong and L. Berkhof, as having inspired him, although he did not explain whether or how any of these

men influenced his social ethics. He insists categorically that "no South African theologians have influenced me". Going back further in time, Poorter declares that he is "not a hyper-Calvinist", although what intellectual debt, if any, he owes to the Genevan Reformer is unknown. In any event, like many of his fellow Baptists he regards himself as having been essentially apolitical in his ministry and believes that the proclamation of the Gospel can and should be separated from political implications. Poorter declares that he was "appalled" to hear another Baptist minister preach a sermon in the late 1980s in which he came very close to advising his hearers to vote for the Progressive Federal Party. Poorter's own approach to contemporary issues is vastly different; he states that if parishioners asked him for advice on such matters he would not even refer them to Biblical texts for use in making their own decisions, for "that would be proof-texting". Poorter insists that during his diplomatic career he never defended apartheid. He recalls telling an audience at the University of Manchester that apartheid was merely "practical" and "politically expedient" but blames Verwoerd for making an ideology of it.³⁹

Poorter may well have made these retrospective comments in the early 1990s in good faith, but an examination of many of his writings from the 1960s reveals many crystal-clear political implications, as do the works of several of his colleagues cited in the present study. One of the earliest of Poorter's lengthy contributions to *The South African Baptist*, and one of the most relevant to this study, was an editorial titled "The Red Invasion of Africa", published in January 1962. In this piece he presented his version of the global communist conspiracy theory and linked it to recent decolonisation in central Africa. He focused especially on programmes to educate young Africans in the Soviet Union and then repatriate them to their homelands as eventual channels of Soviet influence on European colonies in Africa and the neophyte independent countries on that continent. "All these persons, in greater or lesser measure, are being injected with the deadly Marxist propaganda, wrapped in the trimmings of friendship and financial or technical aid", Poorter declared. "In the face of all this, Western complacency alarms thinking people". He reasoned that the feeble attempts of the imperial nations to counter this influence, particularly by granting independence at a faster pace, were entirely

ineffective: "The more the voracious monster called 'freedom' is fed, the less he is appeased, and clamours for new victims, like the legendary dragon". Poorter even caricatured the United States Peace Corps, whose ostensibly volunteers were "employing smiles, sincerity and dollars" in the naive belief that "one can fight the devil by showing the American way of life". Poorter did not allow his own land to escape criticism. His catalogue of South Africa's internal tribulations reads like a white man's confession in which relatively little is confessed, including "riots, raids, racial rumblings, political unrest, subversive literature, [and] bannings". These are merely symptoms of deeply rooted moral shortcomings which Poorter did not mention and which he perhaps did not really comprehend. His editorial betrayed scant understanding of the social context in which much sin takes place and of the institutional forms in which it often manifests itself. Poorter's grasp of the interplay of politics and Christian ethics appears to have been quite truncated at that time and limited to explicitly religious matters. In the same editorial he wrote revealingly, "Christians are interested in political events mainly in so far as they have a bearing on the proclamation of the Gospel". No less revealing was his vague solution for rescuing South Africa from the threat of a Marxist revolution: "What shall we say then to these things? God save us from the tentacles of Communism? No, rather, God save us from our own well-fed complacency, and from our sinful indulgence, and our pleasure-loving age". Clearly, Poorter's "we" was the well-fed, indulgent white minority in South Africa, not the impoverished masses to whom his confession and ultimately defensive plea could hardly have personal relevance.⁴⁰

In 1966 Poorter came out openly against civil disobedience, which had become a hallmark of the civil rights movement in the United States of America and was being advocated as one of the few instruments which the unenfranchised majority of South Africans had at their disposal for effecting change. In fairness to Poorter, it should be mentioned that for various reasons there was no international Christian consensus about the moral defensibility of civil disobedience. In some quarters, well-entrenched interpretations of Romans 13 militated against it. Furthermore, generally speaking civil disobedience could be more readily harmonised with situation or other teleological

ethical approaches than with Biblical prescriptive ethics, and the latter, as we have emphasised, still dominated amongst South African Baptists when Poorter wrote. What is particularly revealing, however, is his argument against civil disobedience.

Poorter tipped his hand in his first sentence by beginning with a transparent appeal to supposed authority, in this case Senator Sam Ervin of the United States Congress. That legislator from the southern state of North Carolina, who would gain great respect in 1973 and 1974 as the chairman of a Senatorial committee which investigated the so-called "Watergate" affair and indirectly forced the resignation under duress of President Richard M. Nixon, was known in the 1960s as a staunch foe of the civil rights movement and as such widely regarded as a principal obstacle to the political and social advancement of Afro-Americans. After the General Assembly of the Southern Presbyterian Church passed a resolution in favour of civil disobedience, Ervin had denounced that action because in effect it "declares that professing Christians have a God-given right to disobey laws they deem unjust". Poorter agreed with the conservative American senator that this would give the individual citizen "the idea that each man is divinely intended to be his own judge in matters of legal and moral significance". This was particularly dangerous because the individual thereby "has sanction to disobey the law he deems to be unjust". In a conclusion paradoxical for a well-educated Baptist theologian to draw, Poorter, again following Ervin, declared, "The standard by which he estimates justice is therefor [sic] none other than his own conscience". This runs counter to the venerable Baptist principle of freedom of conscience to follow what one believes are Biblical principles. Ironically, however, Poorter did not mention the Scriptures in this part of his argument, nor did he refer to the Baptist tenet of freedom of conscience. Instead, he placed great emphasis on social and political stability, something which his white South African readers valued highly. "Lawlessness is perhaps the characteristic sin of our time", he asserted, explaining his belief that it had sprung largely from post-Enlightenment notions of human freedom. Poorter made no mention of what many other Christians had identified as cardinal sins in South Africa, such as racism, economic exploitation, dehumanising social conditions, and rampant materialism. Again relying on the widespread

belief in conspiracy theories which had considerable credence amongst white South Africans, Poorter declared that "the doctrine of inherent human rights, which includes the right to demand rights, is increasingly becoming a seedplot of worldwide disorder". He obliquely castigated fellow Christians whose religious convictions, including their doctrine of Creation and view of God's redemption of humankind, had prompted them to support civil rights movements in South Africa and abroad. By appealing to "nominal Christianity", civil disobedience had "thereby acquired the halo of martyrdom and the blessing of suffering for supposed righteousness' sake". Having set up this straw man by broaching the term "martyrdom", Poorter proceeded to bowl it over by asserting that "this doctrine bears scant and superficial resemblance to Christian martyrdom", the hallmarks of which were "suffering, meekness and the like". To his mind this bore no similarity to his perception of civil rights movements. Parading a profound ignorance of them, Poorter drew a one-sided caricature by stating that "the idea of defiance, as expressed in marches, bottle-throwing and home-made bombs, has no place whatever in the spirit of New Testament faith, nor in Christian ethics". In an obvious attempt to obviate challenges to his position on the basis of the behaviour of the apostolic church in the wake of persecution, Poorter reasoned that "whatever Peter and John felt when they talked of obeying God rather than man (Acts 4:19) they were energised by pure love to God and man. There is no hint of malice or hate, and least of all of an insistence upon their own or anyone else's 'rights'".⁴¹ That many Christian advocates of reform had repeatedly emphasised that they were acting on the basis of Christian love and that they believed their understanding of civil rights was a modern expression of the Biblical view of Creation and human relations in the Kingdom of God Poorter did not mention.

Poorter's essay did not go unchallenged in the Baptist Union. R.S.W. Ford, who, as we shall see shortly, was an outspoken foe of apartheid, dismantled part of Poorter's illogic while curiously calling his argument "timely, sound, and salutary". Writing in *The South African Baptist*, Ford emphasised that rather than throwing overboard the principle of conscience, one should nuance it by distinguishing between that of the Christian and that of the non-Christian. The

former, he asserted, was "subject to higher Sanction within him than the common 'conscience' of mankind". Apparently alluding to I Corinthians 2:16, Ford believed wrote that "the Christian possesses the mind of Christ, and thus he brings higher critical faculties to bear on moral issues". This had particular consequences in South Africa, where "the duty of protest" seemed especially clear. Ford was convinced that "we are moving steadily to a place where, in the political sphere, the Christian will have to resist the wrong-doing of bad law-making if he is to keep his faith's integrity intact". He was unswayed by Poorter's implication that modern concepts of human rights had nothing to do with Christian ethics. "I certainly do not advocate defiance in defence of one's personal 'rights'", Ford explained, "but I do declare the Christian must be prepared to resist and rebuke with dignity, restraint, love and holy indignation (and without bombs!) those 'laws' which dispossess and injure the weak - by denials and deprivations which have been made legal". This political liberal regretted that his views were not widely held. It seemed to him that "in many Christian quarters there is today an unseemly haste to conform to unrighteous policies and practices, simply because we are, frankly, more loyal to comfort than to Christ". To make the point even less ambiguous to his readers, Ford repeated it in equally scathing terms. "I think the Christian is a man of straw if he knows not how, likewise, to be righteously indignant and downright immovable when confronted with wrong, however dressed up in legality it may be", he thundered. "Never were there so few men of steel in the Church on earth as today, which is why to so many people the Master's Church appears an anachronism".⁴²

To avoid oversimplification or the drawing of facile conclusions from this verbal confrontation, it should be emphasised that Poorter, like many other South African Baptist clergymen of his generation, did not think consistently in well-defined ideological categories, and his preoccupation with communism did not prevent him from sometimes taking relatively liberal views on matters of race relations. One such occasion occurred in February 1961, a few months before he published "The Red Invasion of Africa". Poorter wrote a lengthy editorial praising the compendium *Delayed Action*, in which various Dutch Reformed theologians went beyond prevailing sentiments in their

denomination by commenting critically on aspects of race relations in South Africa. It was this small but weighty volume in which B.B. Keet wrote unambiguously: "With regard to the principle itself, that the Scriptures in no way teach the division of the Church of Christ on the grounds of race or colour, there is no longer any shade of difference". He predicted that "those who still wish to assert that language and cultural differences do justify the division of the body of Christ, are fighting in the last ditches and will have to capitulate soon". Poorter optimistically expressed his wholehearted agreement with this declaration as well as his belief that a similar sentiment would soon prevail in his own denomination. The Baptist Union, he asserted, "should be in the van, leading others in a recognition of the changes to come". Poorter also concurred with Ben Marais that racial and cultural differences must be secondary to the essential unity of the church and the oneness of the people of God: "These are true words well spoken. Baptists everywhere will surely welcome any inquiry into racial matters which is based upon a *genuine concern for what the Scriptures teach*". Consciously repeating a familiar refrain, Poorter proclaimed that "our constant boast is that we are a people whose first and last authority and guide is Scripture" and gave no indication that he believed that he and the Baptist Union in general often failed to live up to that ideal.⁴³ Another example of Poorter's occasional liberalism was his opposition to the so-called "Sabotage Bill", one of the measures which the Verwoerd government used in its erosion of due process of law by tilting the judicial balance in favour of the state's prosecution of its critics. This was at the time of the radicalisation of the African National Congress, which in the wake of the Sharpeville massacre in 1960 had heightened its struggle against apartheid and white minority rule in South Africa, a move which eventually led to the incarceration of Nelson Mandela and other leaders of the ANC and the banning of that organisation. Poorter's "liberalism", if that it may be called, had its limits; he never became an advocate of the ANC or of rebellions to overthrow the state. What troubled him was that under the terms of the Sabotage Bill, the burden of proof was shifted largely to the defendant. The venerable principle of presumption of innocence until guilt was proven beyond reasonable doubt was abandoned. As the alarmed Poorter put it, "Persons may now

be prosecuted for breaking the law (which has the widest possible range of offences) merely because the Attorney General thinks some political intent is involved, and the accused must disprove this". He predicted presciently that if it became law (as it eventually did), the Sabotage Bill would "be feared, but not respected as an instrument of justice; feared as an instrument of control, yes, but rejected by the consciences of thousands".⁴

In a sense Poorter, notwithstanding his generally conservative positions during the 1960s and later, not only serves as a fairly good example of a politically conservative Baptist but also illustrates the ambiguities which prevailed amongst many of his Anglophone fellows in the denomination. On the one hand, the legacy of British Nonconformity helped to keep alive some flicker of a social conscience which extended, albeit in a condescending way, to race relations in South Africa. On the other, such factors as fears of Marxism, which the government continued to feed, served to muffle voices which otherwise might have been calling for reform. For many years discussions of matters involving social ethics were subjected to these countervailing forces, and the meagre results indicate how debilitating the effects of this state of affairs were.

At times the ambiguous voices within the Baptist Union seemed to project primarily in a moderately liberal direction and betrayed little if any fear of the spectre of communism. Some of these occasions involved efforts to call attention to troubled relations between church and state in the Baptist tradition, and to do so on the foundation of the New Testament. F.A. Haus, one of the very few South African Baptists of German ancestry who took even moderately liberal positions on contemporary issues, sought to do elucidate that matter in a two-part article which *The South African Baptist* carried in 1962. He drew a rough parallel between ecclesiastical participation in the resistance movement against the Third Reich and the criticism of apartheid and related matters which fellow Christians had levelled at the Nationalist government. After fourteen years of apartheid and the development of widespread white complacency towards it, Haus may have raised the eyebrows of many of his readers when, alluding to recent ecclesiastical pronouncements against apartheid, he announced, "I have in my possession at least 25 to 30 pre-war sermons and messages of

1978 → 205 *By centenary celebrations*

Evangelical and Roman Catholic dignitaries [in Germany] which differ little in tone, text and courage from present-day statements of most South African Protestant denominations". Whether Haus included the Baptist Union in that "most" is unclear, but there is no doubt that he believed it should be. He issued one of the most sharply worded calls for preaching on social ethics which *The South African Baptist* had carried up to that time. It employed the familiar alloy of prescriptive and imitative ethics with an unmistakable pietistic flavour, and in both content and tone it foreshadowed many statements which Baptists and other Christians in South Africa would make with increasing frequency:

1980 → *onwards transition*

It is our sacred call to translate the Word and Will of God into everyday language to our people; if the Christian life means to "follow His steps", then we have to give from the pulpit the practical application for the nineteen-sixties: consequently we cannot preach on the seventh commandment: "Thou shalt not commit adultery" and close our eyes to the evils of migratory labour which encourages immorality and breaks up the sacred institution of marriage; nor can we preach on the tenth commandment "Thou shalt not covet" without thinking of the masses who are kept low and dependent as "cheap labour forces" dependent on that which falls from the rich man's table; nor help thinking of the sectional, selfish legislation to please the small, privileged group.

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In another parallel, Haus refused to draw a strict line of demarcation between the sins of individuals and those of governments. If a member of his congregation committed obvious transgressions against Biblical commandments, he noted, he would be obliged to admonish him. By the same token, "If the State by negative, repressive, provocative legislation provides the machinery for evil practices and anti-Christian ideologies[,] must we be silent?" His answer to his rhetorical question was obvious and unambiguous: "We must preach and speak against *all* evils: Strong drink[,] bad motion pictures, jiving and dancing and excessive use of narcotics, maltreatment of natives, restriction on the liberty of individuals,

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unfair legislation, oppression of religious liberty, violations of conscience, and many more matters". Anticipating criticism that he was advocating the preaching of "political sermons" and that such homiletics could be "dangerous", Haus readily acknowledged that "all great things are dangerous". He pointed first to the Old Testament prophets and reminded readers that some of them had lived in peril because they had challenged the ruling order. Jeremiah, for instance, had he proclaimed his message in contemporary South Africa, "would be locked up and tried for treason". A more important question to Haus, however, was "What would Jesus' attitude be towards the strife, wickedness and hypocrisy of our political situation?" This angry Baptist denied that Jesus was a militant revolutionary: "He founded no political party; even though He had His disciples, He did not gather armies and defence forces around Him". At the same time, though, Haus emphasised with more immediate unmistakable relevance that

He stands above the racial hatred and dangerous superiority of His fellow-Jews. He did not share their extreme exclusive nationalism. . . . When the Jews applied a strict apartheid and would not even touch a Samaritan, let alone walk through his territory, Jesus spoke to the woman at the well (what an offence!)[.] He sat with her (what a sin!); even the woman herself was astonished, "How is it that Thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me?" He praised the Good Samaritan. He helped the Syro-Phoenician woman. Others would not have gone into that area at all; others would have kicked her about and have called her "dog", but Jesus permitted her to speak to Him and to touch Him.⁴⁵

In the second part of this article, Haus sought to dethrone the state from the exalted position which it apparently occupied in the minds of many South African Christians. He stressed that world history in general, and governments as ephemeral parts of it, must be viewed in eschatological perspective. In an argument which betrayed indebtedness to Luther's concept of the "orders of creation", Haus stated that governments were ordained by God to perform certain functions but were neither eternal nor divine. Rather, "the State has

a diaconal and liturgical service to perform in the household of God". Hence, Haus held no brief for simplistic readings of Romans 13 which called categorically for unquestioning obedience to governments. Instead, "it is only right to expect the state to act according to Romans 13 as a minister of God, for good". When it failed to do so, it forfeited its claim to obedience. Linking his analogy from Nazi Germany to the New Testament *locus classicus* in such situations, Haus insisted that "when fanaticism and extreme power prevails [*sic*], when it is incumbent [*sic*] upon us to spend our whole life in political education and recreation (like the Hitler Youth Movement, 1933-1945) so that there is no room left to attend to the religious, social and family side of life[,] then we must obey God more than man (Acts 4:19)". The chronological criterion which Haus employed may have left room for hope in his mind and those of his readers. Before the South African government reached the extreme of neglect of its God-given function and became a thoroughly anti-Christian institution, Christians could exert much more direct influence on it than had been the case. "Surely God does not want the state to be run by *non-Christians* only!" he exclaimed. Addressing squarely the foibles of his Baptist readership, Haus lamented, "Some act as if matters of public welfare should be left to irreligious persons. We are inclined to isolate ourselves and forget Christ's words of the salt and leaven. Perhaps this is a remnant of our pietistic heritage of two centuries ago". As steps towards shedding the burden of that legacy, Haus suggested that Baptists could become directly involved in political life without fear of abandoning their faith, for even in South Africa "a Christian M.P. does not necessarily become a worldling!"⁴⁶

Haus' printed words probably fell largely on blind eyes. The number of Baptists who held prominent public offices in South Africa during the next three decades remained small, and there is no reason to believe that many Baptist clergymen heeded his call to pay greater attention to Christian social ethics in their sermons. When conducting the research for this study, the present writer interviewed approximately thirty white Baptists in various parts of South Africa who almost univocally professed that during the 1960s and 1970s they rarely heard sermons in which Biblical ethics was applied to contemporary social problems. Nevertheless, the message which Haus

sought to deliver indicated at least some consciousness of a prevailing weakness in white Baptist proclamation of the Gospel, and it signalled continuing debate on the matter during the next few years. What it failed to accomplish, however, if indeed this was one of Haus's purposes, was to stimulate significantly greater discussions of specific social ethical issues in the denominational periodical or at the annual assemblies.

A few other Baptists publicly advocated political involvement and took moderately liberal positions on racial and related political matters during the 1960s and 1970s, agreeing with Haus that Christians should not isolate their faith from political involvement. R.S.W. Ford, for instance, contributed in 1963 an essay to *The South African Baptist* in which he addressed what he termed "the guilt of sinful silences". Keenly aware of the tendency of many of his denominational fellows to shun public issues, he posed as the critical question of the time: "Shall I allow my discipleship to take me into the realm of politics in this race-ridden country of ours?" Ford found it deplorable that "many genuine Christians . . . are so afraid of this burning question that they plead the entire divorce of piety from politics, as if they are mutually exclusive". Such a fear and the resulting aloofness produced, in his blunt judgment, "a very comfortable evasion of plain Christian duty" which "gives a detachment from reality altogether agreeable to shallow thinking". In criticising South African racial policies, albeit partly obliquely, Ford used some of the harshest words to appear in *The South African Baptist* to that date. "Political attitudes and acts which amount to the theft of human rights because those rights are seen as a menace to sectional pride ought always to arouse the informed and disciplined indignation of every man of God". He then argued chiefly on Old Testament grounds that certain recent acts by the government fell under divine judgment and therefore demanded censure by Christians. Among these were "the multitude of acts, pass-laws, amendments, no-trial detentions, [and] indefinite imprisonments, which leave the poor of this land defenceless against a political system which too-readily sees a non-white skin as 'Communist' or presumptive of crime". Against these transgressions of justice, Ford quoted excerpts from Amos 8:4-7: "Hear this, you who trample down the needs, who falsify scales by deceit, to buy the poor for silver and the needy

for a pair of shoes . . . the Lord hath sworn, surely I will never forget their deeds". In the New Testament, Ford referred to Matthew 25:31-46 (the parable of the sheep and the goats) and James 1:27 ("Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world") as "governing principles" for Baptists in South Africa. "Shall the Baptist Christian enter politics?" he asked rhetorically in conclusion. "Since all human life is the arena in which faith and discipleship is tested[,] he *must*".⁴⁷ For many more years, however, many did not heed this imperative.

Some, in fact, openly rejected it and thereby precipitated a brief controversy in the pages of *The South African Baptist*. The first shot fired in the skirmish was a letter to that denominational magazine published two months after Ford's essay appeared. Maud Newell of Bulawayo, Rhodesia (subsequently Zimbabwe), asserted that that article "provoked surprise and disappointment among a large number of Christians both inside and outside Baptist circles, as well as to myself", although she gave no indication what the basis for her quantitative assessment was. Newell's letter was rife with illogic, and she apparently had misunderstood Ford's effort to prod Christians into political activism, believing that he had advocated the politicisation of the church as such. For her, as it long had been for many other Baptists, the task of the church was evangelisation, and there was no overlapping of this and social ethics. "The more souls the Church can save, the less time there will be for anxiety about State abuses", Newell wrote. A second reason which she cited in letter, which was no less confused structurally as it was theologically, was clearly sectarian. Leaving behind the Baptist tradition of the separation of church and state, Newell praised the government of Verwoerd for holding a protective hand over Protestantism in the land while discriminating against Roman Catholicism. Again asserting vague numerical values without adducing a shred of evidence to substantiate them, she declared that "there are scores of people who realise that a largely Protestant South Africa is fighting a unique battle which includes national religious freedom for all, a privilege not accorded to Protestants in many parts of the world".⁴⁸

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Newell did not stand alone. In his own letter to *The South African Baptist*, one writer who signed anonymously as "A Theological Student" at the Baptist theological college in Johannesburg declared that he agreed "wholeheartedly" with her. Apparently lacking a meaningful notion of the venerable British tradition of a loyal opposition, he announced that "it is about time that we English-speaking Baptists became more patriotic citizens of South Africa". Criticism of the Verwoerd regime, this seminarian believed, was symptomatic of a lack of patriotism, "with particular regard to our race problems". He admitted that the government fell short of perfection but, sacrificing logic on the altar of rhetoric, wondered, "Where in this world do we find 'perfect' Governments?" In another attempt at a rhetorical flourish, he misquoted Winston Churchill's phrase concerning the heroism of British fighter pilots during the Battle of Britain of 1940 with regard to the Nationalist government of South Africa: "Never has so much been done by so few for so many". The aspiring pastor found it particularly distasteful that "'so-called Christians' have been unjustly criticizing merely because they have formed an unnecessary prejudice against a good Government which is endeavouring to achieve its great ends to the best of its ability".⁴⁹

Ford himself threw a punch in the controversy in the form of a letter to the same magazine in which he replied to Newell's critical epistle. He rejected her suggestion that Baptists shun political involvement and suspected that she did not understand the implications of her advice. "I wonder whether your correspondent votes at government or municipal elections?" Ford asked. "If she does - why?" Appealing to the British evangelical traditions which were still alive in the minds of some Anglophone Baptists in South Africa, he wondered whether Newell had considered "the holy wrath of Carey against widow-burning, or Wilberforce against slavery, or Shaftesbury against labour, or Charrington against drink" and asked whether one should dismiss these activities as "interferences" or denigrate them as "deplorable 'taking of sides'".⁵⁰

The anonymous theology student also came under fire in *The South African Baptist*. C.J. Clemitson of Pinelands thought he had naively "fallen prey to our 'good' Government's propaganda machine" and pointed to the illogic of regarding criticism as being outside the pale

of patriotism. "I think he should get his thinking straight", Clemitson declared summarily. With no mean sarcasm, this writer agreed that "the Government is doing a superb job in the execution of its policy of separate development" but exercised his right to criticise it by alleging that "it is the *policy* that is all wrong and which is singled out for criticism". Clemitson believed that the student in question simply did not understand how inhumane apartheid was and proposed six questions, none of them novel, to illustrate the point. "Does he [i.e. the student] know that to keep the peace our 'good' Government has to have a '90-Day Clause' in order to detain people for an indefinite period *without a trial*?" he asked in one. "Does he know that annually scores of Bantu wives and mothers pour into our cities 'illegally' in search of 'lost' husbands and fathers?" To Clemitson, the Christian had not only the right but also the moral obligation to raise a prophetic voice against these violations of human dignity. He also thought it cheap to quote Churchill, choosing instead to cite the Golden Rule of Matthew 24:40 as a "Higher Authority" than the erstwhile British prime minister. Clemitson's conclusion was thus unambiguous: "No, my dear 'Theological Student'", the price of apartheid is too expensive when measured in human misery, frustration and hardship and the end result of a Utopian 'whites only' state cannot be justified Scripturally or by any other moral means. This is the policy our 'good' Government is enforcing".⁵¹

One of Clemitson's denominational fellows who shared his sentiments but unfortunately emulated the student by resorting to a pseudonym, in this case "Loyal South African (By choice, not accident)", underscored the white economic selfishness underlying apartheid. He also turned his pen against the leaders of the Baptist Union, however, for not challenging that system effectively. "Why do they always say too little too late too softly?" he asked. "But at least they do say something sometimes . . . as witness the unread resolutions in the B.U. Handbook".⁵²

Audrey Williams of Johannesburg, another Baptist who was displeased with the anonymous student criticised him from another angle, suggesting that part of his own indictment applied equally to himself. As a spirited defender of the government, she indicated, was no less a "political enthusiast" than were people who opposed it, for

reasoning in regard to these problems in the light of Scripture.⁵⁵

Again, however, there is virtually no evidence that the Baptist Union heeded this kind of internal criticism. In fact, within weeks the denominational magazine carried letters from readers challenging its legitimacy.⁵⁶ Not until well into the 1970s did the subject of ecclesiastical integration receive noteworthy attention in it, and not even then did it become a reality in most of the affiliated congregations. The Baptist Union remained essentially a racially divided denomination.

The Christian Citizenship Committee

At its annual assembly in 1963 the Baptist Union established its "Christian Citizenship Committee", one of the first denominational endeavours to deal systematically with problems involving social ethics. In the words of Theodore D. Pass, an English immigrant who served as its first chairman and who had been a conscientious objector to military conscription in Britain during the Second World War and who was known as a moderate liberal on public issues in South Africa, the general purpose of the CCC was "the stimulation of Christian conscience (individual and collective) on all social relationships to which the gospel of Christ is relevant". A year later he explained to delegates at the 1964 assembly that the body had begun to pay attention to "policy, personnel and publicity". The CCC, Pass declared, was "in process of thinking through our denominational position on such matters as gambling, temperance, alcoholism, mental health services, divorce, juvenile delinquency, race relations, and even our responsibilities in regard to famine relief". He probably raised expectations by assuring that the CCC intended to recruit "expert opinion" on these issues, however difficult that might prove. True to well-established moral concerns in the Baptist Union, Pass reported that his committee was already in the process of preparing as its first publications a series of leaflets dealing with Christian responses to gambling and alcoholism.⁵⁷

The CCC arguably never lived up to the expectations of its founders, but since its inception it has put forth dozens of resolutions at the annual assemblies and seen delegates approve the majority of them. We shall have occasion to return to the work of the CCC several more times in this and the immediately following chapters. In general, it has toed a fairly conventional line on issues involving personal ethics, such as gambling and the use of alcohol, whereas on race relations the CCC has often been at least moderately liberal. Estimations of its overall significance must take into account the fact that the congregational polity of the Baptist Union makes its resolutions at most only advisory. In 1965 it acknowledged the "limited scope of our influence".⁵⁸ Practical factors, moreover, have hampered its efforts. In general the CCC has been forced to function as a regional committee, with its members being either on the Witwatersrand or the vicinity of Cape Town, though occasionally in Durban, in order to allow them to meet relatively often at virtually no expense. Denominational appropriations to underwrite its activities have never been abundant. Complicating matters, from the outset politically conservative members of Baptist churches have regarded the CCC as an extraneous body. Symptomatic of the frustrations which these factors have caused was the report which Pass filed in 1971, in which he made no effort to disguise his disappointment with the limited scope of activities. Serving on the CCC, he admitted, was a "rather thankless task". Pass explained that "no Citizenship Committee worthy of the name can function in our South African community without handling controversial issues, especially those normally regarded by evangelicals as being solely political. This tends to discourage those who might have a real contribution to make on other social issues which Baptists can approach undividedly".⁵⁹ Little had changed three years later, when the editor of *The South African Baptist* wrote an article entitled "does the Citizenship Committee ever DO anything?" Much of that piece consisted of an interview with Pass. When asked whether he found himself becoming involved in political issues, he in effect answered negatively by explaining that one task of the CCC was to defend the legitimacy of the Baptist Union's "refusal to identify with movements which include violence as a valid method to change Government policy", an obvious allusion to the World Council of

Churches' Programme to Combat Racism. Pass also revealed his dissatisfaction that "we have no programme of a Christian nature for discharged prisoners, for drug-addicts or hoboes". He also confessed that he and his colleagues were not satisfied with their "efforts to strengthen the hands of those who work in legitimate ways to raise the level of Non-White wages to one approximating more closely to that which the White population regard as an irreducible minimum for themselves, and which, therefore, must be similarly essential for Non-Whites".⁶⁰ The first ten years of the CCC's existence simply had not been especially productive or enlightening. During its second decade it continued to function along similar lines. As we shall see in the following chapter, during the 1980s the CCC took bolder stances on some issues, although in doing so it ruffled the feathers of some Baptists who did not believe that the Baptist Union as a denomination had a legitimate role to play in social ethics as such and that as an agency of a denomination with an avowedly congregational polity the CCC had occasionally gone beyond its mandate in publicising its own opinions as representing those of South African Baptists in general.

The Baptist Union and the *Message to the People of South Africa*

CONTEXT

In 1966 the World Council of Churches held its Conference on Church and Society, a seminal parley which led to the highly controversial Programme to Combat Racism four years later. This meeting and its immediate aftermath represented a significant step in the WCC's involvement in the social, political, and economic tribulations of developing countries, racially oppressed groups, and other segment's of the world's population. To a much greater extent than had previously been the case, churches were confronted with this suffering and the expectations which many members had with regard to their responsibilities and prophetic voice. There was no unanimity at the conference as to how churches should react, and within the constituent denominations and other agencies many debates inevitably ensued. Given its disparate membership, even after the departure of the two Dutch Reformed denominations which had belonged to it until the early 1960s, the Christian Council of South Africa, which became

the SACC in 1968, could not escape becoming deeply involved. It responded by nominating in late 1967 an *ad hoc* commission to investigate the particular implications for the churches of South Africa in their witness to unity in a socially divided society. At approximately the same time, the SACC greatly expanded the scope of its activities, largely to encompass a wider programme of social ethics.

The theological commission issued in September 1968 its much-disputed *Message to the People of South Africa*, a document of six pages and approximately 2 500 words which aroused immediate public attention and raised tensions between the SACC and the government of B.J. Vorster to an altitude hitherto unreached. The essential thrust of the *Message* has been analysed both at length and in summary elsewhere, and its details need not concern us here.⁶¹ In brief, the commission which drafted it argued that apartheid itself, not merely the abuse of it, ran counter to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and was "truly hostile" to Christianity. Through the Atonement, God had reconciled the world to himself and, consequently, made reconciliation between people not only possible but also central to Christianity. This was particularly the case in the church universal. According to the *Message*, the social situation in South Africa made this impossible in practical terms, however, because apartheid legislation postulated the permanent, *a priori* disunity of humankind. This could hardly have been expressed more succinctly than in this pithy sentence: "A thorough policy of racial separation must ultimately require that the Church cease to be the Church". But the implications of apartheid extended beyond ecclesiology to social idolatry: "If we seek to reconcile Christianity with the so-called 'South African way of life' (or any other way of life), we shall find that we have allowed an idol to take the place of Christ". The drafters of the *Message* declared that many South Africans had done precisely that, and that for them apartheid had become a "false faith, a novel gospel", i.e. a means of attaining worldly salvation which meant freezing the social *status quo* with all the internal divisions that implied for the people of God. The commission did not allow conventions regarding relations between church and state to muzzle what it believed was its prophetic voice. "We believe that we are under an obligation to state that our country and Church are under God's judgment", they wrote, "and that Christ

Evaluation
of B.C.
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to S.A.
society

is inevitably a threat to much that is called the South African way of life".⁶²

A storm of controversy ensued. Within hours of its publication, the *Message* was discussed in every major newspaper in South Africa, and not long thereafter it prompted debate in many of the country's Christian denominations, especially those which belonged to the SACC but also in some which did not. More than 6 500 copies of the document, 4 000 of them in English and the balance in Afrikaans under the title '*n Boodskap aan die Volk van Suid-Afrika*, were sent to South African clergymen and churches, and a second printing was made within a week,⁶³ so few churchmen could ignore entirely the implications of the indictment which the theological commission had levelled at those who believed they could be both Christians and supporters of apartheid. The *Message* had obvious political implications, however, and some of the first skirmishes of the battle were fought in the political arena, not least in the daily newspapers with their unofficial attachments to either the National Party or its opponents. Liberal newspapers like the *Rand Daily Mail* of Johannesburg reported the contents of the *Message* favourably. An editor of that newspaper, moreover, commented in an editorial that the document was "heartening evidence" that South African Christians were belatedly beginning to take a stand against apartheid.⁶⁴ *Die Burger*, on the other hand, the Nationalist newspaper in Cape Town, and *Die Transvaler*, which supported the Vorster government from Johannesburg, had nothing positive to say about the *Message*. Neither did *Hoofstad*, which performed a similar function in Pretoria. As fought in the partisan press, the skirmish bore some resemblance to that which broke out almost six years later when the SACC passed a resolution challenging Christians to consider conscientious objection to military conscription, a matter discussed in Chapter VII.

Prime Minister Vorster lost little time before issuing one of his blustery warnings. Speaking in Brakpan, he directed an unveiled threat at clerics who challenged his government's policies. "Ek is bewus daarvan dat daar sommige geestelikes is wat daarmee speel en gedagtes rondgooi om die soort ding in Suid-Afrika te doen wat Martin Luther King in Amerika gedoen het", he thundered, referring to the American civil rights leader who had fallen victim to the bullet of a

right-wing assassin less than six months earlier. "Ek wil aan hulle sê: Skei uit. Die kled wat u dra, sal u nie beskerm as u dit in Suid-Afrika probeer doen nie".⁶⁵ What the consequences would be, however, Vorster did not specify. In an address to the Natal branch of the National Party the same week, he cautioned clergymen not to use their pulpits as political platforms and not to serve as lackeys of the Progressive, Liberal, or United parties.⁶⁶

Many denominational bodies soon expressed official or unofficial opinions on the *Message*. By and large, those which belonged to the SACC commented favourably on it, although in many such churches popular opinion was divided. On the other hand, the Dutch Reformed churches, which had tended either to give explicit support to or tacitly countenance apartheid, were predictably critical and accused the SACC of overstepping the conventional border between religion and politics. The editor of *Die Kerkbode*, the organ of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk, labelled it 'n *Misleidende Boodskap* and called it "weinig meer as 'n politieke (en maatskaplike) manifes onder die masker van 'n Christelike boodskap". He argued that the *Message* was not Biblical because those who had drafted it had not quoted a single verse of Scripture. Furthermore, they had not mentioned personal faith in Christ. This editor tipped his hand by correctly pointing out that "Hierdie *Boodskap* is 'n kwalik bedekte dolksteek na die gesagsorde wat die owerheid hier te lande skeep". The South African government deserved the gratitude of all Christians in the country, he pleaded, because it ostensibly did not forbid the proclamation of the Gospel, persecute the faithful, or burn churches. Nowhere, however, did he attempt to tackle the central argument of the *Message*.⁶⁷ In *Die Hervormer*, the denominational journal of the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk, Professor A.D. Pont saw the debate as essentially one of Anglophone versus Afrikaans-speaking South African whites and screamed that "'n 'Heilige Oorlog' word verklaar". He identified such "leftist bishops" as the Anglicans Joost de Blank and Ambrose Reeves as prime enemies. Appealing to ethnic history, Pont revived memories of the 1820s and 1830s when Afrikaners in the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope were subjected to the agitation of "integrasie-behepte, skoorsoekerige engelse kerklike ampsdraers en sendelinge" and

responded by joining the Great Trek. No more than the editor of *Die Kerkbode* did he address the theological thrust of the *Message*.⁶⁸

John W. de Gruchy, who was on the staff of the SACC in 1968, has sought to clarify why some Anglophone churchmen took exception to the *Message* by generously pointing out that some critics touched a fundamental weakness by calling it "too wordy".⁶⁹ Christians who accepted much of the message of the *Message*, though, could point to many other respects in which the commission which drafted it left room for improvement. Several Baptists did so, thereby adding their voices to the public debate and rendering invalid facile generalisations about English-speaking members of denominations which were represented in the SACC supporting the *Message* while the Dutch Reformed roundly chastised it. Baptist opposition to the *Message* came from diverse quarters, most notably the denomination's monthly magazine and a committee which the Executive appointed to convey Baptist opinion to the SACC in response to a request by the leadership of the latter body.

The editor of *The South African Baptist* may have reflected fairly widespread and deeply entrenched presuppositions about the nature of Christianity and a position which many of his denominational fellows took on the *Message*. Allen Charles Townsend edited that magazine without the benefit of formal theological education, and his editorials clearly reflected both that deficiency and the limitations which his general cultural captivity as a white in South Africa brought to his vision of the application of Christianity to social ethics. A victim of cerebral palsy, he was eventually eulogised as "a man of absolute integrity" who evinced both the courage to manage his handicap reasonably well and a strong Christian faith which expressed itself *inter alia* in his writing of hymns.⁷⁰ Townsend's formal education, however, was in sociology at Rhodes University, where in 1968 he submitted a Master of Arts thesis on "Absenteeism in the footwear industry in South Africa".⁷¹

In a lengthy editorial about the *Message to the People of South Africa*, Townsend questioned the logic which its drafters had employed in arguing from what he agreed were "sound premises" but in criticising it committed his own blunders and reflected a typical lack of insight into the manifold nature of sin. He also matched the

occasionally censorious tone of the *Message* stride for stride. Operating from a typically pietistic background which emphasised individual salvation but paid little attention to the extension of the Kingdom of God into all aspects of life, including social institutions (even though he quoted approvingly the statement in the *Message* that the Gospel "declares that we live in the expectation of a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells"), Townsend thought the document had a universalist bias in that it failed to distinguish between Christians and non-Christians. He particularly took exception to what seemed a one-sided statement that "the Gospel of Christ is to be understood in a cultural, social (and therefore political), cosmic and universal sense, as the salvation of the world and of human existence in its entirety". Apparently regarding this arguably too exclusively worded sentence as conveying the core of the *Message*, Townsend rephrased the argument of the commission which had drafted it in an attempt to create a *reductio ad absurdum*: "The Christian Gospel is a gospel of salvation. Christian salvation is to be understood to include political salvation. Racial separation is being offered to South Africa as a means of political salvation. Separate development is therefore being offered as a false gospel in direct opposition to the Gospel of Jesus Christ". To Townsend, this was "arrant nonsense", ostensibly because "'separate development' is not a 'gospel' at all, nor is it being offered as an alternative to the Gospel; its area of relevance is only a fractional part of the total relevance of the Christian Gospel; it is a technique (accepted by the majority of the country's electorate) for the government of a multiracial community". On closer examination, the "nonsense" of the argument stems from Townsend's highly selective view of the *Message*, in which he overlooked, or at least chose not to comment on, its central thrust pertaining to the unity of the church, and from his misunderstanding of the figurative use of the word "gospel" in that document. He could thus agree with the theological commission of the SACC that the Gospel of Jesus Christ worked for the reconciliation of people but simultaneously assert that no-one was presenting apartheid as an "alternative to the Gospel". Townsend nowhere stated so explicitly, but it seems plausible that he regarded such reconciliation as being possible only between Christians and that he shared the lingering attitude that to some extent the line of

demarcation between Christians and non-Christians was the same as that which distinguished whites from non-whites. In any case, nothing in his editorial suggests that he regarded the latter as being fully Christian, and nothing in it indicates that he understood the argument of the *Message* that in South Africa the system of racial separation had immediate consequences for the integrity of the church. One wonders whether this Baptist, who presumably accepted the fundamental denominational tenet of the primacy of the local church, even had a significant notion of the church universal. The absence of such a concept might explain how he so obviously missed the point. Instead of commenting on the repercussions of apartheid for ecclesiastical unity, Townsend focused on apartheid itself as "one possible means of dealing with a particular problem (that of race-relationships) in an unredeemed society". In words typical of a condescending attitude so prevalent in white Baptist and other circles at that time, he acknowledged that "South Africa's racial policy brings hardship and distress to many" and that "it affords opportunity for the petty despot to overstep the bounds of his authority". That the system inherently countered the integrity of the church, however, Townsend does not seem to have grasped. Nor did he evince any understanding of the fact that it was not merely a case of "hardship and distress" but essentially dehumanising and antithetical to much of the Biblical message and had consequently been subjected to heavy criticism on the basis of the Biblical doctrines of Creation and Redemption, the expressly social and economic dimensions of the words of several Old Testament prophets, the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount, the imitation of Christ, and various other Scriptural foundations. His lack of theological education might have been a major factor in this, but another was probably his almost exclusive view of sin and salvation as matters pertaining to people as individuals. Townsend acknowledged that South Africans could be under the judgment of God for their "unloving attitudes towards those of other races". But that, he asserted, was "essentially a personal matter". Why? Because "God, in this age of Grace, deals primarily with individuals and, in this matter of salvation, nothing, but nothing can take the place of a restored personal relationship to Him through an individual commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. To this, the heart of the Gospel, all other issues are

people



secondary". Again, nothing in Townsend's editorial suggests that he believed that sin pervaded society and not merely people as individuals, or that he had any real concept of the Kingdom of God involving the extension of divine will over society in addition to the hearts of individuals. His entire attempt to refute the *Message*, in fact, smacks of the frequently heard affirmation that if South Africans would only become born-again Christians, harmonious race relations and social justice would ensue. Instead of considering ways of viewing salvation that broadened it beyond the revivalistic, atomistic notion which apparently still prevailed in the Baptist Union, Townsend suggested to his Baptist readers that they not allow the *Message* to "muddle our ideas as to the true nature of salvation in Christ and of the way whereby the individual lost sinner may make it his own". He concluded his editorial by again missing the point and urging readers to "refrain from identifying one particular policy with the Gospel and condemning another as its antithesis". After all, Townsend wrote weakly, "there are men of integrity in both camps".⁷²

The response to the *Message* which the Executive of the Baptist Union issued in October 1968 betrayed slightly less theological naiveté but was also fraught with internal contradictions, missed the essentially ecclesiological point of the document, and revealed that Townsend was not the only Baptist leader in South Africa whose pietistic emphasis on individual salvation beclouded a more inclusive view of God's redemptive work in the world. In explaining why it believed that "much of the theological reasoning and some of the conclusions [of the *Message*] are unacceptable", the Executive returned repeatedly to the principle that individual redemption was primary and in effect argued that faith was solely an individual acceptance of the Gospel, not daily living a life of acceptance of the Kingdom of God. Again, one senses the abiding legacy of the pietistic, revivalistic history of the Baptist Union with its roots in Britain and the erosion of the modified Calvinist, theocratic heritage of part of the denomination. As the members of the Executive expressed it in their first reason, "The Gospel of Jesus Christ calls for a response by way of faith on the part of the individual in order that he may enter into the spiritual benefits of Christ's death and resurrection". In the *Message*, however, "national survival" was supposedly confused with

personal salvation, "which is the state of being in the right relationship with God through Christ". The Executive, unlike Townsend, did not deny that racial separation was a "false gospel", but it took the *Message* to task for supposedly embracing integration as "the way to enter into life", an accusation which necessarily went unsubstantiated. The Baptist leaders then denied as a "false antithesis" the belief that "a man cannot be both a supporter of separate development as a political policy and a committed Christian sharing the life of Christ". The reasoning behind this denial cast light on central Baptist thinking in the 1960s. One could be both a Christian and a racial segregationist, the Executive believed, because "the views and attitudes of an individual in racial matters do not enter into the realm of his being justified by faith. They belong to the realm of Christian ethics". In other words, faith was seen as encompassing the individual's decision to accept salvation in Jesus Christ but not his or her life of Christian discipleship. There is no hint of "orthopraxis", to use a term which would only later gain currency in South African theological circles, as a sign of faith. For all these reasons, the Executive rejected the *Message to the People of South Africa* as theologically unacceptable, informed the SACC of this, and presented its explanation to the approving annual assembly of the denomination in October 1968.⁷³

In fairness to the Executive of the Baptist Union, it should be emphasised that its members were by no means entirely insensitive to the difficulties which apartheid posed for large numbers of South Africans, the Biblical demands for the unity of the church, and some of the other matters which the *Message* broached. The statement published in rejection of the *Message* consequently concluded with a positive statement of "affirmations" which reveal just as much as does the section in which the rejection of the SACC paper was delineated. Having criticised the SACC's theological commission for paying too little attention to the distinction between "regenerate community" and the "unregenerate community", the Executive nearly squared the circle by insisting that South Africa was "a professedly Christian nation". It did not, however, explore society-wide implications of God's redemptive work for human harmony in this or any other context. The only indicated concern was that despite being a Christian people, South

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Africans (*n.b.* white South Africans) were shirking their duty to express "the outgoing love of God". Consequently, many non-whites "have received an unfavourable impression of Christianity". Furthermore, the Executive insisted that "our first responsibility as Christian people is to obey the Word of God", but how this ethic of duty should be applied to the issues raised in the *Message* they did not say, choosing instead to respect the venerable if not quite universal South African Baptist practice of addressing social issues by publishing ambiguous statements rather than taking firm stands on them. Finally, the Executive compromised again by failing to condemn apartheid as such but merely "deploring those aspects of its implementation which impose disabilities and hardships upon certain sections of our community in their daily lives and private affairs simply by reason of their race".⁷⁴ Townsend, it seems, was not at all atypical in his arguments against the *Message to the People of South Africa*.

These Baptist reactions to the *Message* probably found general acceptance within the denomination, but they clearly irked the leadership of the SACC, because most other Anglophone denominations which had commented officially or semi-officially (as in denominational periodicals) had praised the statement and commended it to their members. A small controversy between the Baptist Union and the SACC erupted and proved to be the penultimate nail in the coffin of that denomination's membership in the ecumenical body. That these two organisations were somewhat at odds with each other was not without precedent. In 1966 the assembly considered the question of whether the Baptist Union should continue its membership in the Christian Council of South Africa. Delegates did not decide the matter then but deferred it until the following year and in the meantime requested that the regional Baptist associations express their opinions on it. A year later the issue again came before the assembly. Because the associations had not given clear indications of their wishes, the Baptist Union remained a full member of the SACC for another year.⁷⁵ At the 1968 assembly, which met only a few weeks after the reorganised SACC had issued its *Message to the People of South Africa*, delegates in effect gave the Executive's critical response to it their *imprimatur* by approving its circulation to the press with the

proviso that it be printed in its entirety.⁷⁶ The assembly also considered and debated fervently a motion to withdraw from the SACC. Delegates who favoured continued membership emphasised the general value of ecumenical dialogue and the advantages which the South African Baptist Missionary Society enjoyed both through the resources of the SACC itself and co-operation with analogous bodies of other participating denominations. Advocates of withdrawal, however, underscored their dissatisfaction with theological and ethical trends in the SACC, especially its involvement in contemporary political and racial issues. Some also challenged the argument that ecumenical relations were inherently advantageous to the Baptist Union; the deeply rooted anti-Catholicism amongst many members of the denomination appears to have been a major factor in this. A few who favoured cancellation of membership mentioned the recent *Message* as a contributory reason for their position. Opponents of the motion to withdraw defeated it by a vote of eighty-nine to eighty-seven.⁷⁷

The response of the SACC leadership to these negative reactions to its *Message* came most pointedly in the form of a rejoinder to the editorial which Townsend had published against it. In retrospect, it may have been more conducive to enlightened discussion and a refinement of the *Message* if the SACC had responded instead to the less acrid and theologically less naive statement which the Executive of the Baptist Union had issued. Who wrote the SACC rejoinder is unknown; it was published anonymously in *The South African Baptist* in February 1969. He agreed with Townsend that the *Message* and the rebutting editorial "tread divergent paths almost immediately" but disagreed with the Baptist editor that the Biblical message of salvation was solely or primarily a question of individual redemption. Rather, "the Biblical doctrine of salvation includes a wide range of meaning in describing God's actions in restoring man and his various communities, pre-eminently Israel, to wholeness, freedom and peace. Salvation, Biblically speaking, can be personal, national and universal (see particularly Isaiah 40-55)". The SACC also argued the point on New Testament grounds, pointing out that in the gospels Jesus "speaks in very material terms" in addressing people with particular needs, such as in Luke 4:16-21, where he quotes Isaiah 61:1-2 concerning good news for the poor, release for captives, sight for the

blind, and liberty for the oppressed. As corroborative Scriptural evidence, the writer appealed to the Pauline epistles:

Further, the intention of salvation is global in its scope and concerns the whole of creation (Romans 8:19-24), just as Christ's work of reconciliation includes all things in Heaven and earth (Colossians 1:20; Ephesians 1:10). This does not imply a social gospel, which is a dubious thing anyway, but it does mean that the Gospel of Salvation must be seen in a wider context than purely in the individual if it is to be Biblical.

The writer also wondered whether Townsend's understanding of the lordship of Christ was indefensibly narrow: "If, as the Editorial suggests, Christian standards are not to be required of society, and if what Christ has done only applies within the Church, as also stated, then we must conclude that society is not under the judgment of Christ and He is Lord of the Church only". In remarks published in the same issue of *The South African Baptist*, Townsend made no real effort to refute these arguments, apart from stating that his own understanding of the lordship of Christ was "futuristic", i.e. Christ would have dominion over the nations of the world only after the literal fulfilment of John's apocalyptic vision in Revelation. Instead, he declared obliquely that the writer's remarks "leave us without any common basis upon which to discuss the issues involved" and denied the assertion that separate development was an unsatisfactory means of "dealing with South Africa's racial situation". There was "as yet, no proof" that such was the case.⁷⁸

Baptist sentiment against continued membership in the SACC continued to grow, and at its assembly in October 1969 the denomination finally voted by a relatively narrow margin to cancel it in favour of observer status. Townsend rejoiced, reminding his readers that as editor of *The South African Baptist* he had consistently argued that the Baptist Union could better "serve the cause of the Lord Jesus Christ in South Africa from without rather than from within the ranks of the Council". Yet he tempered his triumphant expression of joy by underscoring that the occasion was not one for adopting "any kind of 'holier than thou' attitude towards

the brethren whom we have left behind". Townsend also admitted that the SACC "does much valuable work for the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom" and emphasised that through its observer status the Baptist Union could continue to benefit from its loose association with those denominations which had retained full membership.⁷⁹ Thus ended, at least in its immediate consequences, the effect of the *Message to the People of South Africa* on the Baptist Union. Ironically, by publishing this sharply worded call for the unity of the church transcending racial divisions, the SACC helped to bring about a low-grade schism in its own ranks. The message of the *Message* survived the secession of the Baptist Union, however, and, as we shall see, both the spirit which imbued it and some of the ethical thinking evident in that document would soon make an enduring mark on Baptist social ethics, though hardly one of the magnitude which reform-minded members of the denomination desired. Perhaps more than anything else, the challenge of the *Message* revealed something of the plurality of Baptist attitudes towards apartheid and presuppositions regarding what appears to have been the dominant theological current in the denomination, one which continued to place almost exclusive emphasis on individual redemption and which had accommodated apartheid as a tolerable if imperfect means of ordering a racially heterogeneous society.

The Continuing Unfolding of Social Ethical Diversity

During the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, white Baptists in South Africa continued to take differing positions on the general racial question in their country and ways to address it. The dominant school countenanced apartheid, calling occasionally for amelioration of the suffering which it caused but hardly suggesting that it be abrogated or calling for any other wholesale restructuring of society. The spectre of communism, often linked rhetorically to decolonisation elsewhere in Africa, continued to haunt and dampen ethical thought, including, as we shall see in Chapter VII, discussions on conscientious objection to military conscription. Adherents of this more or less conservative school generally turned deaf ears to calls from various non-Baptist quarters to consider and embrace those dimensions of the

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Gospel, including the nature of salvation, which went beyond the sphere of personal ethics and individual redemption. But the denominational picture, viewed in its larger frame, was not quite that homogeneous. Several prominent Baptists, especially those who served on the Christian Citizenship Committee, were either British immigrants or had received significantly better than average educations, in some cases abroad. They challenged with increasing frequency prevailing notions about ethics, especially the question of apartheid. Their influence, it should be stressed, was not great. Not until the 1980s did the Baptist Union depart radically from the prevailing pattern, and even then much of the denomination remained firmly attached to its traditional moorings of individual salvation and unwillingness to take stands on controversial current issues which touched on or challenged existing understandings of social ethics. Nevertheless, the voices of dissent raised during the late 1960s and the 1970s merit consideration in their own right as well as being harbingers of much more vocal and carefully reasoned protests in the 1980s. Limitations of space preclude a comprehensive treatment of this era, apart from the question of conscientious objection dealt with in a subsequent chapter. We shall therefore focus our attention on a small number of cases which testify to a growing awareness of the gravity of the racial crisis in South Africa and illustrate how a few Baptists reacted to it in various ways.

Manifestations of what may be termed the conservative tendency in the Baptist Union are not difficult to find. On a meta-ethical level, a persistent one was the disavowal of "situation ethics", a term which had been much maligned in many quarters since the appearance of the American Episcopalian Joseph Fletcher's book of that title in the mid-1960s. Fletcher's insistence that the overarching rule of *agape* transcended Biblical prescription, and that the ethics of both Jesus and Paul confirmed this, ran counter to the general, if seldom articulated, assumption of deontological ethics in the Baptist Union. Roger J. Voke, for instance, focused on this challenge in his presidential address to the annual assembly in October 1972. South African society, he acknowledged, was imperilled by "a crisis in the area of morality and ethics". His one example of this was conventional enough in its denominational context: "The young people whom we are seeking to win for Christ are being exposed to moral pressures

hitherto unknown, and are being crippled by the smut-merchants". No less conventionally, he asserted that "Christ is adequate for such times as these" without attempting to explain how Christian ethics could assist believers in meeting any of the moral tribulations facing their country. Voke was dismayed, however, that modern theology was not up to the task, partly because he believed it had tended to dispense with ethical absolutes. In the words of his unsubstantiated accusation, "Theologians and preachers are being used more and more to erode the faith of the common man in his Bible and its teaching". The Baptist president was gratified that "we, as a Denomination, are not, thank God, plagued with such infidelity", but he cautioned that "we need to be on our guard against the subtle, and sometimes strong, temptation to turn aside from the Word of God and to substitute for it our own speculations; to judge the Holy Scriptures by our experience rather than our experience by the Scriptures". In his condemnation of situation ethics, Voke could have invoked the opinions of many Christian ethicists in South Africa and overseas to corroborate his case but did not. More naive was his argument that racial tensions in the country were a purely subjective matter. He bemoaned the divisions which cultural and racial identities had created in South Africa but insisted that the crisis which they caused was merely "a thing of the heart" and did not give any evidence that he understood the many political, social, economic, and other factors which continued to pit one ethnic group against another.⁸⁰

Attitudes and assumptions of the kind which Voke manifested in his presidential address prevailed in much of the Baptist Union during the 1970s, especially the first six years of the decade (*i.e.* before the Soweto riots of June 1976 prompted an increase in critical thinking about the inadequacies of the social order in South Africa). Given this kind of leadership, it is hardly surprising that the World Council of Churches' Programme to Combat Racism found stiff resistance in Baptist circles, as indeed it did in the ranks of many other South African denominations. So strong was the resentment of the membership against this endeavour and, by extension, the World Council of Churches as such, that again and again leaders of the Baptist Union had to assure the congregations that they were not affiliated with the WCC and that they did not support the resented

programme. At the 1970 assembly, for instance, delegates passed a resolution declaring that "the Baptist Union of South Africa is not and never has been a member of the World Council of Churches, basically for theological reasons". The delegates also expressed their "strongest condemnation of grants made for any purpose by the World Council of Churches to movements whose declared aim is to overthrow the elected governments of Southern Africa by violent means" but did not in any way define the criteria, if any, which they believed should be employed for determining which states had "elected governments". In the same resolution they emphasised that their disavowal of any relationship with the World Council of Churches did "not imply any lack of concern, on our part, for the sociological needs and racial problems of our country" but did not go a syllable beyond expressing unspecified "deep concern wherever prevailing attitudes condone injustices".⁸¹ Two years later the assembly passed a resolution which reiterated these assertions.⁸² Readers of *The South African Baptist* repeatedly found similar condemnations of the World Council of Churches. The most noteworthy was in July 1974, when A.H. Jeffree James, an English immigrant who on occasion had taken relatively liberal positions on social ethical questions, at the request of the Executive of the Baptist Union prepared a statement explaining the denomination's refusal to join the global body. He explained that when the World Council of Churches was created in 1948, the Baptist Union had declined membership in it because the doctrinal statement of the former "did not recognise or even mention the authority of Holy Scripture" and "consequently it had no clearly defined theological basis". Furthermore, by its very nature the ecumenical organisation included both "Reformed and unreformed churches" as well as "trinitarian and anti-trinitarian groups", and many Baptists could not conscientiously become involved with such a latitudinarian view of Christianity. Finally, given their own loose, congregational polity and ecclesiology, some Baptists did not agree with the organisational structure of the World Council of Churches, believing it to be "contrary to the New Testament teaching". James was convinced that history had vindicated the reticence shown in 1948. The World Council of Churches, in his view, remained indefensibly inclusive and had evolved from an ecumenical forum to "a supraecclesiastical organisation

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claiming and exercising an authority of its own. The Central Committee, this intensely anti-Catholic Baptist asserted, "pontificates on political, ecclesiastical and social questions, without apparent regard to the views of minority constituent churches". Its Programme to Combat Racism seemed to be a case in point: "The opposition to grants to terrorism, pressed with vigour by the South African member churches, for example, has been totally ineffective: the grants continue". James did not reveal any theological sophistication in this statement, but he reflected both a rejection of existential theology and the general Baptist disapproval of situation ethics in asserting that in the World Council of Churches a tendency towards subjectivity had developed: "From being the science of the knowledge of God as He has revealed Himself in Holy Scripture, it has become an expression of man's understanding of god in his contemporary situation".⁸³ Apparently none of these or other official declarations issued during the 1970s cleared up the matter in the minds of some Baptists. As that decade approached its close, General Secretary Trevor M. Swart felt compelled to make what he presumably hoped would be a conclusive statement on the matter and resolve the ambiguity which countervailing claims on it had created. "Occasional attacks from outside the denomination, and a nagging question in the minds of some within its ranks, make it necessary for the Baptist Union to state very clearly its position as regards any possible affiliation it may have with the so-called World Council of Churches", explained the editor of *The South African Baptist* in October 1979 as a preface to Swart's remarks. Swart pointed out that "certain Independent Baptist Ministers operating in this country" had broadcast the false assertion that the Baptist World Alliance, to which the Baptist Union of South Africa belonged, was affiliated with the World Council of Churches. The secretary general stated that such was not the case and reiterated categorically that the national denomination had no relationship with the World Council of Churches.⁸⁴ This appeared to end the misunderstanding, but a decade of entirely negative and highly distorted depictions of the World Council of Churches had left its mark on white Baptists, many of whom remained hostile to anything associated with that organisation.

Another area in which the negative, defensive wing of the Baptist Union continued to show its strength during the 1970s was in the

denomination's generally weak record of support of its members who resisted conscription into the South African Defence Forces. This is not to suggest that South African Baptists in general opposed conscientious objection (though many certainly did), but rather that on the whole those voices which questioned it during the era of decolonisation and the civil war in then Rhodesia spoke more loudly than did those which defended the small number of Baptists who refused to serve. As indicated earlier, however, this topic is sufficiently important and broad to merit detailed consideration in a subsequent chapter.

Turning to what might be termed the moderate liberal wing of the Baptist Union and its positions on apartheid and related matters during the 1970s, one finds various and disjoint instances of critical and new voices challenging the South African social situation on the grounds of their Christian ethical convictions. One significant development amongst Afro-American Christians during the 1960s and 1970s which made an interracial impact on South African Christendom was "Black Theology". It would be bootless to argue that it exercised noteworthy influence on white Baptists in South Africa. In 1973, however, one such individual, Professor J.A. Lamprecht of the University of Fort Hare, who belonged to a tiny number of Baptist theologians in southern Africa who held doctorates, sought to introduce it to the readers of the denominational magazine. He conceded that "one's first impulse may be to reject it as a sectional and political expression of Christianity" but suggested that it would be more prudent to make an attempt "to understand Black Theology and even to ask whether it has something important to say to us - perhaps something that will stimulate our own Christian life and faith". Lamprecht's own effort to do so was largely dispassionate though clearly sympathetic. He necessarily first sought to legitimise theological flexibility in general. Countering an attitude widespread amongst his denominational fellows, he argued that "we can be seriously at fault by living with a static theology in changing times". Some blacks, Lamprecht's experience at Fort Hare had allowed him to perceive, had been compelled to express their faith in their own terms, and this had given rise to Black Theology. "In South Africa it is the black man's attempt to relate his situation to the Gospel. . . . Black

Theologians ask, 'What has the Gospel to say to me in my poverty, restriction, inferiority, and rejection? How can it help me to be human instead of sub-human?'" As a systematic theologian, Lamprecht understandably lamented that "as yet, Black Theology has not been systematised". He did not attempt to assay its orthodoxy with the touchstone of any confession of faith. Nevertheless, Lamprecht recognised it as a significant "attempt at correction" which "necessarily pays more attention to some doctrines than others", although he did not inform his readers which teachings, if any, were being given their due and which were not. Lamprecht concluded his essay by describing Black Theology as "the heart-cry of vast numbers of people even though they may not yet be able to formulate their feelings". He emphasised that it was "certainly an important fact for the church in South Africa to take into reckoning, especially when one remembers that by far the greater number of Christians in South Africa are black".⁸⁵ There is no evidence that many members of the Baptist Union heeded this plea by one who occupied a potentially key position in bridging the enormous cultural cleft between black and white Baptists. It seems plausible that had they done so, and had Black Theology received greater treatment in the curricula of the denomination's theological colleges during the 1970s, part of the disenchantment of non-white students in them could have been averted.

A month later Lamprecht endeavoured again to call the attention of the Baptist Union in general to seven general concerns of black Baptists which had profound potential consequences for the future of Christianity in South Africa. These were, in brief, (1) African nationalistic aspirations, reflected especially in anti-colonialism and creating "stresses" which "are carried over to the sphere of the Church's mission; (2) the need of the church to transcend deeply entrenched patterns of white paternalism and learn to appreciate African cultural values; (3) the ethical challenges of a multiracial society and their bearing on the proclamation of the Gospel to people sharply divided by lines of ethnicity and economic status; (4) the need to develop more "natural contact" between the races on a footing of equality and "meaningful fellowship" rather than on that of the traditional master-servant relationship; (5) the necessity of realising

attempt to make apartheid more humane while undergirding it with a Biblical defence. In fairness to the Baptist Union, it should also be mentioned that at the same assembly delegates called for an end to "job reservation" and, less emphatically, urged the government to "accelerate the process of narrowing the gap between White and non-White salaries both in the public sector and private enterprise", possibly by establishing minimum wages for domestic servants.⁸⁸

Another example of a superficially strong but essentially weak resolution came in 1973 when the assembly expressed its appreciation of the "substantial increase" in public appropriations for "Bantu education" but called for further progress in that field. The reason given did not differ markedly from the rhetoric which Verwoerd had used when he had proposed the Bantu Education Act twenty years earlier, namely that "it is a Christian duty to provide as good an education as possible to all and that education assists in laying the foundations on which to build a people that will become economically independent and able to contribute to the development of our country".⁸⁹ Two decades after being compelled to accept that statute, the Baptist Union had accommodated it to the point of not even voicing disapproval of it.

Very few resolutions called for a critical self-examination by the churches. In 1976, however, the assembly reaffirmed that "the Baptist Union is open to all churches which desire to join it and which qualify in terms of its constitution regardless of race or colour". The same resolution called for racial integration in the congregations, affirming that "Scripturally, a local church should be open to all persons, irrespective of race or colour, in respect of membership and attendance at services".⁹⁰ The Baptist Union had no authority to enforce this, however, because its constitution did not mandate integration, and in fact for many more years most Baptist congregations remained almost entirely segregated, even though this can be attributed to linguistic differences and social cleavage rather than to local regulations proscribing integration. In the case of white churches, this segregation often took the form of the conventional worship on Sunday mornings and evenings being in English (or, in a small minority of congregations, Afrikaans), while special ones in one

or more African language were held in the chapels on Sunday afternoons or weekday evenings.

The Impact of the Soweto Riots of 1976

The Soweto riots of June 1976, which left several hundred people dead and a legacy of bitterness and resentment in the black townships of South Africa, are generally regarded as one factor which stimulated increased social consciousness amongst white South Africans and awakened some of them to the gravity of the racial situation in the country. Within the Baptist Union, there is evidence that these shock waves prompted more people to pay greater attention to social ethics and take a more critical view of the dehumanising effects of the apartheid system which they had accommodated for nearly three decades. There is no evidence, however, that the violence brought about anything approaching a Copernican revolution in white Baptists' views of how their faith informed the decisions they were compelled to make with regard to public issues or indeed that it changed the positions which most took on those matters.

The first major reaction to the violence which shook Soweto came on 20 June when the president of the Baptist Union, W.T. Edmunds, and the general secretary of the South African Baptist Missionary Society, T.S. Akers, issued to the congregations a call to humiliation and prayer, in which these two men deplored the violence and strife, particularly the loss of life and damage to property which the violence had precipitated. Three days later Edmunds and Akers published and submitted to *The South African Baptist* a statement on what they called "Our Response and Responsibility". In it they emphasised that there had long been "rumblings beneath the surface" of life in the black townships and that Baptists "need to become more deeply aware of the feelings of the African population and of their aspirations and frustrations". None of these, however, did they define. The two denominational leaders also pointed out that whites, having accommodated apartheid as a normal part of life, should not "underestimate the importance to the Black population of limitations and restrictions which may seem to be relatively unimportant to us",

but they did not avail themselves of this opportunity to state what even a single one of those restrictions was. Edmunds and Akers may have enlightened some readers a bit, however, by explaining that many African pastors found themselves in a dilemma in which they were "torn between their fidelity and loyalty to Christ on the one hand, and their sympathy with those of their people who come to them with national aspiration and deep frustrations, asking, 'What must we do?', on the other". Edmunds and Akers asked their fellow white Baptists to pray for these clergymen but otherwise did not burden readers with any particular responsibility in the wake of the national crisis.⁹¹

In the columns of *The South African Baptist*, Townsend also sought to address the question of Christian responsibilities a few weeks later. "Must the Church accept part of the blame [for the violence] because it has been too little concerned with social issues, or too much concerned?" he asked. "Because it has concentrated too much upon the proclamation of an other-worldly Gospel, or because it has diluted that presentation with an earth-centred humanitarianism?" In attempting to answer these questions, the conservative editor cautioned that "we dare not trot out our easy answers". Yet he did so himself. Adhering to a pattern which he had established in many previous editorials, Townsend insisted that "until we have faced the issues involved, as *individuals*, we dare not attempt *any* answers which have a collective application". In an attempt to bolster his *de facto* negation of social ethics, or at least his belief that social ethics was at most only secondary to personal ethics, he engaged in selective hermeneutics by pointing to and quoting what he declared was "no better starting-point" than Micah 6:8. Townsend encouraged readers to consider the verse in its context and to note that "it is a word for the individual". Yet this itself is an example of decontextualisation, for the writings of Micah preserved in the Hebrew Scriptures are addressed to the nation of Israel. Indeed, much of the Hebrew prophetic tradition as a whole is proclamation of God's condemnation of national behaviour and violation of the Covenant, not merely the transgressions of isolated individuals. The non-theologian Townsend does not appear to have understood that fact, of which any serious student of the Hebrew Scriptures would have been aware. To his credit, Townsend stressed the obvious fact that "White Christians need

to try to appreciate the circumstances and the tensions under which Black Christians live"; for some reason which is not obvious but which may have been personal sincerity but may also have simply been rhetorical balance, he added in the same sentence that "equally, Black Christians need to try to appreciate the position of Whites who are true Believers in a nominally Christian society". How the latter half of Townsend's equation related to either the causes of the Soweto riots or how he believed it could contribute to a resolution of them he did not say. In any case, he held no brief for those who advocated solutions which involved changing social structures. "Blaming the government, or the local authorities, or the 'system' are all easy ways of trying to evade our own personal responsibilities", Townsend declared. Instead, he urged readers to pray for a revival amongst Baptists "and for all others who are of similar evangelical persuasion as ourselves, of every race and language group, throughout the country".⁹² To this Baptist layman, it seems, individual *metanoia* had nothing in common with raising a critical prophetic voice against the social *status quo*.

The following month Townsend devoted two and one-half pages of *The South African Baptist* to fellow layman A.H.J. James' critical report of the recent annual conference of the SACC, in which the Baptist Union still had observer status. At that parley, held at Hammanskraal the last week of July, the violence in Soweto had been a central topic of discussion. James consequently lamented that the SACC appeared to be on the path of becoming "a meeting-place for religio-political activist groups which believe that 'the liberation of the whole man' demands the intrusion of the Church into the secular arena to do battle with secular weapons", an indictment which one could have justifiably levelled at nearly two millennia of ecclesiastical history. what irked him as "one of the most distressing features of the conference" was the formation of a black caucus which proposed what he labelled "radical resolutions" for consideration by the delegates in general. It also alarmed James that Beyers Naudé of the Christian Institute had objected to use of the word "peaceful" to describe that struggle for Namibian independence which the SACC could support on the grounds that the struggle had ceased to be peaceful. James found it significant that "by implication, those organisations which have been

involved in terrorist activity in South West Africa, are now given the approval, not only of the World Council of Churches but of the SACC". That the South African Defence Forces had allegedly been involved in terrorist actions does not seem to have been known to him. In summarising the position of the SACC with regard to Namibia, James declared that "the main emphasis was upon social, economic and political liberation". Because of this, the conference had, in his terse judgment, "failed", partly because it had done only part of what he conceded could be one of its secondary tasks. "It is one thing to talk loosely of 'communal ownership' of property, and 'one head, one vote'", James averred; "it is quite another for a multi-racial and multi-cultural society to devise a viable alternative to those social, economic and political structures which the council seeks to destroy". One of the few rays of hope which he perceived at the conference was a resolution in which beerhalls were described as "symbols of the Black man's degradation". In making that declaration, James believed the SACC had touched on an area "which is the prior concern of the Church - the area of social evils which are not the result of political structures but which arise from the depravity of the human heart".⁹³ Decades of theology which had discussed the manifestation of sin in *inter alia* oppressive political structures had apparently been lost on James.

Turning from these leading figures to the denomination as a whole, a resolution which the Baptist Union passed at its assembly that October illustrated the compromising and ineffective position it tended to take on matters of race relations during the 1970s. Delegates said little about the underlying causes of the violence. The resolution contained nothing about racial segregation in general or either the general predicament of the educational system or the government's provocative attempts to impose wider use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in the black schools. Instead, the Baptist Union platitudinously went on record as declaring that "violence breeds violence, and imposes a strain upon human relations which sets back progress in social, racial, economic and political spheres", although it also urged the government "to expedite the removal of all petty apartheid, and those discriminatory laws which weigh most heavily upon our African, Coloured and Indian peoples". This was yet another

example of a vague realisation that things were not in order in South African society and a failure to call for specific measures to begin to rectify it. The denomination then undermined whatever slight impact the resolution may otherwise have made by virtually exonerating the government by expressing its "appreciation of, and support for, the Hon. Prime Minister in the positive lead he has taken in creating a climate favourable to the consideration of these matters including meeting with Community Leaders".⁹⁴

Reactions to Foreign Christian Criticism of Apartheid

Few things revealed more clearly and incisively the divided state of South African Baptist opinion on apartheid in the late 1970s than the ways in which members of the denomination reacted to a special issue of the American Protestant magazine *Christianity Today* in July 1978 which focused on precisely that topic. In response to that issue, which contained four generally critical but hardly vituperative articles under the thematic rubric "South Africa Today", the editor of *The South African Baptist* asked two of the denomination's white ministers known to hold widely divergent opinions on social ethics and race relations to prepare written evaluations to this instance of critical American religious journalism.

One was John Poorter, the former editor of *The South African Baptist* who then edited *To the Point*. As an essentially defensive publicist for the South African government (though one who on occasion could call for reform), it is not surprising that he took umbrage at the criticism levelled at his society in *Christianity Today*. He accused the articles in it of being "an unhappy mixture of idealism, Christian sentiment, half-truths, theological superficialities and outright error". Yet his response to them merits an equally harsh judgment. In what in retrospect is a transparent rhetorical technique, Poorter noted that "the Kremlin" was expert at propagating an image of South Africa as "a smoking volcano of strife, race hatred and unrelieved oppression" and declared that it was "something of a jolt" to discover "evangelical Christians asserting the same thing" in a Christian magazine. He lamented that the authors of the four articles

had depicted his country as *inter alia* "a land where hospitals for blacks are crowded and dirty", "where white people have invented a spurious history of their country for selfish gain", "where there is often 'bitter hatred' between blacks and whites and hostility between English and Afrikaans-speaking whites", and "where white men believe God made them superior to blacks". Poorter did not attempt to refute any of these assertions (which, it should be pointed out, were not adequately substantiated in *Christianity Today* although they could have been), which he apparently believed were among the "half-truths" to which he referred. He resented them, however, partly because he believed they created the false impression that "the whole 'evil system' would soon crash". In an unveiled effort to blacken the articles in question by drawing a parallel between them and the criticism that radical foes of apartheid had levelled at it and simultaneously conjuring up the spectre of communism, Poorter stated that its termination "is precisely what movements like Black Consciousness, the PAC and other Moscow-backed fronts work for day and night, so that they may replace it with another order where everyone is free to propagate revolution while the gospel of Christ is put in chains". In another rhetorical ploy, he accused one of the authors, Stuart Briscoe, of being "politically out of his depth" because "he does not know that 'apartheid' in its 1948 form is a long-dead concept". What Poorter did not mention was the fact that apartheid had evolved to a considerable degree *after* 1948, and that much of the legislation which anchored it, such as the Population Registration Act, the Group Areas Act, and the Bantu Education Act, was still on the books and being enforced. His accusation of Briscoe being "out of his depth" was thus at best a clear example of the pot calling the kettle black. Poorter then came very close to defending apartheid by conceding that although it was imperfect it should not be criticised because "utopianism is politically naive and scripturally heretical", although he was unable to adduce a shred of evidence that any of the authors who had criticised it in the pages of *Christianity Today* advocated utopianism. In yet another bit of innuendo, he cast aspersions on the authors' soteriology by asking, "Must we now be told that a man is saved by believing on Jesus *and* rejecting nationalism?", although none of the targets of his wrath had stated

that the road to salvation passed through the gates of anti-nationalism. Poorter concluded his piece by again resorting to an appeal to anti-communism rather than addressing directly the concerns expressed in *Christianity Today*: "Please do not ask us, in the name of evangelicalism, 'to stand on the side of the suffering mass of humanity' as if our commission were but an echo of Marx and Lenin".⁹⁵

The other respondent was David Walker, two of whose articles we considered in detail in Chapter II. In 1978 he was a pastor in Durbanville but had not yet gained the prominence as a critic of apartheid which he would acquire during the 1980s. His response was a bit longer than Poorter's and much less subjective. Walker devoted nearly one-half of it to summarising the contents of the two major articles, both of which he regarded as relevant to South African Baptists. Rather than merely stamping his *imprimatur* on them, however, he conceded that "the articles contain weaknesses and generalisations concerning a complex situation" and lamented that "the art work presents an emotional appeal (the cover shows a black hand grasping a wire fence) which would pre-judge the issue for the reader". Nowhere, however, did he accuse the writers of serving as lackeys of any foreign power or ideology. To Walker, it seemed of paramount importance that instead of defensively quibbling about the blemishes of this issue of the prominent American Christian magazine, South African Baptists would do well to read it carefully to ascertain why, with regard to apartheid, "our fellow evangelicals, starting with the same presuppositions as ours, arrive at very different conclusions on this matter". He found it regrettable that without examining any foreign criticism, "many Bible-believing Christians here have accepted the apartheid viewpoint, and regard all opposition to it as reflecting liberal theology". Such input as the issue of *Christianity Today* in question, Walker believed, could help to correct this fallacy. He abstracted four reasons underlying American evangelical opposition to apartheid, although what the basis of his inductive methodology was he did not specify. First, he pointed to "the social awakening that has taken place among American evangelicals in recent years" and stated bluntly - if arguably too optimistically - that "the deadened conscience has been waking up". Secondly, Walker struck at the heart of an assumption widely held by his fellow Baptists in South Africa by

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declaring that in the United States of America "there is the ethical conviction that the Bible speaks clearly concerning social as well as spiritual matters" and assured anxious readers that "this is no theology of revolution; it is rather an attempt to apply consistently the message of the gospel to every area of life". Thirdly, Walker believed that "there is a general theological consensus among evangelicals concerning the apartheid question", although what this was he did not define in a detailed way which would distinguish it from positions held by evangelicals in support of apartheid. Instead, Walker merely asserted that "the consensus is that the biblical doctrine of man contradicts the principle of enforced separation of races". What seemed especially significant for him to assure his generally conservative and often defensive South African readers in 1978 was that the American evangelical critiques of their country's social system were "not basically politically inspired" but "spring from deep theological and biblical roots, and consequently are a challenge to us to study and apply the biblical teaching". Finally, Walker warned his readers that "there is a strong sense of moral indignation among our brethren [in American evangelical circles]. It is felt that our system is destructive and humiliating, and must therefore be rejected in the strongest terms". He reiterated that this was a specifically Christian reaction "among many Bible-believing Christians with their own clear sense of morality and justice".⁹⁶

The South African Baptist did not dwell on this episode of foreign Christian criticism of apartheid, but it may be enlightening that its editor published an incisive comparative evaluation of Poorter's and Walker's responses to it in the next issue. This was by Peter Moll, a student at the University of Cape Town who, as we shall see in Chapter VII, would soon gain international attention as one of the most celebrated conscientious objectors to military conscription in South Africa. Moll left no doubt as to where he stood on the matter. Walker's mildly worded response, he declared, was "balanced", "restrained", and "theological". Poorter's piece, however, fared miserably under Moll's pen. He accused Poorter of being "one-sided", "unrestrained" (giving as his only evidence, of this, however, the accusation that "Black Consciousness wants to put the Gospel in chains"), and "untheological". Moll supported this third charge by pointing out that

Poorter "has not made a biblical statement but a nakedly political statement motivated more by anti-communism than anything else". He wondered, "Where does God come into all this?" and, referring to a recent article by the eminent South African missiologist David Bosch, reminded readers that the "defence of the State against communism is not the responsibility of the church. . . . The search for justice is".⁹⁷

Conclusion

By the close of the 1970s, the Baptist Union was effectively disunited on questions of social ethics, especially the defensibility or indefensibility of apartheid on Christian grounds. For that matter, white Baptists in South Africa could not even agree on whether their churches as institutions should become involved in such issues. In some respects, this disunity was endemic in the denomination, given its commitment to freedom of conscience and its loose congregational polity. But the diversity of opinion, earlier manifested in the prophetic message of a small number of individuals like J.J. Doke and C.M. Doke, grew to considerably larger proportions during the 1960s and 1970s, as initial hostility to apartheid around mid-century faded in some quarters and many Baptists tacitly condoned wholesale social engineering along racial lines. That there was still a basic if rarely articulated commitment to the preservation of white domination and capitalism is too obvious to require further proof here. Even as late as the 1970s, very few white Baptists appear to have written anything which challenged those deeply entrenched institutions. Indeed, ongoing decolonisation in the countries on South Africa's northern borders continued to instill fear in white Baptists, as it did in their white compatriots in general. The spectre of communism thus remained a strong determinant in the formation of opinions on public issues. One can readily point to their comfortable socio-economic position during a period of general white prosperity as an important determinant in cementing their attachment to the *status quo*.

Beyond that, it should be emphasised that the theology of the denomination had changed little during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, notwithstanding short-lived attempts to introduce new currents,

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especially at the denomination's theological college which opened in Johannesburg in the early 1950s. Later attempts by people like Lamprecht to sensitise white Baptists to black concerns and introduce them to the rudiments of "Black Theology" hardly seem to have made a dent in the consciousness of the denomination as a whole. Much the same can probably be said of the repeated calls by pastors like Haus and Ford. Even theoretical pieces on the relationship of church and state were poorly developed amongst South African Baptists prior to the 1980s. Meta-ethically, if one can speak of a normative approach in the Baptist Union, it clearly remained an unarticulated commitment to Biblical prescription which left no room for situation ethics and little for the imitation of Christ, although the last-named would subsequently make some inroads, as we shall see in Chapter VII. This was intimately linked to the fundamental assumption that sin and salvation were almost exclusively matters of the individual without direct social manifestations, as the Baptist Union's official opposition to the SACC's *Message to the People of South Africa* of 1968 demonstrated.

What conclusions can be drawn about the relatively many resolutions which delegates to the denomination's annual assemblies passed through the years? Not much of import. As we have seen, again and again they were vague, compromising, and failed to challenge the central pillars of the apartheid system, despite calls to ameliorate its effects and the dislike of petty apartheid which delegates occasionally expressed. One important exception to this generalisation would obviously be the Baptist Union's open defiance of the "church clause" in the Native Laws Amendment Bill of 1957. It is incorrect to generalise, as has been done, that the Baptist Union was "apolitical", for during every decade it repeatedly voiced its opinions on public issues with direct political implications, as it had done since the 1890s. Furthermore, again and again the denomination followed its own tradition by addressing the government with suggestions and demands pertaining to public policies. The point is that its voice was nearly always a weak and indecisive one which, even if the Baptist Union had been a major denomination in South Africa, could not have been expected to make a perceptible dent in the bastion of political conservatism and white racism which governed social issues. The

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Baptist Union thus entered the much more turbulent decade of the 1980s poorly equipped to deal with the further unravelling of the nation's already tattered social fabric and, as we shall see in the immediately following chapter, concerned Baptists found it very difficult to make up for lost time by belatedly developing a theological and meta-ethical foundation on which to build meaningful ethical positions relevant to the rapidly changing times.

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- ~~From written documents~~
- use of secondary source
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CHAPTER VI

THE 1980S: THE ERA OF SERIOUS CHALLENGES?

Introduction

In the persistent area of troubled race relations, the decade of the 1980s posed certain familiar problems for South African Baptists, albeit in more intensified and urgent form, as well as new challenges which further complicated vexing issues. In the wake of the so-called "Muldergate" scandal which rocked the government of B.J. Vorster in 1978 and led to his resignation, P.W. Botha became prime minister as the ruling National Party continued in power and did not immediately alter its domestic policies. Early hopes that Botha would initiate a new era in race relations and gradually dismantle apartheid waned when it became evident that his government was committed to "separate development". The departure of the *verkrampte* wing of the party to form the Conservative Party in 1982 gave the Nationalists further reason to look first over their right shoulders and consider the eventuality of continuing erosion of white support when considering any reforms of South Africa's socio-racial structure. This undoubtedly impeded the progress of change. Within southern Africa, the war for Namibian independence dragged on as the Botha regime refused to relinquish control over what it believed was its continuing mandate. Further complicating the situation in that sector of the continent, at least as seen through conservative South African eyes, was the ongoing civil war in Angola and the perceived threat of a Marxist victory there. The spectre of communism in the wake of decolonisation, in other words, remained a factor which influenced much white political and ethical thought in South Africa. Related to this, economic decay in Moçambique and the difficulties which the government which Robert Mugabe headed had in returning prosperity to Zimbabwe after the end of the protracted "bush war" gave conservative whites in South Africa further reason to believe that black majority rule in their country would lead it down a similar path.

Strictly speaking, the Botha regime did not try to preserve the entire political and economic *status quo* in South Africa. As early as

1979, for example, it legalised black trade unions, a move which eventually contributed to the termination of apartheid. Furthermore, "petty apartheid" crumbled, though inconsistently, throughout the 1980s, thus continuing a pattern which had actually begun under Vorster. No less notably, the white referendum of November 1983 prompted the government to dispense with the Westminster system of parliamentary government and create supplementary legislative assemblies for Asian and Coloured populations, a move which was alternately hailed as a significant step towards the ending of white rule and a ruse designed to preserve it by bringing these relatively small groups into minor positions of power-sharing while excluding the approximately 75 per cent of the population who were denied citizenship in South Africa but given it in "black homelands", another key element in the politics of the Botha administration which had been inherited from its predecessors. In the meantime, such organisations as the African National Congress and the more radical Pan-Africanist Congress remained banned and many of their leaders were either imprisoned or in exile. There were thus very few meaningful channels through which black victims of apartheid could even express their hostility to that system of control, let alone effectively struggle against it. To varying degrees the churches, especially those which were affiliated with the SACC, served as such conduits.

Beyond the machinations of white politics, though not unrelated to them, was the intensification of the violence in the black townships beginning in 1984. Divided by tribal, religious, ideological, economic, and other factors, and suffering from decades of exploitation and oppression, countless thousands of residents of these depressed areas engaged in violent confrontations with one another which generally pitted outspoken critics of the government against neighbours who were accused of opportunistic complicity with it. In the process, the black churches, with members on both sides, were caught in the middle and suffered accordingly. The imposition of a "State of Emergency" in some of the townships in 1985 and its extension to all of South Africa the following year did not halt the violence but gave the government draconian powers of censorship and means of further eroding due process of law. This was, in brief, the state of affairs as the 1980s approached their end.

In the present chapter we shall bring to a close our overall chronological consideration of the ways in which white South African Baptists have responded to the ethical challenges which apartheid posed by examining the positions which both the Baptist Union as a whole and individuals within it took up to and including 1990, which, largely because of the steps which the government of F.W. de Klerk took that year towards restructuring South African society and politics, provides a suitable *terminus ad quem*. The scope of this chapter is obviously broad, and it would be neither feasible nor prudent to attempt a comprehensive treatment of it. Instead, our emphasis shall be on a relatively small number of key events, statements, and controversies which shed the most light on our subject, especially by allowing us to peer most deeply into the minds of the Baptists in question who have been in a position to shape denominational opinion and policy. Because the denomination would not have changed if the voices of key individuals in it had remained static, we shall begin by examining shifts in the social ethical thinking of several Baptists during the 1980s. Following that, we shall look at how the Baptist Union in general took a more liberal socio-political stance during that decade than it previously had. Other facets of the overall topic which we shall examine are the more detailed analyses of relations between church and state which some South African Baptists published during the frustrating years when P.W. Botha headed the government, reactions to such statements as *The Kairos Document*, the teaching of Christian ethics at two Baptist theological colleges, the functioning of the Christian Citizenship Committee, and, briefly, Baptists' reactions to the political events of 1990 which promised to usher in a new dispensation in South African race relations.

Cases of Individual Sensitising to Racial Issues

As has been pointed out at various junctures in the present study, the Baptist Union of Southern Africa must be seen as a loose association of disparate individuals in autonomous congregations. To understand the reasons for the changes which have taken place in Baptist thinking on social ethics in recent years, one must keep that

fundamental fact in mind. During the course of the 1980s many individual white Baptists who at the beginning of the decade had been tacit supporters of the *status quo* in South Africa, including much of the apartheid system, became conscious of its incompatibility with their Christian principles and began to speak out against it. The spectrum of such persons is relatively broad, encompassing both Anglophone and Afrikaans-speaking South Africans (though with a preponderance of the former), men and women, clergymen and lay people, young and old, and, more surprisingly, individuals at several points of the ideological compass. Nearly as varied were the factors which awakened their social consciences in this regard. In the present section we shall examine briefly a diverse sample of Baptists who underwent such a transition, paying attention to both the factors which they believe contributed to it and the consequences of their ethical *metanoia*. While it is virtually impossible to conduct a statistically scientific study of this phenomenon, it is quite feasible and enlightening to examine the social awakenings of Baptists representing a fairly wide variety of denominational backgrounds (*i.e.* both people who have never belonged to non-Baptist churches and converts to the Baptist faith), as well as both men and women, and clergymen and lay members. Our emphasis, however, shall be on Baptists who arguably have been in a position to exercise influence on the social ethics of their denominational fellows. To avoid giving a skewed impression of what has nevertheless remained a relatively conservative denomination, however, we shall also take into account some Baptists who did not experience such a change and one who did so but subsequently backed away from social engagement. All of these individuals contribute to an understanding of how the turbulent events of the 1980s affected social ethics in the Baptist Union.

Through his work at the helm of the Christian Citizenship Committee and as a lecturer in *inter alia* Christian ethics at the Baptist theological college in Athlone, Peter Holness became one of the most significant voices in social ethics in the Baptist Union during the 1980s. His case offers an appropriate starting point for this survey of individuals because Holness is in some respects a fairly typical native South African Anglophone Baptist and because the development of his social ethics represented a much less drastic a change than is evident

in some of his less typical colleagues. Born in Johannesburg in 1948, he grew up there and in Durban, where he completed high school in 1965. As a youth in the latter city this member of a Baptist family attended Lambert Road Baptist Church, where he served as a youth leader while a teenager. Holness recalls that in high school he was not encouraged to think independently to any noteworthy extent but that there was some discussion of current issues during the mid-1960s. At Lambert Road Baptist Church much of the homiletical emphasis was on individual morality; "not much" attention was paid to social issues. In the congregation's youth ministry, however, these matters received some attention. Party politics was a taboo subject in the church. Holness does not believe he was exposed to a genuine prophetic voice during his Baptist youth. "There weren't many sermons on Amos", he states illustratively, adding that there was a general condemnation of injustice but that this was not made relevant to the specific social situation in South Africa. Because of a physical injury, he was excused from military service during a time when conscription was being extended to an increasing number of white men. Despite the apparent limitations in his upbringing, Holness believes that owing to the conventional British legacy of liberalism in his family and the social milieu in which he was raised in Durban, he had some genuine social consciousness as a youth.¹

Holness consequently found it necessary to make a "tremendous cultural adjustment" when he began to study at the University of Stellenbosch, where he received a Bachelor of Laws in 1968. In that cradle of Afrikaans cultural identity he was accused of being a "lover of blacks" because of his moderately liberal social and political views. Following his graduation, Holness practised law for a year and a half as a prosecutor in Durban. He simultaneously undertook a Bachelor of Divinity course by correspondence from the University of London and from 1970 until 1973 studied for that degree at London Bible College, an institution at which several of the clergymen in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa had received their training before that denomination had established its own theological college in Johannesburg during the early 1950s. He states that his incipiently liberal social views were "sharpened" during his stay in Britain but did not undergo a radical change there. Upon returning to South

Africa, Holness was unable to get a call for approximately eight months. He believes that amongst Baptists there was then a widespread suspicion of people who had studied theology overseas. In 1975 Holness accepted a pastoral position at a new congregation in Knysna. He remained there for two years and witnessed a schism in the church. Holness was then called to Bellville Baptist Church near Cape Town, where he remained for three and a half years before joining the faculty of the Baptist theological college in Athlone in 1981. Four years later he became its principal. Owing partly to this position, Holness was named to the Executive of the Baptist Union in 1985 and remained on it until 1990, when the demands of his schedule at the college and, by his own admission, some degree of undefined disillusionment prompted him to leave that denominational post. In 1991 he was considering pursuing a doctorate in theology but had not laid specific plans in that regard.²

Although Holness is one of the very few theologians in the Baptist Union who teaches Christian ethics on a regular basis, he does not have formal training in the subject. His education in it was largely autodidactic. Among the theologians who he believes have influenced his understanding of ethics are the seasoned American Baptist Carl F.H. Henry as well as certain "neo-evangelicals" such as Bernard Ramm and John Stott. Yet Holness emphasises, "I tend to be an independent thinker" and that he does not uncritically reflect any other person's views uncritically. He labels his approach to Christian ethics "evangelical" because he regards Biblical revelation as its foundation. More specifically, Holness believes the Bible provides not merely guidelines for conduct but - indicating one step closer to a prescriptive ethic - "guideposts or parameters", not merely indicators of direction. He finds absolute theological norms in the Scriptures but denies that they always provide immediately applicable answers to such issues as abortion. His approach to such contemporary social issues as apartheid and related matters is relatively low-key. Holness works largely behind the scenes in his capacity as the head of the Christian Citizenship Committee and seeks as far as possible to avoid such rhetorical stereotypes as "oppressor" and "oppressed" because he believes the use of such terminology has proven itself counterproductive. He emphasises the desirability of negotiation in lieu

of public recrimination. Holness realises that his unwillingness to engage in vilification of the Nationalist government in South Africa has displeased militant black and Coloured Baptists but insists that by negotiating discreetly with politicians and public administrators he and other denominational leaders have occasionally succeeded in effecting changes or at least contributing thereto.³

A second ethicist, Louise Kretzschmar, some of whose critical articles we examined in Chapter II, is one of the youngest theologians considered in this survey and the only one who left the Dutch Reformed Church to become a Baptist. As a young convert, she has escaped part of the burden of the denomination's highly inconsistent history in the area of social ethics, although she laments that she has inherited much of its legacy. Kretzschmar was born in Benoni in 1956 and spent her entire childhood there, where she was educated in English schools. Shortly before she was to have been confirmed at age seventeen, she underwent a conversion experience while under the influence of Baptist friends who were members of the Student Christian Association. She joined that organisation and has maintained a "huge amount of respect" for it. Kretzschmar's secondary education differed somewhat from that of many of her peers in that she attended an experimental high school in Benoni whose curriculum offered considerable flexibility. great emphasis was placed on debating and writing essays in the subjects history and English. Unlike many other former pupils of schools in the Transvaal, she recalls being taught by liberal teachers and being encouraged to ask challenging questions. The seeds of her subsequent social involvement were thus planted, although they did not germinate for several years. If Kretzschmar's secondary education was atypical, however, her involvement in the Dutch Reformed Church arguably was not. She insists that she derived "nothing" from ten years of attendance at Sunday school and cannot remember hearing a single sermon of immediate relevance to social ethics while a teenager in Benoni.⁴

Kretzschmar studied history and Biblical studies at the undergraduate level and the history and philosophy of religion at the honours level at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg between 1974 and 1979. She describes the approach to Biblical studies to which she was exposed there as "quite liberal" but not a threat to

her faith. During these years she simultaneously remained active in the Student Christian Association and witnessed the unfolding of her political interests. In the SCA she received her first significant exposure to blacks on an equal footing; in Benoni the only Africans with whom she interacted in any noteworthy way had been domestic servants or employees of her father. Kretzschmar attended many SCA conferences and participated in its Bible study groups during her years at the university but otherwise found the role of women in the church to be very limited. Following the completion of her studies there she taught high school very briefly in Johannesburg before being accepted at the University of Cambridge to pursue a two-year Master of Philosophy. This was a taught programme which involved courses in *inter alia* ethics. Her spell in England, which was her first experience outside southern Africa, opened new theological and ecclesiastical horizons. Kretzschmar met ordained women and heard women preach the Gospel for the first time. She also read a good deal of black theology at Cambridge and wrote a thesis on the subject which was subsequently published in a revised version in South Africa. That project, she believes, was an important step in her own spiritual pilgrimage.⁵

Kretzschmar returned to South Africa in 1982, M.Phil. in hand. Her attempts to get a lecturing post in one of the Baptist theological colleges were fruitless, however. She believes that being female diminished her possibility of receiving such an appointment. Instead, Kretzschmar accepted a position at the University of Transkei in the largely Xhosa "independent homeland" of that name. This was anything but a prestigious appointment for a Cambridge-educated theologian to accept, but she retrospectively calls it the "perfect place to go" at that stage of her theological development. Teaching and learning from black students allowed Kretzschmar to contextualise the theories of black theology which she had worked out in England. To her dismay, she discovered that her students, whom she calls "generally pietistic", had not received noteworthy exposure to either black theology or social ethics, however, and that the university was very poorly administered. Kretzschmar nevertheless continued to do research in and write about her particular interests and before the end of the 1980s registered as a candidate for a Ph.D. in religious studies at the

University of Cape Town, where in the early 1990s she was writing under the supervision of Charles Villa-Vicencio a thesis on the privatisation of theology in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa. She also did first-year New Testament Greek and learnt a bit of Xhosa in Umtata and has expressed a desire to increase her knowledge of Xhosa and acquire additional theological tools by learning some Hebrew and German.⁶

When interviewed in 1991, shortly after she had left the Transkei to take a lectureship in theological ethics at the University of South Africa in Pretoria, Kretzschmar stated emphatically that she could not easily be classified in terms of adherence to any one school of interpretation of that subject. Her inclusive self-portrayal is, in two words, "integrative" and "contextual". Kretzschmar declares that she is not merely a situation ethicist in the tradition of Joseph Fletcher but nevertheless has a generous measure of teleological ethics in her overall approach and emphasises that Christians must consider their goals and the probable consequences of their actions when attempting to make ethical decisions. She finds one of the keys to her relative uniqueness in the Baptist Union in her general eschatological approach. Kretzschmar dismisses as "nonsense" the premillennialism which many of her denominational fellows profess. She describes herself as "amillennial", and while Kretzschmar nevertheless believes in the Parousia and the ultimate judgment of humanity, she refuses to engage in speculation on these topics because Revelation and other apocalyptic Biblical texts do not give her enough precise data on which to make predictions. To Kretzschmar, who regards herself as standing in the "interim ethic" tradition of *inter alia* Oscar Cullmann, eschatology is not exclusively future-oriented. This affects her social ethics. As she puts it, "If everything is to be destroyed, why would we do anything?" Kretzschmar does not have a carefully developed theology of the use of the Bible in ethics but in any case stresses that she is not a literalist but one who looks carefully at the *Sitz im Leben* of Biblical texts which are employed in ethical argumentation. Her general theology, like that of several other younger South African Baptist theologians, appears to be in a state of continuous transition, partly, in this case, because of the interplay of traditional Baptist and black theology in a rapidly changing society. Perhaps this is shown

most vividly in the fact that on the one hand she describes herself as an "evangelical" (without, however, defining that vexing term) and, on the other, admitting that she does not like that label and some of the connotations which accompany it.⁷

Turning from ethicists to other theologians in the Baptist Union, we find a unique case in Kevin B. Roy, in that he is both an immigrant in South Africa and a convert from Roman Catholicism. Roy was born in the late 1940s in Northern Rhodesia (subsequently Zambia), where his parents owned a prosperous farm. He attended high school at a Jesuit institution in Salisbury (later Harare), the capital of Southern Rhodesia (later Zimbabwe). This was at the time of Rhodesia's "Unilateral Declaration of Independence", and Roy recalls emulating many white Rhodesians in referring to its leader, Ian Smith, as "good old Smithy". An excellent student there, he received a multi-year bursary to study engineering at the University of Bristol. After an undistinguished year at that English university, however, Roy temporarily left his studies and lived for approximately three years in and near London. There he underwent a conversion experience and became closely associated with Protestant groups. Roy then returned to Zambia, where he briefly worshipped at a church of the Plymouth Brethren. Believing he was called to missionary work, he volunteered for service in Hans von Staden's Dorothea Mission, a conservative Protestant organisation. In this capacity Roy did primary evangelism in black townships near Johannesburg, Pretoria, and Cape Town for approximately a decade. His yearning for formal education reawakened during this period, and he became an external student at the Baptist theological college in Johannesburg and, subsequently, at the University of South Africa, where he received bachelor's, honours, and master's degrees in theology. His principal theological subjects were missiology and ecclesiastical history. In the meantime Roy had become a Baptist minister and served two white congregations near Pretoria. In addition to his pastoral duties, he taught as a part-time lecturer at the University of South Africa. In 1990 Roy left these positions in the Transvaal and became a lecturer at the Baptist theological college in Athlone near Cape Town.⁸

Roy dates his socio-political awakening broadly to the first half of the 1980s but believes that its roots lay a bit earlier in his spiritual

biography. He cites five factors which either stimulated or shaped it. First, while employed by the Dorothea Mission, Roy experienced almost daily the misery of life in black townships. This gave him insights into the bitter fruits of racism from which he had been protected as a relatively protected son of a prosperous farmer, youth in a boarding school, and well-supported undergraduate student in England. Secondly, while doing his honours degree in theology at the University of South Africa, he was compelled to read such works as John W. de Gruchy's *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, which shed light on how Christians had both undergirded and fought apartheid. Roy states that prior to undertaking his formal studies in South Africa, he had not given the relationship between religion and racism serious thought. Thirdly, Roy points to the influence of his friend Alan Spence, a Presbyterian minister who had stayed in Zimbabwe after that country's transition to black rule under Robert Mugabe (whom Roy had earlier opposed) and found life there quite tolerable, in contrast to general white fears in both old Rhodesia and South Africa. Fourthly, while serving as a part-time lecturer at the University of South Africa, Roy had countless conversations with both black and white colleagues, most of whom were politically more or less liberal and who thus gave him impressions which differed from most of those to which he had previously been exposed, especially in the Dorothea Mission and the Baptist Union. Finally, when Roy was initially unable to get a call to a Baptist church he began to work for Koinonia Southern Africa, the nondenominational ministry for interracial reconciliation which the Dutch Reformed missiologist and pastor Nico Smith and others had founded in 1982. This experience afforded him more insight into contemporary black thoughts and feelings and further deepened his rapidly liberalising convictions. In 1987, moreover, he became involved in the Fellowship of Concerned Baptists, a new, interracial association of clergymen and lay people who have sought to keep issues concerning racial justice in the consciousness of the Baptist Union. Roy admits that during his years with the Dorothea Mission he believed that he understood "the black mind" in South Africa but that only after participating in Koinonia and in other settings in which blacks felt more free to express themselves openly did he begin to comprehend the magnitude of their anger, resentment, and frustration.

Owing to his involvement in the Fellowship of Concerned Baptists, Roy became known as a political liberal in the Baptist Union, and in 1989, when he applied for the post which he subsequently received at its college in Athlone, was closely questioned about his role in and sympathies towards its activities.⁹ Absent from Roy's enumeration of the factors which influenced his ethical awakening are his Roman Catholic upbringing, his formative years in a country which gained black majority rule, and his spell in England.

Gisela Nicholson is yet another Baptist whose upbringing was in another country and another denomination and who underwent a profound social awakening after becoming a Baptist. Born in Leipzig in 1936, she emigrated from what was the German Democratic Republic during the turbulent year of 1953 and settled in the Federal Republic of Germany. This Lutheran from the heart of Lutherdom continued her education and was employed in Frankfurt when she underwent a conversion experience in 1957. This led to a period of study at the generally Baptist European Bible Institute in France, where she met her future husband, a South African Methodist student. They married in 1962 and went to South Africa that year. Initially Nicholson did missionary work in the Transkei under the auspices of a small Bible society and its school but found the organisation too autocratic and left it. Nicholson's next missionary call was to the Baptist hospital in Hamanskraal in the northern Transvaal where, in addition to secular work, she lectured at a small Bible school and led women's Bible groups. Through the Bible school and contacts with American missionaries who were affiliated with the pietistic Africa Evangelical Fellowship in Soweto, Nicholson became involved with programmes to support indigenous ministries which received no external financial support. She became the secretary of the sponsoring agency, the Christian National Evangelism Commission. Through it, Nicholson made the acquaintance of Caesar Molebatsi, a dynamic African pastor who had studied at Wheaton College in the United States of America and founded the Youth Alive ministry in Soweto. She heard him speak at the large, interdenominational South African Christian Leadership Assembly in Pretoria in 1979 and recalls that his speech to that gathering made a profound impact on her. Molebatsi spoke on how he had lost a leg when a white motorist drove over him and how his

failure to receive any compensation had made him hate white people. This shocked Nicholson, who for the first time realised that blacks, who had seemed quiescent and respectful in their dealings with her, could actually hate her. This well-intending immigrant missionary then understood that she had been guilty of the paternalism which she had perceived amongst native white South Africans. She subsequently became more deeply involved in Molebatsi's endeavour, as well, and served it as a secretary from 1983 until 1987, years of intense unrest and violence in that world-renowned black township. Nicholson dates her social awakening principally to this period of intimate involvement in the events then taking place amongst highly disgruntled blacks and emphasises her belief that one cannot genuinely empathise with the victims of apartheid unless one has lived amongst them a great deal. During this period she became active in the Fellowship of Concerned Baptists and the Baptist Convention, the latter being an association of non-whites who eventually seceded from the Baptist Union.¹⁰ We shall consider the significance of these two organisations later in the present chapter.

David Walker, two of whose articles about "evangelical" social ethics we considered in great detail in Chapter II and whose favourable reaction to the critical issue of *Christianity Today* we examined in Chapter V, offers an almost unique case in this survey because he professes to have left behind much of the theological tradition which provided the basis for his ministry and has expressed sufficient disenchantment with the Baptist Union to consider leaving the denomination. Walker, the son of Baptist parents, was born in Port Elizabeth in 1935. He received his first formal theological education at the Baptist Union's college in Johannesburg between 1957 and 1961 and was ordained to the ministry shortly after graduation. Walker then served sequentially Highway Baptist Church in Westville near Durban and Stutterheim Baptist Church for most of the decade of the 1960s. There is no evidence of liberal social thought on his part during this period. He then continued his education in the United States of America, taking a Bachelor of Divinity at the Southern Baptist Convention's Georgetown College in Kentucky and a Master of Arts in systematic theology at Wheaton College in 1972. Upon returning to South Africa Walker lectured at his *alma mater* in Johannesburg until

1975 but, to his eventual regret, left it in 1975 because he felt overworked and believed that it was unsatisfactorily administered. Returning to the pastoral ministry, he served congregations at Durbanville near Cape Town and, from 1982 until 1984, Port Shepstone on the Natal South Coast. The latter church, he commented in 1991, was not only the last to which he ministered in South Africa but also the "most conservative". Confrontations with parishioners made Walker realise that he was undergoing a radical theological transition which was taking him far outside the mainstream of white Baptist thought. It became clear to him that what he terms "conservative evangelicals" in the Baptist Union were pillars of support for the government of P.W. Botha and the existing social order in South Africa, both of which he increasingly rejected. Owing to this but also to other personal factors, Walker left the country to serve as the pastor of Harare Central Baptist Church from the end of 1984 until January 1987, when he was unable to renew his Zimbabwean work permit and had to return to South Africa. Having no desire to serve a Baptist congregation again, he registered at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg to take a Ph.D. on a thesis titled "Radical Evangelicalism and the Poor: A Challenge to Aspects of Evangelical Theology in the South African Context". This study reveals that by the end of the 1980s Walker had gravitated squarely into the loosely defined camp of the "liberation theologians". Like many Baptists who do not have his breadth of theological preparation, he finds it difficult to define with precision the influence of other theologians on his own recent development. Walker points to John Howard Yoder's *The Politics of Jesus*, however, as well as to Dietrich Bonhoeffer's later works and those of Orlando Costas. John Stott, moreover, made an impact on him during the 1980s but eventually seemed outdated. Walker notes that he identifies "to quite a degree with the Anabaptist approach" to ethics and that he has become a universal pacifist. Meta-ethically, he is "more influenced by imitative than deontological ethics". Walker does not attribute his change to a different eschatological outlook and states that he does not hold well-defined views about eschatology apart from the fact that he has gone from amillennialism in the direction of postmillennialism. He is more concerned with how he sees eschatology being abused, especially by South African Baptists, whom he accuses of often

allowing their belief in the imminent return to Christ to prevent them from coming to grips with pressing social issues. Interestingly enough, Walker places the primary emphasis for the direction of his transition to a negative insight: "The major factor influencing my paradigm shift was the realisation that conservative evangelicals supported and legitimised the whole apartheid system". Owing to his theological metamorphosis, his attachment to the Baptist Union had become tenuous at best. When interviewed in March 1991, he acknowledged that the denomination had made "some change" in the direction of social relevance during the 1980s and that he had "great respect" for such individuals as Peter Holness and Ellis André but insisted that most white Baptists were still "very conservative". He has close ties to several black Baptist pastors, but his inability to speak an African language has effectively made it impossible to minister to an indigenous congregation. Walker stated that he consequently found it more appealing to worship with Anglicans in Pietermaritzburg, partly because of the deep tradition to social ethical relevance in the Church of the Province. He also had accepted a post as librarian with ancillary lecturing duties at a Roman Catholic seminary near that city.¹¹

Not all the Baptist clergymen and lay people who began to express moderately liberal positions on racial issues during the 1980s remained social activists. One prominent exception who reversed his personal course and subsequently advocated general though not total ecclesiastical detachment from social and political questions is Martin Holdt. In several respects which will become clear shortly, his biography and spiritual pilgrimage complemented those of many of his colleagues. Perhaps more vividly than those of nearly any other white Baptist in South Africa, they reveal a segment of the denomination's complexity in terms of ethics.

Holdt was born in the western Transvaal during the early stages of the Second World War. His paternal grandfather had been a **Danish** Lutheran missionary (although Holdt is also of German ancestry), and it was in that confession that he was raised. Holdt's father was employed in what was then known as "Bantu Affairs" and, even though his political sentiments were with the Nationalist government which acceded to power in 1948, he reportedly enjoyed the respect of the Africans whose lives he administered. Like many other Baptists and

other Christians of his generation, Holdt recalls hearing very little that was relevant to social ethics from the pulpit during his youth. Unlike many of his peers, however, he remembers teachers encouraging debates at school, especially a history teacher whose advocacy of the Nationalist regime and of withdrawal from the British Commonwealth did not exclude him from encouraging the development of countervailing political views. At age nineteen in 1960, Holdt left behind his Lutheran heritage after undergoing a conversion experience at Central Baptist Church in Pretoria, and within three years he began studies at the Baptist theological college in Johannesburg. His introduction to the study of Christian ethics was a course which J. Lamprecht taught but which Holdt admits did not influence him to any noteworthy degree. Holdt believes that Alexander S. Gilfillan, then the principal of the college, left a greater mark on him, although whether and how the relative social liberalism and pacifism of that Scottish immigrant shaped his views is unclear. After his graduation, Holdt served the Baptist Union as a domestic missionary and church-planter for several years before becoming a pastor. In the late 1980s he was the *primus motor* of the Reformed Baptist movement within the denomination. A principal goal of this organisation is to reassert certain tenets of Calvinism and place the Baptist Union on a modified Calvinist confessional foundation. In his leadership capacity, which Holdt exercises alongside his pastorate, Holdt serves as one of the editors of a highly tendentious journal which initially bore the grandiose title *Reformation South Africa* but which in 1990 was renamed *Reformation Africa South* to indicate that the ambitions of these self-styled neo-Calvinists extend beyond the borders of the Republic of South Africa.¹²

Holdt describes his spiritual and ethical sojourn in three phases. During his childhood, he naturally was influenced by his father and by the conservatism of white society as apartheid was first being promised and subsequently implemented. If his account is reliable, however, at times his father, who spoke Pedi, Sotho, and Xhosa, opposed the police when they harassed blacks who violated pass laws, and this made an impression on Holdt. This suggests that the family may have shared the fairly widely held position, discussed in the immediately preceding chapter, that apartheid was acceptable but

should somehow be made more humane. Holdt admits that after his conversion experience he saw some "merit" in the government's racial policy, partly because fallen man needed strong discipline. The second stage of his pilgrimage was short-lived and took place during the 1980s. Holdt recalls that under the influence of the Dutch Reformed pastor and missiologist Nico Smith, who left a comfortable professorship at the University of Stellenbosch to become the minister of a black congregation in the township of Mamelodi near Pretoria, he became more "radical". At that time Holdt was the pastor of Constantia Park Baptist Church in a new white suburb not far from that township. On several occasions he wrote letters to the *Pretoria News* in which he lambasted white racism in the unrestrained tone which characterises much of his writing. At times he was quite militant. "If I were black and living in Pretoria, I would be an embittered reactionary against the bold manifest actions of evil apartheid in the city", Holdt railed on one occasion. "Perhaps white racists don't realise that all the odds are against them and that they are only making it harder for themselves in the long run". In a brief flourish which bordered on liberation theology, Holdt declared on the basis of Psalm 146:7 that God is "on the side of the oppressed".¹³ Even more surprisingly, he expressed sympathy for and called for the liberation of Nelson Mandela nearly half a decade before that incarcerated leader of the African National Congress was released and at a time when it was more common for white Baptists to reject him as a dangerous revolutionary. Again writing in the *Pretoria News*, though this time anonymously, he commended an interview in that newspaper for dispensing with "the myth that Mr Mandela is a Marxist monstrosity". In the same letter Holdt wondered "whether we arrogant whites are not digging our own grave at terrific speed by our denial of the basic right of the freedom which belongs to a man who undoubtedly has the support of most of this sub-continent's inhabitants".¹⁴ When the city council of Pretoria announced that seventeen parks would be off-limits to blacks, Holdt and his congregation issued a public statement that if that step backwards actually were taken they themselves would boycott the parks.¹⁵ By the end of the tempestuous 1980s, however, Holdt had largely withdrawn from the rhetorical barricades of protest and begun to place most of his emphasis on more conventional proclamation of the

Gospel, personal regeneration, and what he regards as Biblical holiness. He insists that people who do not have a strong view of regeneration cannot legitimately be called Christians and believes that in the absence of this the twentieth-century church has accomplished very little in terms of changing the world, notwithstanding its loud voice on numerous issues. Holdt regards this generalisation as particularly applicable in South Africa where, he asserts, the church has talked enough about social ethics but not done nearly enough in terms of following the examples which Jesus Christ set and thereby serving as an example for the rest of society. Hand-in-hand with this emphasis, Holdt believes that his evangelism suffered during the 1980s because his vocal approach to social issues alienated many conservative whites. "I don't want to offend the CP man on my right or the ANC man on my left", he stated in 1991. By then he had reverted to the widely held notion that if individuals only accept the Gospel (which he leaves undefined) and are thus reconciled with God, their relations with other people, including those of other races, will improve. In the eighteenth century, he declares in a spirited oversimplification of English ecclesiastical and social history, Whitefield and Wesley changed society through their preaching, not by protesting to the monarchy. Holdt does not appear to have any significant understanding of the manifestation of sin in human institutions; to his mind, it is entirely within the individual and can thus be dealt with on an individual basis. The influence of the pietistic legacy in the Baptist Union and in the many non-Baptist channels which Holdt has cultivated, especially through his involvement in neo-Calvinist movements, seems clear.¹⁶

Within the Baptist Union, Holdt is widely regarded as an uncompromising, reactionary, and at times tactless crusader whose primary agenda is to lead the denomination into a quasi-Calvinist fold. Surely his essays and other comments in *Reformation South Africa* and *Reformation Africa South* lend much credence to that depiction. In fairness to Holdt, however, it should be emphasised that the 1980s left their influence on his social ethics, and that he does not stand at the conservative pole of the denomination on public issues. It should also be stressed that in this respect Holdt is just as far from the politically progressive wing of the Baptist Union. As will be seen in the

immediately following chapter, he was one of the few Baptist pastors who publicly supported conscientious objectors within the denomination, even though he was never one himself. He did so on the basis of the historic Baptist principle of the freedom of the individual conscience. In the early 1990s Holdt's son declared himself to be a conscientious objector and enjoyed his father's support in this position. Furthermore, he states that even when preaching on matters which he regards as essentially individualistic, he inescapably touches on social dimensions of them. As one example, Holdt explains that when he is preaching on James, he comments on the sensitive question of wages for domestic servants, although he does not clarify precisely how he handles this matter. Furthermore, while Holdt now regards himself as essentially apolitical, he has strong political opinions which he seeks to relate to his Christian faith. "I would be the happiest man in the world if someone in my congregation told me it was his calling to go into politics", he stated in 1991, "but he should not expect me to support him publicly in a partisan way". Before the dissolution of the Progressive Federal Party, Holdt tended to support it, and he regarded Graham McIntosh, one of its members of parliament from Natal, as "a real evangelical model" of a politician, one of the few he could think of when interviewed in 1991. Dr Andries Treurnicht, the leader of the Conservative Party, however, Holdt regards as a "tragic case" who "has gone badly wrong" and "been caught up in the most ghastly race prejudice imaginable". He is ambivalent on the question of civil disobedience and the questioning of civil authorities, which many conservative Baptists in South Africa have rejected categorically on the grounds of their understanding of Romans 13. On the one hand Holdt, who declares that he tends towards Biblical literalism, states that Christians have no mandate in the New Testament to criticise their governments and believes that God even ordained the rule of Adolf Hitler. Elaborating on this example, Holdt emphasises that he does not condone Nazi atrocities but adds that he has very little sympathy for the legendary Jewish Nazi-hunter Simon Wiesenthal. The Jews, he asserts earnestly, should stop complaining about the Holocaust and start to accept Jesus as the Messiah. On the other hand, Holdt states that in a democracy Christians have the right to criticise their government. Whether he regards this as contradicting his statement

about the absence of a Biblical *mandate* to do so is unclear, and Holdt does not indicate whether this "right" is a gift from God or, as some politically conservative Baptists believe, a mundane product of the Enlightenment. In any case, he softens his stance on the right to criticise worldly authorities by stressing that Christians should not do so unless their governments seek to restrict their worship, evangelistic activities, and the like. This view leaves one wondering what notion Holdt has of the emulation of Old Testament prophets who repeatedly spoke out *inter alia* against economic and political oppression. The basic consequences of Holdt's position on this matter in South African society are too obvious to require elaboration. Furthermore, he declares that when Christians feel compelled to criticise governments, they should do so courteously, using as their model Paul's appearance before Agrippa in Acts 26.¹⁷

Like many other Baptist clergymen and lay people, Holdt had developed a strong opinion of the denomination's Christian Citizenship Committee by the early 1990s. He believes that in its early years the committee did commendable work and cites as one example of this its publication of a brochure intended to help whites understand black customs better. By the 1980s, however, it had outlived its usefulness and nearly ceased to accomplish anything. Holdt believes it could justifiably be abolished. Related to this, he is especially critical of the decision of the Baptist Union's annual assembly in 1985 to send a letter of protest to State President P.W. Botha calling for an end to the national "State of Emergency" and an abolition of apartheid, a move which will be discussed at length in the present chapter. Inconsistent with his statements concerning obedience to civil authority, Holdt argues that it is sometimes morally preferable simply to disobey laws, such as by letting flats to blacks in violation of the Group Areas Act before that statute was abrogated in 1991, than to approach governments with what he calls "niggling protests".¹⁸

While the primary focus of this survey of cases of social ethical awakening is on individuals who evinced changes during the 1980s, it may be enlightening to consider briefly one instance of a fairly prominent Baptist social critic whose transformation actually came earlier but whose ethical views continued to evolve notably. The following example illustrates the occasional power of the printed word

in awakening the conscience of an individual. Wesley James Gavin was born in 1935 in Mossel Bay, the son of an Irish-South African father and a mother from London. He was brought up a Methodist, although his mother was a nominal Anglican and he unabashedly describes both his parents as "godless". While living at the YMCA in Cape Town, Gavin underwent a conversion experience in 1954, began to preach the following year, and was baptised in 1956. He became a chartered accountant the following year and in 1962 married a lady who had graduated from the Baptist theological college in Johannesburg. Largely because of his marriage, he joined a Baptist congregation in 1963 and has regarded himself as a Baptist since that time. Gavin himself then studied at Kalk Bay Bible Institute from 1964 until 1966. This preparation helped him to obtain a diploma in theology from the University of London. Gavin then held a variety of missionary positions in southern Africa and was ordained in 1970 at Claremont Baptist Church, then his home congregation. He served Baptist churches during most of the 1970s but found himself at odds with many of his parishioners and in 1979 changed careers by taking a lectureship in accountancy at the University of Fort Hare. In 1987 Gavin moved to a corresponding position at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg.¹⁹

Gavin attributes his ethical sensitisation, especially with regard to race relations in South Africa, to three principal factors. First, in 1956 he read Trevor Huddleston's *Naught for Your Comfort*, which painted a dismal portrait of the oppression of urban blacks in the townships around Johannesburg. That volume, he recalls, "turned me from conservative to liberal overnight". Secondly, his disciplined reading of the Bible contributed to the development of his insights into the contrast between Christian ideals and South African realities. Thirdly, missionary service at both rural outposts and in black townships gave him a perspective on the country much different from that which he had previously. Gavin does not recall a single theologian contributing significantly to the development of his ethical metamorphosis, although he cites such works as Ronald Sider's *Rich Christians in a World of Hunger* as having given him greater insights after he had become a social liberal. In terms of meta-ethics, Gavin regards himself as principally an adherent of Biblical prescription and states that he

takes his cues more from the teachings of Jesus and the apostles than from their example. Yet Biblical prescription is not a static or simple matter for him. Gavin notes that until the mid-1980s he accepted the notion commonly held in South Africa that capital punishment could be justified on Old Testament prescriptive grounds but that he subsequently changed his position on this issue. He also became a pacifist during the 1980s. Furthermore, unlike many Baptists who have wedded their unarticulated acceptance of Biblical prescription to a belief in and insistence on the verbal inerrancy of the Scriptures, Gavin has devoted a great deal of energy since the mid-1980s to fighting attempts in the Baptist Union to adopt an official doctrine of such inerrancy.²⁰

While the present study is concerned primarily with white Anglophone Baptists, it can be enlightening to consider one relatively prominent Afrikaans Baptist pastor who underwent an ethical transformation during the 1980s. Ivor Jenkins was born at Waterval Boven in the eastern Transvaal in 1958. He describes his childhood as essentially typical for one raised in a conservative and pious Afrikaans family and his spiritual nurture in an Afrikaans Baptist congregation as entirely irrelevant to Christian social ethics. Nothing in the sermons he heard or the Sunday school instruction he received as a child touched on race relations or intimately related matters. From an early age, however, Jenkins was exposed to the realities of black poverty and subjugation in the Transvaal. His father, a former national heavyweight boxing champion who remained active in that sport by coaching boxers in black townships, often brought him along to those areas. The younger Jenkins admits that the contact this gave him with black South Africans was one-sided and superficial but nevertheless educational and that partly as a result of it he has never felt intimidated in black townships - a fact quite relevant to widely held white attitudes in South Africa. In 1977 Jenkins was conscripted into the South African Defence Force, never having heard of conscientious objection, and served in operational areas on the country's northern borders. After his discharge he studied at the Seminarium of the Afrikaans Baptist Church in Kempton Park. During this period Jenkins worked as a part-time railway conductor on the Witwatersrand and witnessed the nocturnal misery of black commuters, many of whom had

to rise at 4h00 to travel to their places of employment. He spoke with some of them about their plight and retrospectively attributes part of his gradual social awakening to this experience. Following his graduation from that small seminary Jenkins served as the pastor of Arcadia Baptist Church in the early 1980s. While there he continued his theological education by taking a Bachelor of Theology at the University of South Africa in 1984. Jenkins ministered almost exclusively to white parishioners in Pretoria, but one interracial experience there pricked his sensitising conscience. Driving frequently between that city and his hometown of Waterval Boven, he occasionally transported black migrants, including two Baptist pastors who desired to found a church in a township which Jenkins and his father had often visited in connection with their involvement in amateur boxing. It irked Jenkins that on one occasion when they stopped to have lunch with some white acquaintances *en route*, these would-be hosts refused to invite the black clergymen into their house but gave Jenkins money with which he could buy fish and chips for them at a take-away nearby. Incidents of this sort clashed with his evolving concept of the church, which was influenced by part of the theological currents to which he was exposed at the University of South Africa, not least black theology as espoused by Simon Maimela and others in the Faculty of Theology. Jenkins succeeded in transforming Arcadia Baptist Church to become multiracial, but many of its white members resigned in consequence of this move. In 1984 he himself resigned his first pastorate and went to the seminary of the Southern Baptist Convention in Louisville, Kentucky, to study for a Master of Divinity, the standard North American degree for pastoral ministry. Jenkins' *metanoia* was not complete, however, when he arrived in the United States of America. He found it difficult to be identified as an Afrikaner at a time when South Africa in general and especially the violence in many of the country's townships were receiving massive coverage in the American media. At times Jenkins responded by becoming defensive when fellow seminarians challenged him about apartheid. In 1985, though, Columbia Broadcasting System, commonly known as "CBS", broadcast the so-called "Trojan horse" incident in which white policemen surreptitiously rode a military transport vehicle into a black township, emerged from their cover, and began to shoot into crowds of people. By Jenkins'

account, it suddenly became clear to him that he no longer could defend apartheid in any form. Conversations with American colleagues helped him to clarify his understanding of human rights in Christian social and theological contexts.²¹ His awakening coincided with the largest ethical controversy in the history of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa, to which we shall soon turn our attention.

This sample of socially concerned Baptists has at least two obvious limitations. First, it should be emphasised that it comprises chiefly ordained ministers; the only two lay people considered are Kretzschmar and Nicholson. It could therefore be objected that one cannot understand the resolutions which the annual assemblies have passed and other actions which that body has taken regarding apartheid and other social problems without more closely examining the extent to which the laity became more socially conscious during the 1980s. That lay people count in Baptist churches seems beyond dispute. That the words published by the annual assemblies have counted to any significant degree is, as has been underscored in previous chapters of the present study, a highly dubious generalisation. In any case, we shall look more closely at lay opinion later in the present chapter, chiefly as represented in letters to the editors of *The South African Baptist*. Secondly, it should also be pointed out that people like Holness, Roy, Kretzschmar, and Gavin are not typical of the mainstream of the Baptist Union in general or even of its leadership. Nevertheless, they illustrate how changes in social ethical thinking have come about amongst white South African Baptists who, by and large, have been in a position to exercise some influence on their denominational fellows. As will be seen shortly, some of these socially liberal Baptists have contributed frequently to the denominational periodical and otherwise either spoken to or for their fellows, in some cases through the Christian Citizenship Committee.

Hugh Wetmore on the "New Race"

Another significant voice crying in what to some may have seemed to be almost an ethical wilderness during the turbulent 1980s was Hugh G. Wetmore. This Baptist pastor, who was also the general

secretary of the Evangelical Fellowship of South Africa, contributed in 1984 a highly relevant article to *The South African Baptist* in which he sought to place the concept of race into a Christian theological context and sensitise other Baptists to both the gravity of racial issues in South Africa and the relevance of their faith to the problems which racism had spawned. "Race is the number one problem confronting our lives in society today", Wetmore declared imprecisely. He cast part of his article in the form of an effort to explain why "Evangelical Christians" had "not taken the lead in developing a positively Christian attitude to the race question". Wetmore found answers to this question in the widespread fear of churches becoming involved in politics and in the identification of such involvement with the suspect World Council of Churches and SACC. He regarded both of these as poorly grounded, however, and sought to dispense with the first by insisting that "actually, the subject of race relations is a *Christian* subject that has been taken over by the politicians, and NOT a *political* subject that has been taken over by Christians!" Wetmore did not seek to deny that there were "liberal theologians" in the two mentioned ecclesiastical organisations but reasoned that his readers should nevertheless become active in issues involving race because "a true doctor does not stop treating arthritis because there happen to be some quacks treating arthritis".²²

True to his tradition, Wetmore based his approach to the subject on "certain Biblical presuppositions". The first was that the "centre of reference" should not be a political policy or humanistic theology but "the teachings of the World of God in Scripture". Secondly, Wetmore emphasised the "depravity of man" and that because of this it was "impossible for unregenerate man to live in permanent, true peace with his neighbour, of whatever race he may be". Thirdly, he stressed the "new birth" of the Christian and believed it included "the possibility and responsibility of living at peace with all men, of whatever race". Finally, Wetmore rejected "the common idea of the brotherhood of man" but accepted "the biblical idea of the brotherhood of believers". He expressed the belief that during the 1980s Christians in South Africa had not devoted much time to study of the Biblical principles relevant to the general question of race and lamented that "there is little teaching on race in our churches". Rather than taking

their cues in this regard from the Scriptures, Wetmore believed, many Christians were merely conforming to the ways of the world. If they would undergo a Pauline *metanoia*, however, they would adopt new positions on matters pertaining to race. In fact, he asserted optimistically, "Our attitudes and actions will become good, acceptable and perfect".²³

The optimistic Wetmore suggested several "key Scriptures" to guide readers in their investigation of the Biblical understanding of race. Three which he grouped thematically were Genesis 1:27, Genesis 3:20, and Acts 17:26, all dealing with God's creation of all people. Wetmore also advised readers to reconsider the "curse of Ham" in Genesis 9:20-27, because that text was commonly misunderstood to justify the subjugation of black Africans. He pointed out that in it God had not cursed Ham, but rather Canaan. "So this passage has nothing to do with any alleged curse on the black people", Wetmore concluded, possibly to the surprise and dismay of some Baptist readers.²⁴

Wetmore emphasised that ultimately Christians should be primarily concerned not about races in the conventional sense but focus on "Jesus Christ and His brand-new race", which encompasses all Christians without regard to colour. He did not use the phrase, but this would presumably be identical to the church universal. Within it, peace and harmony would prevail, for "friction and hatred are foreign to the nature of the church, which comprises all those of all races who have been born again into the family of God".²⁵

Wetmore's article was obviously written in good faith as a well-intended effort to help other Baptists to take seriously the ramifications of their faith with regard to the racial crisis in South Africa. It suffered from various weaknesses, however. First, it must have given readers the impression that racial tension was largely a result of spiritual differences. Secondly, and intimately related to this, it seems to assume that racial harmony would naturally emerge when Christians of various races got together in church. This flew in the face of demonstrable facts. Again and again the ecclesiastical history of South Africa and, for that matter, of the United States of America and other countries, has demonstrated that tensions persist even within the visible church. Thirdly, Wetmore failed to come to grips with the generally accepted Christian belief, one hardly foreign to Baptists

in South Africa or elsewhere, that most people are not and will not become Christians. The presence of large numbers of non-Christians, *i.e.* people outside the "new race", was left unresolved. How one can foster better relations or otherwise apply one's Christian faith to interaction with people who are not in Wetmore's "evangelical" fold remains an unanswered question. Wetmore gave the impression that the racial disharmony stemming at least in part from religious pluralism would have to be tolerated as inevitable.

The "Open Letter" to P.W. Botha

In October 1985 the Baptist Union awakened from what many Baptists and others correctly or incorrectly regarded as its relative somnambulism with regard to apartheid. At its assembly held in George, the home of State President P.W. Botha, the denomination debated at length the national "State of Emergency" and responded to it by sending to Botha an "open letter" calling for the termination of apartheid and the execution of other major reforms. However belated this action was, it went beyond anything the Baptist Union as a denomination had hitherto done on the overarching question of race relations in South Africa. It inevitably caused bitter controversy in Baptist circles and met with bitter resistance by conservative elements who believed that radicals within the denomination had led it down an unblazed trail and departed from the tradition of avoidance of political involvement. This was incorrect; as we have seen, since the late nineteenth century the Baptist Union had on dozens of occasions directly addressed the government and called for the reform of public policies. What was novel in 1985 was the manifest absence of consensus and the strife which resulted. This episode in the history of South African Baptist social ethics thus merits our close attention.

Overlooked in the controversy which immediately ensued after the assembly sent its letter to Botha were two significant historical facts. First, at its congress in Los Angeles on 5 July 1985 the Baptist World Alliance had condemned racism in general and apartheid in particular. "We believe it is our duty in the name of God to denounce this system and all who practise or support it", delegates to the world body had

declared. "We urge Baptists everywhere to call upon their Government to stand firmly against all forms of support for South Africa as long as apartheid remains on their statute book".²⁶ Given the nature of Baptist polity, this was not binding on the Baptist Union of Southern Africa, notwithstanding that denomination's affiliation with the Baptist World Alliance, but leaders of the church in South Africa had been in close touch with the large body and had reached a great deal of common ground with them regarding race relations. The timing of the 1985 assembly's open letter to Botha must be viewed in this context. Secondly, on 24 August 1985 the Executive of the Baptist Union, acting on the initiative of the Christian Citizenship Committee, had sent a letter, or "memorandum", to the state president expressing concern about the State of Emergency and other matters. This had come about because Botha had earlier invited representatives of the SACC, notwithstanding that organisation's sharp criticism of his government and its racial policies, to meet with him and discuss the general crisis of violence in South Africa. As the Baptist Union had not held even observer status in the SACC since 1976, it was not invited to participate in the delegation which went to Botha's office. In the memorandum the denomination's leaders noted quite correctly that "the Baptist Union of Southern Africa has always regarded it as both its right and duty to speak in accordance with its understanding of the Word of God, on issues affecting the life of the nation". Hoping to obviate misunderstanding of their action, they also explained that "since we believe in the separation of Church and State, this approach should not be misconstrued as interference in the affairs of government" and that on previous occasions the Baptist Union had also communicated with the head of state or departments of government to express its "convictions relating to social, racial and political justice". Nothing in the memorandum which followed was particularly severe or radical in the context of its times. It did state, however, that as "the policy of 'apartheid' has been based upon discrimination, it is in conflict with our Christian conscience". The drafters of the memorandum acknowledged Botha's stated willingness *inter alia* to enter into interracial dialogue, pay increased attention to the educational needs of all ethnic groups in South Africa, and give assurances that forced removals of people would no longer take place.

They encouraged him to continue to work for reform and requested an opportunity to confer with him.²⁷ The Christian Citizenship Committee approved the memorandum.²⁸

It is doubtful that assembly's own letter of protest would have come about without the presence of a relatively large number of Coloured delegates at the 1985 gathering. Together with discontented black African delegates, they signed what one called "an articulation of grievances". This was not the first occasion on which non-white Baptists had sought to prompt more outspoken action on the part of the assembly, but unlike attempts in previous years it did not meet with stiff white opposition through procedural tactics.²⁹ With violence raging in many of the black townships, however, and images of it broadcast frequently on South African television, many delegates were apparently grateful for the government's military actions in seeking to prevent the violence from spilling into white suburbs and central business districts and were consequently unwilling to sanction any challenges to the government on that score. A debate of approximately nine and one-half hours therefore ensued. Advocates of reform prevailed. First, delegates approved *ex post facto* the memorandum which the officers of the Baptist Union had sent to Botha on 24 August. In doing so, delegates called upon the churches which were affiliated with the Union "to urge upon every member the obligation of our faith in the matter of relationship with all other men and women, and in our concern for the social and political conditions under which many of our people live". The text of the assembly's own letter, which a committee drafted and which was approved by a vote of 156 in favour and fifty-six opposed, with thirteen delegates abstaining, reflected the circumstances under which it was hastily drafted and, indirectly, the fact that in the Baptist Union there had been relatively little published of a serious nature on matters of social ethics and relations between church and state in recent years. Almost totally absent from the document were an explicit meta-ethical basis and any explanation of how the grievances and demands which it contained related to Christian ethics in general or Baptist principles. Instead, the letter began with a fairly conventional *captatio benevolentiae* in which Botha was greeted "with the respect and honour" due to his office as head of state. It then gave several vague expressions of

Christian convictions which acknowledged traditional and indeed constitutional claims of a relationship between church and state, e.g. "This nation claims to be committed to a form of government based on Christian principles as found in Scripture", "We believe that, more basic to the situation even than the present partial state of emergency and its consequences, the failure to apply consistently basic Christian principles to the ordering of society is a great evil", and ". . . our Christian faith requires us not to be silent". The drafters of the letter castigated apartheid but did not proceed logically from their unspecified Biblical principles to their rejection of that system. Instead, they declared that "codified discrimination" was "in conflict with the Bible" and was therefore "an evil which needs to be repented of". The indefensibility of the system on Scriptural grounds may have seemed self-evident to those Baptists who suffered under it, and this may explain their failure to develop an argument against it. Yet their assertions were probably foreordained to lack any cogency, because Botha, who regarded himself as a Christian and who regularly worshipped in Dutch Reformed churches, did not believe that apartheid was in conflict with the Bible. In any case, the drafters of the letter shifted gears and argued their case primarily on pragmatic grounds, stressing the failure of the State of Emergency to achieve its goals. They emphasised that the imposition of those special measures and restrictions of freedom which they entailed "is even hindering the possibility of finding solutions". Their indictment of the men involved in the ostensible preservation of law and order in the townships so governed as actually working in ways inimical to their task was clear, severe, and only partly qualified:

The presence of heavily armed police and members of the Defence Force is regarded by the majority in those areas, so it would seem, as a source of provocation of the very violence they are intended to prevent. Unfortunately the actions of some members of the Police and of the Defence forces, in the circumstances where extensive powers are entrusted to them, have been totally undisciplined, and acts of brutality have been performed. Thus the fires of race-hatred have been stirred up afresh.

The writers of the letter then put forth a dozen specific demands. They prefaced them with a bold, overarching one which in the context of the times could only have alienated Botha: "We ask, therefore, Sir, that the whole structure of apartheid be dismantled as a matter of extreme urgency". As steps towards "eradicating the evil we believe to be implicit in an apartheid system", and "on the basis of true Christian justice", they then stipulated their demands, which were virtually indistinguishable from those which many other organisations, Christian and otherwise, had long made:

1. That provision be made for full participation of all in the policy-making process in a unitary system of Parliamentary Government;
2. That urgent attention be given to the provision of one national educational system with equal standards and facilities for all sections of our society;
3. That influx control policies based on racial principles be abolished;
4. That the pass-book system be abolished and a uniform identity document system be established.
5. That the principle of equal pay for equal work be implemented throughout the public service, and be actively promoted in all sections of the economy;
6. That the greatest care be taken to ensure that the attitudes and actions of all members of the SADF and the Police Forces conform to the highest standards, and that those who transgress be brought speedily to justice.
7. That the present state of emergency be terminated;
8. That the Group Areas Act be removed from the statute book;
9. That detention without trial be forbidden;
10. That the Population Registration legislation be amended to eliminate all reference to race and colour;
11. That those at present being held in detention solely on the grounds of their political convictions be unconditionally released, and that political exiles against whom no other criminal charge is made, be allowed freely to return;

12. That without criminal charges being brought in a court of law, no organisation or person be banned.³⁰

As indicated above, the text of this letter did not have the support of all the delegates at the assembly. The furore in George, however, was minor compared to the storm of protest which followed when the letter was published. Beyond the defensiveness of many whites who would have felt threatened by the call for an end to apartheid and the legal restrictions which had been imposed on non-whites and protest organisations both before and after the Nationalist accession to power in 1948, some delegates at the assembly and other Baptists opposed it because they believed it violated denominational principles. Several stated at the assembly that the constitution of the Baptist Union did not warrant the sending of such a statement to the head of state. Recognising the inevitability of dissent on the matter in the absence of a well-defined policy, the chairman of the Christian Citizenship Committee, in his report to the assembly, assured his fellow representatives that a sorely needed "Statement of Baptist Principles" was in the process of being drawn up for presentation to the parley the following year.³¹

The 1985 assembly is best remembered for its letter to Botha, but in fact it also passed a resolution which showed a great deal of traditional moderation. Without engaging in explicit finger-pointing, the assembly expressed its "deep distress at the continued cruel unrest and public violence in so many parts of our land" and deplored "the burning of homes and the murder of their occupants, the attacks upon motorists and the drivers of public transport vehicles". This language was no less vague than that of many previous Baptist Union resolutions, although in the context of its time it could only have been read as a condemnation of young radicals, chiefly supporters of the African National Congress, whose engagement in such behaviour was well publicised in South Africa. In other paragraphs of the resolution sufficiently broadly worded to preclude any real effect, the assembly expressed its abhorrence of violence and intimidation as "contrary to the will of God" and inimical to "the freedom of the individual". It thus appealed "to all persons, young and adult[,] and to all organised groups to refrain from all such activity".³²

Not content to wait for the promised "Statement of Baptist Principles", Anglophone Baptists fought a pitched battle in the pages of *The South African Baptist* during the months immediately following the 1985 assembly. Most of the letters to the editor of that periodical reflected deeply ingrained attitudes and prejudices with historic precedents in the Baptist Union; few revealed appreciable insight into either the ethical issues involved or the history of their denomination's involvement in social ethics. Nearly all of those which were published came from the pens of clergymen and lay people who were hostile to the letter to Botha. Collectively, they go far towards explaining the cultural captivity of the Baptist Union and why that denomination had generally failed to come to grips with the issue of apartheid in an effective way and why many members of it had done little in terms of applying their faith to matters of public policy.

Typical of one extreme was that of the politically conservative R.A. Gorven, a lay preacher whom we shall again encounter in the immediately following chapter on pacifism and conscientious objection. "I am dreadfully concerned at the fact that the Baptist Church is becoming involved in politics", he wrote, apparently ignorant of the fact that the denomination had long addressed the South African government on numerous issues. To Gorven, it seemed that the very practice of raising an ecclesiastical voice on public matters lacked Biblical warrant. "As Baptists we claim that the Scriptures are the final and only authority that governs our church life", he wrote, curiously omitting such other spiritual and mundane determinants as the Holy Spirit and financial resources. "Nowhere does Scripture teach that the Church has any right, duty or obligation to interfere in, or even approach, or attempt to direct the government". In a typical *non sequitur* which postulated that the opposite of this dubious principle was unqualified and unquestioning endorsement of governmental policies, and that regarding governments as above constructive criticism, Gorven asserted that the Bible "teaches that, however unjust or dictatorial it may be, the Christian is subject to the government and must accept it as ordained of God". He believed the sole exception to this dictum, and it only a partial one, occurred when governments forbade the preaching of the Gospel. Even then, however, Gorven thought it defensible only to continue to proclaim the Good News, for

"we still do not have a right to protest, demonstrate or write to the President". Displaying an ignorance of the history of relations between church and state in eastern Europe since the end of the Second World War which matched the superficiality of his Biblical knowledge, Gorven asserted that "our Christian brothers in communist lands have set us a very clear example. They do not hold protests and stay-aways and demonstrations but merely get on with the work to which they were commissioned Preaching the Gospel". This lay preacher was evidently unaware of the many demonstrations and other actions, large and small, publicly and privately, which both individual churchmen and their churches of various denominations had made for decades concerning such matters as equal civil rights for young Christians, the distribution of Bibles and other religious literature, and exemptions from military conscription for conscientious objectors. Gorven believed, however, that the Baptist Union should send one more letter to Botha, namely one of apology for interfering in "political matters".³³

Another discontented Baptist, Les Kilham, expressed a similar sentiment and ostensibly self-evident truths which also revealed ignorance of the denomination's public involvement in social ethics. Whatever he may have lacked in his knowledge of Baptist history, however, he compensated for in his employment of various rhetorical devices and fractured logic. "For over a century the Baptist Church in SA (body of Christ) has distanced itself from all politics", Kilham proclaimed. "Now, in one fell swoop, the Assembly has pitchforked our believers in Christ into the maelstrom of 'political' churches, those who do not preach Christ as saviour in all it's [*sic*] meaning". He then sought to rush other manufactured verities past readers by asserting that "it is well known to believers that Christ never tangled with governments or politics, and this was always the view of the Church, the body of Christ, that we refrain from being embroiled in the things of this world". Kilham presented a catalogue of optimistic and totally unsubstantiated assurances concerning the benevolence and progress towards the resolution of national tribulations which the government of P.W. Botha was making and which, to his mind, rendered ecclesiastical resolutions and protests superfluous as well. To cite but a few: "One system of national education is in the pipeline already".

"Influx control is being attended to". "The government is busy about the eradication of apartheid but Assembly must remember that Rome was not built in a day".³⁴

One pastor, P.J. Raubenheimer, conjured up the venerable spectre of an international Marxist threat to justify his opposition to the open letter to Botha and, concomitantly, his support of the State of Emergency. The riots which had prompted the government to take drastic action in many black townships, he declared, were part of a long-standing conspiracy. Raubenheimer did not lack confidence about his investigative or rhetorical skills: "After thorough research and praying for God's guidance I can say convincingly that the main cause lies beyond apartheid and we will find the main cause of all the trouble at no other place than Communism". Quoting Ian Smith, the former prime minister of Rhodesia as his ostensible authority, he asserted that "those who are supporting the riots are pro-Communist". To Raubenheimer's leery mind, the unrest in South Africa sprang not from social, political, and economic frustrations, but from negative spiritual forces. "We are living in the last days and the Antichrist is about to be revealed and all the global riots and unrest is [sic] contained in a well known text", explained this pastor in an eschatological flourish as he proceeded to quote Ephesians 6:12: "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers and the rulers of darkness of this world against spiritual wickedness in high places". Raubenheimer warned that the time had come to form a united front against the "common foe", although he did not propose what actions should be taken against that Marxist enemy.³⁵ In any case, he evidently did not perceive either township violence itself or the government's actions against it as constituting a Christian moral issue. In harmony what had long been a tendency to view the world dualistically, Raubenheimer believed that the matter was essentially religious and therefore not social.

No less simplistic were the assertions which dotted many of the other letters which angry Baptists sent to their denominational magazine. A recurrent theme was that Christianity had nothing to do with politics. "Let the politicians do their thing and we ours", wrote Wendel Stander. He warned that "since political obsessions are definite symptoms of a type of liberal theology, this issue has the potential for

further divisiveness in our beloved denomination". How the letter to Botha could justifiably be called a political obsession Stander did not explain. He understood that the action of the assembly was not unprecedented but was unimpressed by this argument. "Whereas New Testament norms are always our guide for faith and conduct", he asked optimistically, "are we now going to be led by the precedents of our historical Baptist forebears? Who's to say that they weren't wrong in their attitudes - or have they posthumously been accorded infallibility?"³⁶ Not Stander, in any case, as he made no effort to assay any previous Baptist resolutions or other actions with the touchstone of New Testament norms. His argument, like most others in this controversy, thus remained little more than a compilation of truncated assertions.

Another irate Baptist, Bryan Smith, wrote in a vein similar in both tone and content to those of Stander's and Raubenheimer's, though with even less theological substance: "Let me say this very strongly, apartheid has nothing to do with the state of affairs here now, neither has the so-called inequality of education or any other of the excuses used by opponents of our government". Writing from an obvious white viewpoint, Smith feared that "we, as Baptists, are about to lose our credibility and are on our way out if we allow ourselves to be used like this". Hence, "our Assembly must keep to the task of preaching the gospel and not poking into politics".³⁷

A small minority of the writers whose letters in the controversy appeared in *The South African Baptist* supported the letter to Botha. In general their comments were somewhat more temperate than those of their opponents, although not all were more Biblical or otherwise explicitly theologically grounded. Nan Cross of Johannesburg, for example, one of the few women who became involved in denominational disputes on the national level during the 1980s, called attention to the fact that amongst South African Baptists there was a general expectation that the churches speak out on issues of personal ethics so why not, in her words, "also on the sin embodied in laws which deny ordinary human rights to people on the basis of ethnicity?" She did not, however, explain the meta-ethical presumptions underlying her rhetorical question. Amongst these legalised sins were those which rested upon racism, which, "we all know, is still the basis of our

system of government, and is still firmly entrenched in the new constitution with its racially divided parliament and divisions into 'own' and 'general' affairs". Cross pointed out that through its long if irregular series of resolutions the Baptist Union had protested to the government about "injustices and oppression" in South Africa. The denomination, in her view, had reached a critical juncture because of the national crisis which had precipitated the State of Emergency. So serious had it become, according to Cross, that for "any Christian or body of Christians to ignore it can only mean that by keeping silent we are condoning all the evils of the apartheid system". In making this judgment, she directly challenged the commonly held assumption that the Baptist Union could and should remain innocent of political involvement. "There is no such thing as 'not being involved in politics'", Cross declared. "Either we speak out against evil, and act positively to bring about a just dispensation, or by our silence we are consenting to the sin of racism and oppression".³⁸

Arguing his case on the well-worn turf of Scriptural prescription, John Castle directly contested R.A. Gorven's interpretation of Biblical prohibitions of challenges to the state: "In asserting that Scripture does not give any 'right, duty or obligation' Mr Gorven overlooks the fact that Scripture does not prohibit the presentation of appeals or petitions. It would have been wasted effort in view of the constant political activities of the Jews". Castle then hurled another rhetorical missile at Gorven in the form of a *reductio ad absurdum* argument: "If we constantly lived our lives in accordance to what the Bible does not specifically teach us, we would not drive a car, fly in a plane, have freed the slaves or done 1 001 other things we take for granted". Like Cross, Castle noted that if Baptists remained silent in the face of morally questionable public policies, they would be lending tacit support to them.³⁹

Kevin Roy may have been the most theologically astute disputant in the controversy surrounding the letter to Botha. At the time he was the pastor of a Baptist congregation near Pretoria and a part-time lecturer in theology at the University of South Africa. In response to denominational fellows who had protested against the letter, he sought to elucidate four points. First, Roy sought to defuse one critique by emphasising that the memo to Botha was "not an act of disobedience or

rebellion" but a respectful document in which the state president's God-given authority was explicitly acknowledged. No less important was a corollary to this point, namely that Botha presided over "a government professing to be Christian and which recognises that the church has a prophetic role to play in the affairs of the nation". Secondly, Roy called attention to the fact that the Baptist Union had frequently passed resolutions and otherwise expressed opinions about legislation which it had deemed to be "unjust, immoral and contrary to Christian principles". Thirdly, he dismissed as "surely naive" contentions that South African blacks had no genuine grievances and that only communist plots lay behind the unrest in the townships. Roy did not deny that there was a communist threat or that Marxists were capable of exploiting black dissatisfaction, but he believed it was the responsibility of South African Christians to redress grievances so as to impede the growth of communism. In what was probably an incorrect or at least incomplete interpretation of the assembly's action, Roy asserted, "This is why the Assembly sent the letter to the State President". Finally, he sought to counter Raubenheimer's partisan and self-serving misuse of Ephesians 6:12 by declaring that "our enemies are neither the government nor the communists (all flesh and blood), but the devil and sin, including the sins of selfishness, greed, pride and prejudice, which so bedevil our country". Rather than avoiding fundamental issues by seeking to direct attention at communists and chastising those churches which had taken bolder positions against apartheid, Roy stated, it would be appropriate for Baptists to practice humility and repentance, praying for both the government and their enemies, "lest God use ungodly communists to remove from the world the scandal of racist Christianity".⁴⁰ The last rhetorical salvos in this rhetorical battle had not yet been fired, but shortly thereafter the editor of *The South African Baptist* declared that the debate could no longer take space in the columns of that periodical.

Even more hostile to the letter to Botha than the conservatives cited above was the general reaction amongst Afrikaans Baptists, who had rarely expressed themselves publicly on questions of social ethics. Surprisingly, the editors of their markedly pietistic magazine, *Die Goeie Tyding*, who very rarely touched on matters which related even tangentially to politics, did not deal with the issue until February

1986, nearly four months after the 1985 assembly. In the meantime, the Executive Committee of the Afrikaanse Baptistekerk had drawn up a statement roundly condemning the action of the assembly on five counts, none of which broke new meta-ethical ground or went significantly beyond the points which conservative Anglophone members of the denomination had raised. First, the Afrikaans Baptist leaders took issue with the assertion in the open letter to Botha that the State of Emergency was ineffective, in places counterproductive, and failed to solve the underlying causes of discord. In a counter assertion, they believed that without such action by the government the violence would have escalated. Furthermore, the Afrikaans Baptist leaders also questioned the statement that the authorities were preoccupied with symptoms and thus failing to treat the real social illnesses, "aangesien die regering met geweldige hervormingsprosesse besig is". Shifting rhetorical gears, they agreed with some Anglophone Baptist critics that idealistic arguments in favour of the letter were irrelevant and insisted without adducing a shred of evidence that "baie van hierdie opstande is suiwer kommunisties geïnspireer en gaan nie om menseregte nie". Secondly, the Afrikaans Baptist leaders took issue with the allegation that the police and members of the South African Defence Force who administered the State of Emergency "have been totally undisciplined" and had been guilty of incidents of brutality. Such a charge, they declared, was "totaal eensydig" and failed to take into consideration the fact that the police had been exposed to life-threatening situations, particularly "die barbaarse optrede van die onrusmakers". How, they asked, could one level a categorical accusation at the police as the cause of the brutalities when blacks were repeatedly killing each other through the "necklace" method of execution without a policeman in sight? Thirdly, without elaborative comment the Afrikaans Baptist leaders rejected as partisan political activity the demand "that provision be made for full participation of all in the policy-making process in a unitary system of Parliamentary Government". Fourthly, on denominational constitutional grounds they argued that the 1985 assembly had exceeded its circumscribed authority by demanding that the State of Emergency be terminated, that the Group Areas Act be abrogated, and that other reforms be made. They did not, however, mention the fact

that many previous annual assemblies had also requested the government to enact, modify, or delete laws from the statute books. Finally, in summary they described the letter as "in die algemeen baie eensydig negatief" but did not explain the logical relationship between this characterisation and the rejection of the document. The leaders of the Afrikaanse Baptistekerk sent copies of their response to the letter to the Executive of the Baptist Union and to Botha's office. The text also appeared in *Die Goeie Tyding* in February 1986.⁴¹

There is no reason to believe that the position which the leadership of the Afrikaanse Baptistekerk took on the matter did not represent very widespread opinion within that sub-denomination or that a significant number of its members disagreed with it. At least one of its pastors did so, however, and expressed himself in no uncertain terms which led to a minor controversy which radically changed the course of his ministry. Ivor Jenkins, whose political awakening we described earlier in the present chapter, was still studying in the United States of America at the time of the 1985 assembly of the Baptist Union and the reaction of the Afrikaanse Baptistekerk to the letter to Botha. Writing from the seminary of the Southern Baptist Convention in Louisville, Kentucky, and perhaps doing so in haste without appreciable regard for the niceties of evidential argumentation, Jenkins stated that it was "met groot teleurstelling" that he had read that response in *Die Goeie Tyding*. He explained that when he had earlier read the denomination's open letter to Botha in an American newspaper, he had been able to put aside his shame of being a white South African and, with pride in his heart, again look squarely at people. A few months later, however, his emotional state had again collapsed: "Alles net om 'n paar maande later te hoor hoe 'n 'wit-baas' uitspraak, alles weer ongedaan maak". Jenkins accused his fellow Afrikaans Baptists of defending their social *status quo* and practicing social isolation instead of the imitation of Christ. As he put it graphically, "Jesus het nie in 'n 'wit dorp' gewoon en as God uitsprake oor die 'swart dorp' gemaak nie". Moreover, employing language which would inevitably infuriate some Afrikaans Baptists, Jenkins declared, "Hy't nie die dood en verwoesting as 'kommunisties' afgemaak nie - Hy was een van die sogenaamde 'opstokers'". This disillusioned young seminarian suggested that his

denominational fellows try to empathise with South African blacks by experiencing at first hand their world where electricity, food, heaters, and other necessities were in short supply but where third-class railway carriages, kerosene lamps, dilapidated houses, and other bitter fruits of poverty were the order of the day. Jenkins concluded his provocative letter by challenging the well-worn response that the Baptist Union should avoid all political involvement. That, he believed, meant the abandonment of its ethical responsibility to serve humanity as an instrument of God's reconciliation. "Wie sal dan kyk dat dinge verander, hoe sal verhoudinge herstel word, hoe sal gesindhede en bitterheid en haat verander en geheel word as die kerk nie PRAAT nie?" he asked. "Meer nog, as die kerk nie DOEN nie? - Die ANC of die AWB?"⁴²

Editorial reaction to Jenkins' letter was swift and prominent, printed in italics on the same page. The editor pointed to Jenkins' failure to substantiate his claims with references to anything specific in the response of the Afrikaans Baptist leadership to the letter to Botha. Furthermore, the editor declared that the logical course of Jenkins' piece was "unmotivated" and that it therefore was impossible to know precisely why he was dissatisfied. In an summary evaluation, he judged the letter full of sensational generalisations with nothing about positive aspects of interracial relations in South Africa; "Die feit dat dramatiese stappe gedoen is en gedoen word om groter lewensruimte vir anderskleuriges te skep, word ignoreer". Moreover, the tone of Jenkins' letter was described as "uiters emosioneel, eensydig, sarkasties en vol sinisme" but, ironically enough, the editor unintentionally emulated Jenkins in failing to indicate precisely what in the text fitted his accusations. The editor took exception to Jenkins' characterisation of Jesus as an "opstoker", asserting that unspecified New Testament evidence disproved that he did not belong to the Zealot party.⁴³

This strongly worded rejection of Jenkins' rejoinder in the organ of the Afrikaanse Baptistekerk effectively terminated whatever chance there was of his returning to its pastoral service in any conventional capacity. Jenkins did fly back to South Africa later that year with the intention of again becoming the minister of a congregation. When he called on the leaders of the Afrikaanse Baptistekerk and informed them

that his letter to *Die Goeie Tyding* was in fact an accurate representation of his social ethics, however, they made it clear to him that he would find it difficult to receive a call from any of their congregations. That proved to be the case. Jenkins consequently left that conservative sub-denomination and sold insurance for nine months before accepting the directorship of Koinonia, the nondenominational ministry of interracial reconciliation which the well-known Dutch Reformed pastor and missiologist Nico Smith and others had established in 1982. Jenkins remained in that capacity, despite threats to his life and the lives of his wife and children (including gunshots fired at their house) until resigning in September 1990 to accept a leading position with the Institute for a Democratic Alternative for South Africa. When interviewed in March 1991, he stated that he still regarded himself as a Christian but no longer as an "evangelical". The rapidly changing political situation in South Africa and the emergence of black theology had both left their mark on Jenkins, who thought his calling was to serve the cause of democratic reform. He emphasised, however, that he had no personal political ambitions and that his Christian convictions, which included a belief in human equality, were driving his political involvement.⁴⁴

Having examined this diverse sample of white South African Baptists who underwent social ethical awakenings of greater or lesser magnitude during the 1980s, we can draw some tentative conclusions about the factors which contributed to their change of heart and perception. It should be emphasised that statistical accuracy lies outside the scope of this survey and that we necessarily operate with impressions, though ones derived from a *bona fide* effort to consider various kinds of Baptists in terms of their denominational background and other factors mentioned at the beginning of this section.

The Role of the Christian Citizenship Committee

During the latter half of the 1980s, *i.e.* after the Baptist Union had sent its open letter to P.W. Botha, the denomination's Christian Citizenship Committee tended to work quietly behind the scenes to effect further reforms while the denomination as a whole did not

intensify its public criticism of the government. Peter Holness, who served as its chairman during most of that period, believes that it accomplished a great deal by taking a low-keyed approach and rejects as uninformed and unfair criticisms that the committee and the Baptist Union as a whole passively accepted governmental policies during this troubled era. He has expressed the belief that if the relatively extensive activities of the CCC were better known, fewer socially concerned Baptists would question the validity and value of its existence. The archives of the CCC yield considerable evidence in support of his contention concerning the alleged passivity but considerably less to bolster claims that dealing quietly with government officials, as opposed to issuing censorious statements, has been effective. A comprehensive analysis of the activities of the CCC during this period necessarily lies outside the scope of the present study, but a representative sampling of its responses to central socio-political issues illustrates not only the concerns of the committee but also some of the obstacles which both the government and some fellow Baptists placed in its way as it earnestly sought to contribute to the process of applying Christian convictions to the major social problems of South Africa.

Much of the evidence comprises correspondence between Holness and government ministers concerning controversial ethical matters. In 1987, for instance, long after much of the world had criticised the low ceiling which successive South African statutes had placed on due process of law, Holness wrote directly to Adriaan Vlok, the widely detested minister of law and order whose interpretations of laws restricting personal freedoms in South Africa had brought him into disrepute at home and abroad, about the practice of imprisoning for lengthy periods, sometimes indefinitely, people whom the government suspected of committing crimes or otherwise challenging its authority. The former prosecutor and Baptist ethicist declared it to be the "firm conviction" of the Baptist Union that "the principle of detention without trial is fundamentally wrong". Regarding due process as virtually a self-evident truth, he argued that "this is the cornerstone of our legal system. No man must be assumed to be guilty until he has been convicted in a court of law". The fact that South Africa was a country in civil turmoil did not seem particularly relevant, at least not

to the point to remove this cornerstone from the foundation of South African jurisprudence. In support of his position, Holness appealed not to centuries of Anglo-Saxon judicial tradition but to a recent judgment of the Cape Supreme Court, which had declared, "The disturbed state of the country ought not, in my opinion, to influence the court, for its first and most sacred duty is to administer justice to those who seek it and not to preserve the peace of the country". He added his own view, which many other jurists and non-jurists in South Africa shared, that "there is . . . more than adequate legislation by which wrongdoers may be charged and tried".⁴⁵

Not unexpectedly, this appeal and mode of argumentation failed to sway Vlok. Replying a month later, he flatly rejected Holness' contention. Instead of addressing the matter on an evidential or moral basis, he merely quoted the findings of the Rabie Commission of Inquiry to Security Legislation which had been tabled in Parliament in 1982. That report had stated that detention without trial had been "used in peacetime on countless occasions in many countries, such as the United Kingdom and the British dependencies, India, Malaya, Ghana and Zambia, to mention but a few in the Commonwealth". It further asserted that "the system of preventive detention has been recognised as an indispensable tool of modern government". As a virtually meaningless sop, Vlok assured Holness that governmental policy on detention without trial did not affect the principles of religious liberty or the freedom of conscience.⁴⁶ The government continued to detain political prisoners without necessarily bringing them to trial, and there was virtually nothing that the Baptist Union could do to counter the practice.

Another chronic issue with which the Christian Citizenship Committee felt compelled to deal and which the annual assembly occasionally did was the government's practice of forcibly removing blacks and other non-whites from districts where their presence was forbidden by the Group Areas Act and other statutes. In 1984, for instance, Theodore Pass, Holness' predecessor as chairman of the CCC, wrote to the minister of community development, P. Coetzee, to protest against the forced removal of fifty-one Coloured families from the Kenilworth area of Cape Town. Pass informed Coetzee that on several occasions since 1953 the Baptist Union had "condemned discriminatory

legislation in general, and in particular, the Group Areas Act". Without engaging in detailed theological discourse, the chairman stated that the denomination's action in this regard flowed from its "commitment as a Christian community to the principle of loving our neighbour as ourselves and therefore bound only to do to others what we would gladly allow them to do to us". In fact, the reasoning behind the Baptist Union's protests through the years is not apparent from the extant evidence, and that which Pass gave is in all likelihood a severe abridgement of the ethical thinking which South African Baptists had employed in addressing racial issues since the late nineteenth century, although as I have been at pains to point out in the present study, on many occasions they passed resolutions or took other action without leaving a record of their reasoning. In any case, Pass did not call for the abrogation of the Group Areas Act, but he apprised the government minister in question of several mitigating facts in the case. On behalf of the CCC, moreover, he expressed "the deep conviction that in the present political climate, whilst our Government seeks to improve race relations by positive attitudes, this is no time for persisting in actions which once again open old wounds suffered by our Coloured people".⁴⁷

Later that year Pass protested to the government about the demolition of squatters' homes near Cape Town. When no meaningful reply was forthcoming, Holness, as his successor, sent a more sharply worded letter to the Department of Co-operation and Development in January 1985. He sought to make it clear that "we have been perturbed on Christian and humanitarian grounds by the periodic destruction of people's homes, and moreover the insensitive manner in which this is often carried out". Holness softened his language by conceding that the problem of urbanisation was "complex" and assuring the government that the CCC had no desire in promoting "simplistic or negative" answers to it. Nevertheless, as chairman he struck at the heart of South Africa's political dilemma by pointedly expressing the committee's concern "the exclusion of urban blacks from participation in the South African parliamentary system". Related matters against which Holness protested in the same letter included "the discriminatory way in which influx control has been applied", "the over-rigid requirements before legal residence is recognised",

and "the lack of housing for those who are considered legal residents, and the inadequate building programme".⁴⁸

Botha's government did not strike the Group Areas Act and other racist land tenure statutes from the books, nor did the CCC muffle its small but occasionally loud prophetic voice in this regard. Indeed, during the latter half of the 1980s, when more disillusioned white South Africans joined the international call for a resumption of the reform process which Botha had promised but on which his government had not delivered nearly as much as expected, the CCC spoke. In 1988, for example, Holness wrote to J.C. Heunis, the minister of constitutional development and planning, to call directly for legislative reform. He stressed that his committee's opposition to the Group Areas Act was based not on "party-political considerations" but rather on what he imprecisely called "our understanding of Christian morality". Holness did not define what that concept was, but he declared that the law was "wrong both in principle and practice", the former because it was "discriminatory and racialistic" and the latter because "the terrible hardship and heartache which have been caused by the application of the Group Areas Act are surely too obvious to deny". Holness added that in the view of the CCC, no other South African law had caused more suffering than it. Going a step beyond condemning that statute of 1950, he judged bills then under discussion to replace or supplement it as unsatisfactory solutions to the legal morass which had existed for decades. Holness assured Heunis that "the Baptist denomination is, on the whole, theologically and politically conservative" and that it was by no means eager "to become embroiled in the hurly-burly of party politics". Nonetheless, he insisted that within the Baptist Union there was a strong conviction concerning the Group Areas Act and urged its prompt repeal.⁴⁹

During the late 1980s, as the reactionary Conservative Party gained control of some city councils, there were signs of a recrudescence of petty apartheid in a few municipalities. Perhaps Boksburg east of Johannesburg gained more publicity than any other in this regard. In December 1988, therefore, Holness drafted a letter to P.W. Botha which in a revised version was posted the following February. In it he informed the state president that "the current attempt by certain municipalities to reintroduce an extreme form of

'petty apartheid' appals [*sic*] us". Holness reminded Botha that as head of state he had taken a public stand that "local government will not be permitted to turn back the country's clock". Precisely that, however, was happening in Boksburg and elsewhere. "We have opposed all forms of discrimination on theological, moral and humanitarian grounds", he asserted without explaining in detail why the vestiges of the national policy of compulsory racial segregation were intolerable. "We believe it is not necessary, sir, to convince you that such official actions [as petty apartheid] are demeaning and degrading, a very serious violation of the Bible's teaching that all men have been created in the image of God". Holness labelled the actions which local authorities in Boksburg and elsewhere were taking "blatantly racialistic" and reminded Botha that those wielders of power on the grass roots level were simply exercising the authority which the law gave them. He urged Botha "to remove all discriminatory legislation, including the Group Areas Act, as a matter of extreme urgency."⁵⁰

Discussions of the implementation of a bill of rights for all South Africans attracted a good deal of domestic and foreign attention during the last few years of the 1980s, including some within the Baptist Union. The South African Law Commission, which the government had created to deal with this matter, invited public input into the process, and the CCC responded accordingly. In June 1989 Holness wrote to the commission to present the views of the Baptist Union. He cautiously stated that "we do not wish to identify ourselves uncritically with any philosophical or political ideology" but made it clear that "the introduction of a bill of rights would protect the dignity, freedom and legal equality of every citizen in our land". His presentation of the theological basis underlying this conviction was succinct and arguably too brief to deal adequately with either Christian anthropology or the Biblical doctrine of creation which appears to underlie the thrust of Holness' argument:

It is our deep theological conviction that all human beings are created equal before God and therefore possess an innate worth and dignity. Under God, every person has certain inalienable rights. These rights should be protected in the

constitution and laws of any country which professes to be both democratic and Christian; as South Africa does.

Holness also expressed his conviction that anything short of the wholesale reform which a bill of rights presumably would bring, would be unsatisfactory. "More is needed in our country than the 'reforming' of certain discriminatory laws and the 'broadening of democracy', he asserted. "As the document clearly explains, a bill of rights would necessitate the removal of all discriminatory legislation".⁵¹

The departure of the increasingly intransigent Botha from the political scene in 1989 and his succession by F.W. de Klerk appeared to open new possibilities for the resumption and acceleration of reform of race relation in South Africa. The leaders of the Baptist Union, like their counterparts in many other denominations, sought to avail themselves of this opportunity to exercise influence on public policy. Shortly after de Klerk's accession to the state presidency, Holness wrote to him on behalf of the denomination as a whole and informed him that the Baptist Union "on the grounds of scripture" believed that "apartheid is theologically and morally indefensible" and as such should be abolished posthaste. He reminded de Klerk that South Africa was an officially Christian country but that "if this is to be true we cannot continue to legislate and practise a way of life in which colour and race determine a person's value in society". Regarding one specific current issue, Holness expressed the denomination's rejection of violence in recent political demonstrations near Cape Town and attempted to state this in an even-handed way. On the one hand, he questioned the wisdom of organising demonstrations which seemed likely to lead to violent confrontation. On the other hand, Holness stated with equal candor that "we are appalled by the way in which the police have dealt with certain peaceful protests, especially in the Western Cape". In a democratic country, he emphasised, "people should have the right to protest in an orderly and peaceful manner without being subjected to physical assault".⁵² Less than a fortnight later, Holness again wrote to de Klerk, this time in his capacity as chairman of the CCC and, by his own admission, in a more personal manner. Undoubtedly to avoid being dismissed as a "political priest", to use the term which many supporters of the Nationalist government had

used against clergymen who had criticised it, he stressed that the Baptist Union had maintained "a low political profile" for many years. The reason for this, Holness explained candidly in a remark particularly revealing from a lecturer in Christian ethics, was that "we have been anxious not to become too 'political' but rather to concentrate on the heart of the gospel, viz. personal salvation". He pointed out, however, that a low profile did not mean a flat one, as "the Baptist Union has always drawn the line at discriminatory legislation". Underscoring the obvious, Holness stated that "there is a rising tide of discontent, disillusionment and despair which are the daily experience of millions of people in our country, especially those of colour". Even in the "ecclesiastical back-waters" of the Baptist Union, however, "a significant number of our brethren are beginning to 'give up' on the government. They are saying, 'We've heard all that before, over and over, and nothing has changed! There's no point in talking to the government'". He warned the state president that "in my view, it is essential for South Africa to change - and to change quickly. The alternative is frightening".⁵³

On 3 February 1990 de Klerk made his globally publicised speech to open parliament in which he promised sweeping reforms, the release of Nelson Mandela, and the unbanning of the African National Congress, the Communist Party, and other long-forbidden organisations. Holness wrote to compliment him six days later. He congratulated the state president on his "moral courage" and commended de Klerk's "unequivocal commitment to a new South Africa in which racial discrimination will play no part and true democracy prevails". Holness indicated that representatives of the Baptist Union, like counterparts in other denominations, would probably accept the state president's invitation to meet with him to discuss the future of South Africa.⁵⁴

During this period the CCC appealed not only to the South African government to work for greater racial harmony but also to the congregations of the Baptist Union. As mentioned earlier in connection with Kevin Roy and Ivor Jenkins, the Koinonia movement was founded in 1982 to promote interracial understanding. It was perceived as a sorely needed instrument of social concord which only indirectly challenged the social and legislative *status quo* as such it enjoyed the

support of many white Baptists. The CCC sought to foster this nondenominational ministry. In 1987, after the violence in many black townships had subsided somewhat but the country remained in tension with the State of Emergency firmly in place, Holness wrote to all the co-ordinators of the territorial associations within the Baptist Union and recommended that they promote the concept in their meetings. Without disturbing the congregational polity of the denomination, he also suggested that where they did not already exist, each territorial association form a social concern committee. Giving controversial matters a wide berth, Holness argued on safe ground that "there is an urgent need for white South Africans especially to be made aware of the hurts and frustrations being experienced by some of our people".⁵⁵

Probably owing heavily to the relatively small size of the Baptist Union and its concomitant lack of political clout, the work of the CCC rarely effected legislative results. Some of its members and other supporters of its activities have argued that its fruits have been of another kind, chiefly in terms of educating Baptists about contemporary social issues and the relevance of their faith to those public matters. Obviously that kind of assertion is impossible to quantify and difficult either to prove or refute. It is not our purpose to do either. Another basic fact should be mentioned, however, namely that since its inception the CCC has never enjoyed the support of all white Baptists in South Africa, and during the 1980s and early 1990s some politically conservative Baptists as well as a few non-conservatives either openly or in correspondence with Holness criticised the form of its activities, the positions which it has taken on issues. A few have called for restrictions on the CCC's right to speak for the Baptist Union as a whole before receiving permission of either the Executive or a majority of the delegates at the annual assembly. Some have gone a step further and even questioned whether it should continue to exist.

Alrah Pitchers, for example, a white minister in the Baptist Union who became a lecturer in systematic theology at the predominantly Indian University of Durban-Westville and who is not known as a political conservative, has questioned privately whether the CCC has made significant steps towards fulfilling its task of doing analyses of secular problems in South Africa and asking the churches for answers

to them. Without first accomplishing this objective, he believes, the committee has generally been able to put forth only "very watered down" resolutions at the annual assemblies. Pitchers suggests that the principal tasks of the CCC should be to investigate social issues and submit to the churches "middle axioms" (using the term popularised by the twentieth-century American Christian ethicist John C. Bennett, whom Pitchers regards as having had one of the greatest influences on his own meta-ethics) relevant to those problems. Rarely, however, has it done that.⁵⁶

John Poorter, a decidedly conservative individual whom we considered at length in the immediately preceding chapter, has doubted whether the CCC has been in a suitable position to do sufficient research on issues before making pronouncements about them. He has gone so far as to express a belief, both unexplained and unsubstantiated by any evidence, that at times the CCC has been asked to submit resolutions to the Baptist Union's annual assemblies "just for the sake of doing so".⁵⁷ Poorter's cynicism may be a product of his disagreement with some of the more or less controversial resolutions in which the government's policies on matters pertaining to race have come under fire.

Martin Holdt, whose reversion to a nominally apolitical understanding of the role of the church in society we discussed earlier in the present chapter, is at least as severe as Poorter in his judgment of the CCC. Like Poorter and many others of *de facto* conservative political bent, Holdt found the Baptist Union's open letter to P.W. Botha of 1985 troublesome. He argues cryptically and in a curious turn of logic for a self-styled Calvinist, that had the churches "done their jobs correctly", it would not have been necessary to criticise the government, for the latter would have followed moral principles in matters of race relations which, he concedes, it often has not done. In accordance with his understanding of the place of the church in social ethics, he believes that the CCC could justifiably be abolished. Holdt's logic is simple: If the church generally should not express itself on social issues, there is no justification for it to maintain an agency for assisting it in that purpose.⁵⁸

A final and unabashedly naive example of a Baptist who is disgruntled with the CCC is a lay preacher without pretensions of

having a theological education, R.A. Gorven, whose views on conscientious objection we shall examine in the immediately following chapter. When asked about the CCC in 1991, he admitted in a bit of probable hyperbole that he had "no idea of what it does" but nevertheless expressed hostility towards it. Upon closer interrogation, however, Gorven contradicted himself fundamentally, indicating that he did not have a consistent position on the role of the church in public issues. On the one hand, he declared categorically that the Baptist churches of South Africa should not address the government on anything and added that "total separation [of church and state] means we cannot dictate to the state". On the other hand, when asked whether the churches should have a prophetic voice on matters which appeared to contradict Biblical ethical principles, Gorven agreed wholeheartedly that it was valid for them to approach the civil authorities with advice. Otherwise, he asked, how would the government know what it should do? In support of this position, Gorven added that Old Testament prophets had repeatedly spoken to monarchs. Yet all this seemed irrelevant in South Africa, where to the trusting Gorven it was "unthinkable" that the government, which was "based on Christian principles", would ask him to do anything that violated his conscience. He could not think of a single statute which contradicted that generalisation. In addition to being superfluous in the virtual Utopia of South Africa, the CCC, in Gorven's critical view, was "not really effective", partly because its members "don't get their information across to the churches".⁵⁹

The Dissenting Voices of New Baptist Organisations

Since 1986 the interracial Fellowship of Concerned Baptists has sought to keep issues of social justice before the denomination and to work for their resolution. It began as a consequence of the document *Evangelical Witness in South Africa*, a statement which self-styled "evangelicals", some of them Baptists and most of them black, had drafted that year in the wake of *The Kairos Document*, which had appeared some nine months earlier. In October 1986 the annual assembly of the Baptist Union met in Pretoria. During the convention

approximately thirty socially concerned ministers and other delegates held an *ad hoc* meeting to discuss the *Evangelical Witness in South Africa*. Despite negative reactions by most of the white delegates at the assembly to that statement, they agreed to establish the Fellowship of Concerned Baptists as one means of bringing that document to the attention of more of their denominational fellows and allowing it to make an impact on the Baptist Union. A national committee governed its activities. The new organisation was conceived *inter alia* to serve as a Baptist affiliate of Concerned Evangelicals. The headquarters of the FCB was established in Pretoria, while small regional affiliates were gathered elsewhere in South Africa. Operating budgets have always been small, compelling the FCB to rely on voluntary labour. Activities have included the publication of a newsletter, maintaining contacts with Baptists overseas, co-operating with the larger Concerned Evangelicals and Koinonia South Africa organisations, and arranging and participating in conferences for the discussion of social issues. The FCB became an associate member of the SACC in 1987. From the outset Gisela Nicholson, the German immigrant laywoman whose social ethical awakening we described earlier in this chapter, was one of the driving forces in the FCB, serving as its co-ordinator and editor of its newsletter. Several other whites, including Kevin Roy, Ivor Jenkins, David Walker, and Louise Kretzschmar, also discussed above, have belonged to it almost since the beginning, but the majority of the members have been non-whites, especially black Africans. Some of the latter, such as Gideon Makhanya and Caesar Molebatsi, have also played important leading roles in the Baptist Convention of Southern Africa both before and after the secession of that body from the Baptist Union.

Relations between the FCB and the Baptist Union have never been particularly close. In January 1987 Holness wrote to General Secretary Trevor Swart about the FCB and its "obvious overlap with the B U Christian Citizenship Committee". Holness informed him that the CCC had never received any correspondence from the FCB and found that "disappointing". At that stage the *modus operandi* of the FCB was still an "enigma" to Holness, partly because he did not have a basis for understanding how it would choose its leaders, whether it would operate as an independent body or maintain some official connection

to the Baptist Union, and what ties it would have to the Baptist World Alliance. "It seems to me that the FCB is trying to have its cake and eat it, i.e. benefit by its Baptist identity without being answerable to anyone, even to itself", he complained. Holness was especially irritated and feared potential embarrassment because, in his words, leaders of the FCB had "made statements, some of them highly controversial, which imply that they are officially authorised to speak on behalf of the South African Baptists". He referred to an unspecified newsletter from a church in Bristol to illustrate the point.⁶⁰ A few months later Holness wrote to Nicholson and suggested that closer communication between their respective organisations would be desirable in the interest of preventing misunderstandings. He addressed her in a cordial tone but did not disguise his belief that the FCB had unjustly accused the CCC of passively accepting the *status quo* in the wake of great national turmoil. "Within the context of the S A Baptist life we have stuck our necks out quite frequently!" Holness insisted. As examples of its active approach, he mentioned that during the past week he had written letters to the ministers of defence and of law and order concerning widening the provisions of community service and detention without trial, respectively.⁶¹ Despite considerable goodwill on both sides and the participation of some members of the FCB in the general affairs of the Baptist Union, relations never became close. This was partly because many stalwarts in the FCB were either whites who had become disenchanted with the denomination or blacks and Coloureds who belonged to congregations in the Baptist Convention which, as we shall see shortly, severed its ties with the Baptist Union in 1987 after several years of tension. In 1991 Nicholson complained that her own pastors at Central Baptist Church in Pretoria, Reginald George Codrington and Anton Fourie, "ignore" the FCB, as do most other white Baptists there and elsewhere.⁶²

Internal problems have plagued the FCB nearly from its inception. Personality conflicts, accusations of white domination, and apparent embezzlement have arguably limited its effectiveness, damaged morale, and prevented the FCB from growing as it otherwise might have. The most serious offence may have been that involving Errol Nourse, a Coloured Baptist minister who raised a considerable sum of money overseas for the FCB but failed to submit these funds to its

leadership. In a periodic synopsis of the FCB's activities, it was reported that "after one year of vain attempts to obtain the money[,] the Committee saw itself compelled to take legal steps. Our lawyers are in contact with E. Nourse's attorneys [but] . . . there seems to be little chance that FCB will ever receive any of that money".⁶³ By 1991 Nicholson had to describe the FCB as "financially nearly moribund" and on the verge of disbanding.⁶⁴ At that time some members believed that Nicholson herself was one cause of its woes. Des Hoffmeister, a prominent Coloured dissident pastor in the Baptist Convention who admits that his anger about white theological and administrative domination in South Africa sometimes influences his perceptions, acknowledges Nicholson's good intentions but dismisses her as domineering and representative of traditional white authority which has been slow to transfer the reins of power to Africans.⁶⁵ Nicholson, for her part, disagrees and points to the numerical preponderance of blacks and Coloureds in positions of leadership within the FCB. She sees her role as essentially a sorely needed administrative one in an otherwise chaotic and loosely run organisation.⁶⁶

Strictly speaking, the Baptist Convention antedates the FCB, although it did not gain autonomous status until after that body came into being. Historically, the South African Baptist Missionary Society, like many similar bodies attached to other denominations, had advocated the creation of autonomous indigenous churches comprising converts to Christianity. To assist the maintenance of these congregations, which were deemed incapable of standing entirely alone with regard to such matters as the finance and the education of clergymen, the Baptist Convention (originally the Bantu Baptist Church) was created in 1927. It existed under the purview of the Baptist Union, which allegedly exercised some measure of control over it. Critics of this seemingly paternalistic system attributed its existence to the unwillingness of many white Baptists to integrate their churches fully and give even second and third-generation African Christians autonomy to the same degree that they themselves enjoyed. Such allegations are virtually impossible to substantiate. In any case, during the 1980s black dissatisfaction with the status of the Baptist Convention grew as many regarded its relationship to the Baptist Union as a "special association" contradicted the spirit of the

times and their aspirations of attaining not only political and social but also ecclesiastical equality. Demands for separation became more frequent. At its convention in Cape Town in December 1987, the Baptist Convention voted almost unanimously to sever its ties with the Baptist Union. It did not exclude the eventuality of a subsequent merger, but made clear that such a fusion would have to be of two equal partners. This was expressed in a resolution which the Baptist Convention passed to explain its action: "Realising that the Convention[,] due to many causes, is far from being equal to the Baptist Union; [sic] it is the Convention's desire to be allowed to stand on its own in order to propagate growth within, that is, learn all skills necessary for sound leadership, etc. When the Convention is ready[,] it will obviously consult with the Baptist Union for the implementation of the merger".⁶⁷ The Baptist Union accepted this decision with virtually no comment at its assembly the following October.⁶⁸

Relations between the two Baptist denominations did not improve during the late 1980s and early 1990s, despite the willingness of the Baptist Union to press more vocally for greater political and social reform in a rapidly changing South Africa. Indeed, they became more strained in 1990 when the Baptist Convention sponsored an interracial "National Awareness Workshop" at Barkly West. Coloured, white, and black delegates from South Africa and overseas, many of them representing the Baptist Convention, aired their grievances in unmitigated terms for four days. In the accounts of some of those who spoke, the Baptist Union was little more than a religious expression of white colonialism and paternalism, a church which understood personal pietism but knew virtually nothing about social and political realities in South Africa or the temporal liberation which Africans had increasingly come to regard as a central aspect of salvation in Jesus Christ. Their own denomination, some argued, was a religious product of apartheid. A brooding anger hung over this well-attended parley at a remote location in the northern Cape. Some of the speeches and a two-page "Barkly West Declaration" containing moderate elements of liberation theology were subsequently published in a loosely edited booklet.⁶⁹

The leadership of the Baptist Union did not take kindly to the verbal chastisement to which it was subjected at distant Barkly West.

In an open letter published in *Baptists Today*, the monthly periodical of the Baptist Union, General Secretary Trevor Swart expressed "repentance for the hurt we have caused in the past by our attitudes and behaviour". At the same time, however, he made it clear that he and his colleagues felt "hurt at being criticised and accused of many wrongs and evils, without the opportunity either to face the allegations and, where necessary, to repent and change our ways or to answer the charges in order to clear up the misunderstandings that have arisen". He also found it painfully unjust and, no doubt, embarrassing, that members of the Baptist Convention had circulated internationally letters underscoring "differences and divisions" amongst Baptists in South Africa. This approach, Swart believed, contravened Jesus Christ's commandment that those who had mutual grievances should speak with each other. He declared that the Baptist Union was willing to speak with the Baptist Convention and hoped that the reverse was also the case.⁷⁰

Some of the members and supporters of the Baptist Convention, including non-South Africans temporarily in the country, proved more hostile and defiant than conciliatory. Brian Gurney, for example, a missionary from the United States of America who had helped to arrange the conference at Barkly West, wrote to *Baptists Today* openly rejected Swart's olive branch. He refused to acknowledge anything positive in Swart's letter. Instead, Gurney wondered, "Why only now is the BU repenting? Why are they in such a hurry to repent, particularly since they do not seem to be sure why?" He believed that "the attempt by the BU to plead ignorance . . . [sic] and appeal to the 'differing circumstances' in which they have lived is frightening".⁷¹ Peter Steinegger, a Swiss missionary serving in the black township of Langa near Cape Town, similarly rebuffed the Baptist Union's endeavours at reconciliation on an explicitly Christian basis and in effect suggested that Swart could continue to stand in the snow at Canossa. "By feeling this hurt, the BU may come to understand something of what the Convention has felt in its alliance with the BU when it was misrepresented overseas, and talked about as if their aspirations were fully understood by the BU", he declared in a letter to the same periodical. Steinegger thought Swart and his fellows could benefit from some "eye for an eye" punishment: "While the General

Secretary has assured the Convention of his love in the Lord Jesus Christ, I encourage him and others in the BU to sit with their feelings of hurt, and to come to a deeper awareness of what they have caused in the past".⁷² A few months later Des Hoffmeister expressed similar views and thought that any reunion of the two denominations was out of the question in the foreseeable future.⁷³ At the *terminus ad quem* of this study, the Baptist Convention remained entirely separate from the denomination which had spawned it. The younger body may have served a useful purpose as a foil to the pietistic proclivities of the Baptist Union, although the latter had already shown significant signs of taking a more active role in social ethics during the years of the Convention's gestation and birth.

Re-evaluating Relations between Church and State

As has been argued at various points in this study, white South African Baptists have always have had some awareness of their nonconformist heritage in the history of British Protestantism and realise that as heirs of this tradition they should respect the fundamental principle of the separation of church and state, but that they rarely have evinced a sophisticated understanding of the implications of that heritage for their relations with the South African government. Exceptions to this, such as the spate of essays which appeared in 1957 when the government attempted to impose apartheid on worship through the infamous "church clause" of the Native Laws Amendment Bill, were few. During the latter half of the 1980s, however, the national crisis, especially the State of Emergency which the government imposed in 1986, compelled Baptists and others to re-evaluate the nature of their churches' relationship to the state in a country whose constitution declared it to be Christian. Within the Baptist Union, the general question is particularly relevant for at least two closely related reasons. First, as we have seen in the previous historical chapters of the present study, there was a tendency for Baptists, especially those who opposed legal and social reforms in the area of race relations, to use the Pauline injunction in Romans 13:1-7. to "be subject to the governing authorities" as a reason for not only

resisting changes in existing legislation but even for contesting the practice of addressing the government on matters of public concern. Secondly, as "the new South Africa" began to germinate during the late 1980s and go through a painful birth process in the early 1990s, many Baptists asked what the nature of their churches' public or social ethical responsibility was - if indeed it had one - in an increasingly pluralistic society where white Protestantism of British and Dutch origin no longer exercised religious hegemony in tacit or explicit support of white political domination. The era of civil religion, in other words, seemed either to be approaching its end or at least be on the verge of momentous change.

It should not be assumed that the 1980s brought any consensus on the general questions of relations between church and state or that the Baptist Union underwent a comprehensive revolution in this regard during that decade. Again and again conservatives appealed without elaboration to Romans 13 to justify their defence of the *status quo* and counter those who sought to effect reforms of public policy by either protesting to the government or challenging the National Party in the halls of parliament. That line of argumentation, usually presented in a very truncated form, was especially conspicuous in letters to the editors of the denominational periodicals throughout the decade. Furthermore, *The South African Baptist* carried a lengthy if loosely argued essay in 1980 by Norman Schaefer who repeated well-worn reasoning to justify the unwillingness of individuals to do anything significant against their governments. As his "biblical directives" he cited Romans 13:1-7, which he believed was "reminiscent" of Jesus Christ's commandment in Mark 12:17 that we are to "render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's". Schaefer dismissed the countervailing argument that some governments were unjust and therefore undeserving of obedience. "This is a false question[,] for in this fallen world there can be no government entirely free of corruption[,] and even the worst government is **better** than none", he averred. Schaefer's thinking was perhaps less wooden than this curious logic would suggest. He acknowledged that at times the demands of Caesar contradicted those of God, and to deal with such situations he predictably quoted Acts 4:19-20. Schaefer did not, however, give any examples relevant to contemporary South Africa.

Instead, he included a concluding section on the "Political Responsibility of the Church" in which he emphasised, again without providing any concrete examples, that the church has a prophetic voice: "It is part of the church's mandate that she must call sin by its name and warn men against it". On the other hand, Schaefer insisted that extraparliamentary protests had no legitimate place in a Christian society. "If, in the opinion of the individual, the government is unjust in ordinances and if it will not listen to the prophetic voice of the church, this does not constitute an excuse for revolution and rebellion", he declared, "but rather increased the responsibility of the Christian to improve his relations and goodwill with his neighbours". Schaefer gave no clue as to what effect this course of action could have on legislation which contravened Christian convictions. Writing from an utterly white perspective, he maintained that "the Church must make use of legislation which gives her a say in society. . . . The church, by its witness for Christ to the community, must seek to recreate society from within". The central question which Schaefer ignored is how the vast majority of South Africans, dispossessed of virtually all alternatives for working within the political process on the national level, could seek to effect change through parliamentary means. It is conceivable that he, true to deeply held tradition, believed that it remained the responsibility of white Christians, acting in a body, to seek to ameliorate the suffering of the black majority by effecting legislation on their behalf.⁷⁴

By the middle of the decade, the Baptist Union had in Ellis André an increasingly prominent specialist in church-state relations whose essays on the subject began to receive a great deal of coverage in the denomination's periodical and whose views on the subject appear to have wielded some influence amongst other Baptist clergymen. More than anyone else in the Baptist Union, he became its spokesman on the topic of its relations with the government and the civic role of its members. His views, moreover, proved much more relevant to the changes which were beginning to take place in the structure of South African society and politics than were those of people like Schaefer, even though André's writings inescapably reflected to his status as a white in a white-dominated country.

André's background was somewhat atypical for a white Baptist minister. As a teenager in Durban, he underwent a conversion experience in the Full Gospel Church and believed that God had called him to professional Christian ministry. André accordingly studied at Berea Theological College in Irene, where he completed the first phase of his ministerial preparation in 1968. He then served Central Full Gospel Church in Cape Town until 1976. In the meantime André had continued his formal studies and received at the University of South Africa a Bachelor of Theology in 1976 and an Honours Bachelor of Theology three years later. He subsequently took a Master of Arts in Religious Studies at the University of Cape Town, where in 1984 he completed a thesis on the Baptist understanding of relations between church and state. André's choice of a denominational topic was personally appropriate, because since 1977 he had been the minister of Meadowridge Baptist Church. In addition to his pastoral duties, André served as a part-time lecturer at Chaldo Bible Institute, the Bible Institute at Kalk Bay, and the Baptist Theological College in Athlone. In 1985 he was called to the Baptist church at Umhlanga north of Durban. The following year this dynamic speaker was elected president of the Baptist Union. for a normal twelve-month term.⁷⁵

André delineated the essence of his understanding of the proper relationship between Baptist churches and the civil governments of the societies in which they functioned in a four-part article published in *The South African Baptist* in 1985, shortly before his election to the denominational presidency. In the first instalment, titled simply "Baptists and Politics", he sought to come to grips with the broad resistance within the denomination to even a discussion of the subject. André acknowledged that one could frequently hear objections to the ostensibly "new" trend of raising a voice of protest on matters which had political implications. "Why are we, as Baptists, getting involved in politics?" was the common refrain. "For years we have concentrated on man's spiritual needs and preached the gospel of salvation. Now we are following the lead of some other politically-involved denominations and focussing upon secondary issues. We even criticise the Government which we are instructed to obey. Let's get back to our real calling". André had little trouble dispensing with this attitude, although given the fact that many of his readers held it, he was

compelled to do so tactfully. He began in an uncontroversial and virtually indisputable manner by arguing on the basis of deeply grounded historical precedent. "Baptists have always been involved in socio-political issues", André generalised. He traced this tradition of activism from such seventeenth-century denominational ancestors in England as Thomas Helwys and John Bunyan down to his own time. "From the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries Baptists did not question the propriety of their involvement in socio-political affairs", he further inferred, though without citing any evidence. André declared that the transformation took place between approximately 1910 and 1930. On what he based this periodisation is unclear. Indeed, the logic of his statement concerning the absence of challenges to political involvement is itself problematical and difficult to substantiate without engaging in extensive induction. In this context André mentions David Moberg's *The Great Reversal: Evangelism versus Social Concern*, a book briefly cited in Chapter II of the present study. That widely quoted American volume, however, does not pertain to South African Baptists. What André was able to demonstrate without difficulty is that for several decades, beginning as early as 1894, the Baptist Union began to pass resolutions pertaining to race relations and other social and political issues. He also showed that in 1924 the denomination had asserted that "the Church of Jesus Christ is bound to oppose the continuance of any wrong in the State".⁷⁶

Having established that Baptists in Britain and South Africa had frequently raised prophetic voices on political matters, André proceeded to defend the way in which they had done so. Indirectly addressing a potential complaint, he insisted that "the Baptist Union has acted along the lines of principle and not of party-political loyalty". Bolstering this contention, André informed readers that the denomination had protested against various policies long before the accession of the still governing National Party to power in 1948. Moreover, the objections of various politically conservative Baptists that it was improper to embarrass the government by criticising it publicly seemed unfounded to him. He contended that the Baptist Union's resolutions had been "courteously-worded" and that it had "stated its opposition to injustice in a clear but nonbelligerent manner" but did not substantiate either of these assertions.

Furthermore, in his perception "events have often proved that the warnings and protests [of the Baptist Union] have been valid and far-sighted". Examples of this seemed to abound. In 1925, André noted, the denomination had declared that "disaster faces us if selfish and racial considerations are allowed to rule", while in 1957 it had predicted that discriminatory legislation would create frustrations which in turn would precipitate racial violence. André did not believe he belonged to a backward-facing communion, because "many of the reforms being discussed at present were, in fact, advocated by the Baptist Union decades ago!" As his final point, he stated that the denomination "has repeatedly called upon South African Baptists to live lives free from racial prejudice and to engage in action which will contribute towards a more just society". This appears to have been in response to objections that the Baptist Union risked minimising the role of personal ethics and faith while becoming increasingly vocal in the arena of public issues.⁷⁷

In the second segment of his serial article, André discussed the Biblical basis for relations between church and state and sought to deal with two common misunderstandings or, as he put it, "stubborn myths", in this regard. These were, in brief, that Romans 13 mandated total and unquestioning obedience to civil governments and that "because there is no clear Biblical precedent for Church involvement in socio-political issues, such involvement is *ipso facto* wrong". André, like many commentators before him, dispensed with the former quite easily through basic exegesis. He demonstrated that in Romans 13:1 the verb *hypotassesthai* means to subordinate or, in his translation, "to arrange oneself under", not simply "to obey". André drew a comparison with the usage of the same word in Ephesians 5:21, where readers are admonished to "be subject to one another". He also argued that if categorical obedience to the state were required by Romans 13, then the words of Peter in Acts 5:29 ("We must obey God rather than men") would be impossible to observe and the church would not have survived its infancy. André quoted approvingly the words of the American Mennonite ethicist John Yoder in the latter's book, *The Christian Witness to the State*: "No State can be so low on the scale of relative justice that the duty of the Christian is no longer to be subject; no state can rise so high on that scale that Christians are not

called to some sort of suffering because of their refusal to agree with its self-glorification and the resultant injustices".⁷⁸

Turning to the question of the legitimacy of the church's involvement in socio-political issues, André reasoned that the Baptist Union had three choices. First, it could give up completely its practice of passing resolutions. He cautioned readers, however, that consistency would require the denomination to remain silent on such matters as alcohol, gambling, and pornography, against which it had long protested. Secondly, the Baptist Union could adopt a "selective" policy concerning resolutions, according to which it would be free to express a voice on some matters but not on others. "Of course, if we adopt this 'selective' approach we are obliged to explain why one socio-political issue falls within the Church's sphere of responsibility and another does not", André warned, without mentioning the obvious fact that such a policy would probably accentuate the racial cleavage in the denomination. Thirdly, the Baptist Union could explicitly opt for a policy of "engagement". This, of course, was the course which he believed it should follow. As André explained, "The Church's mandate extends beyond the preaching of a gospel of personal salvation (seen in spiritual terms only) and includes temporal affairs such as justice and morality in society". He acknowledged, however, that in order to advocate this position, Baptists would "need to demonstrate biblically and theologically that such involvement is desirable or at least permissible". André then set out to do precisely that, stating that one of his goals was to provide a Biblical and not a "biblicistic" foundation. In words which could hardly have been more relevant to many South African Baptists in their facile employment of Romans 13 and other New Testament passages when attacking the practice of challenging the policies of the state, he defined the latter as "the shallow, somewhat imperceptive citation of a text or incident without proper regard for the specific and general context and for the principles laid down in Scripture as a whole". André appealed to such passages as Romans 13:1-7, I Timothy 2:1-4, and I Peter 2:13-17 as providing "important *clues*" about relations between church and state but emphasised his belief that while they "guide us" and "set the parameters for our thought and action" they do not "purport to provide a complete blue-print". Furthermore, he pointed out that such

texts as Matthew 22:15-22 (concerning paying taxes to Caesar), which other South African Baptists had occasionally cited in arguments pertaining to relations between church and state, and Revelation 13:1-10 (regarding the beast of the Apocalypse, often interpreted as the Roman state during the Neronian persecution), which few had mentioned in this context, were equally relevant. André was evidently dissatisfied with the tendency of many conservative South Africans to use the Bible as a rhetorical instrument for the justification of their tacit acceptance of the *status quo*. Like most other theologians, including Biblical scholars and others, he regarded it as axiomatic that in many respects the world of the New Testament differed radically from that of the twentieth century and that to apply to modern South Africa texts relating to *inter alia* the political conditions of the former without attempting to find the underlying principles inherently distorted the essential Biblical message. This all too common practice seemed particularly ironic because, in contrast to the apostolic church, the Baptist Union of Southern Africa existed "in a country where politicians profess to be believers and speak of upholding Christian values". André did not go so far as to assert that South Africa was a democratic society, but he made clear his understanding of Romans 13 that post-Enlightenment forms of government, no less than Roman dictatorships, were ordained of God, and that Christians themselves living in societies where such political institutions obtained were therefore part of God's plan for the ordering of Creation, a notion which does not seem to have occurred to many other Baptists in South Africa, if their written comments about Romans 13 are even a remotely indicative barometer of their sophistication in this regard.⁷⁹

In the third instalment, André addressed "those who would claim that our Baptist witness to the State has been totally ineffective, that we have failed miserably either because of an unbiblical pietism or because of a class-conditioned approach to the South African scene". Such a categorical condemnation, he believed, could not be supported. Yet André, as both an observer of and participant in the denomination's "witness" to the South African government, had to concede much in terms of "observable weaknesses" before he could begin to catalogue the Baptist Union's empirically demonstrable achievements in its endeavours to influence public policy. He focused

on four relevant Achilles' heels which had diminished the potential impact of the denomination in the area of social ethics. His first point, namely that Baptists were guilty of "conformity to the pattern of South African society", was nearly a universal truism applicable to most white Christians in the country and thus lacked specific rhetorical vigour. The second weakness which André cited was also inclusive and vague; he declared that "by and large, Baptists do not seem to have been involved in the pressing social needs of South African society". Without citing a single such need, however, André must have left readers wondering what issues he believed they should have tackled but did not. Thirdly, he argued that the Baptist Union's concern about remaining politically neutral, which he regarded as in itself commendable, had often been misconstrued so as to rob the church of much of its voice. "If the Church is to speak 'prophetically' or to offer a 'social critique'", André insisted, "it is obliged to go to the heart of the matter". At this juncture he came close to confronting the issue of apartheid but did not address it directly. "We have objected to certain aspects of discriminatory legislation", André stated obliquely, adding that "such legislation cannot be understood in isolation from the ideology which it has sought to buttress". He explained that "the strange notion has existed that the objection to an aspect of legislation is 'a-political' while the denunciation of the ideology itself implies party-political alignment". Instead of identifying the doctrine of apartheid or commenting on the theological underpinnings of it, however, André proceeded to his final point, which was that in the Baptist Union there was "a subtle tendency to dissociate anthropology (the doctrine of man) from soteriology (the doctrine of salvation) as though God's concern for man *as man* were merely appended to his desire to save man". He urged his fellow Baptists to take seriously the Biblical understanding of mankind as an integral part of God's plan of salvation. No less emphatically, André implored them to link any ventures in prophetic witness to the Christian message in general and to realise that a concern for justice should not be isolated from the latter: "Indeed, our action on the socio-political front must be inextricably related to our proclamation of the gospel". Again, however, he reduced the potential impact of this admonition by declining to give any specific instances of it.⁸⁰

Having effectively conceded that the social ethical witness of the Baptist Union tended to be weak and having given general reasons for its weakness, André sought to define legitimate dimensions for the church's socio-political witness in relation to its proclamation of the Gospel. "Of what does this gospel consist?" he asked rhetorically. "It is the good news, not only that Jesus died for us but that He rose from the dead and is now exalted to the right hand of the Father. In Him God's kingdom has come. He who took the way of suffering, now exercises dominion over all things seen and unseen", André answered in terms with which most of his readers presumably would have agreed. He went beyond the denominational consensus, however, by stating that the Gospel has both personal and universal "implications for the whole of life, not only in the future but also in the present!" These words introduced André's understanding of a holistic Gospel which, however, he did not define well in this third instalment. Instead, he made the pivotal point that "sin affects society, as well as individuals", an insight which many other theologians in South Africa and elsewhere had expressed for decades but which was still not widely grasped in the Baptist Union. "The salvation God promised includes the elimination of the dehumanizing effects of sin", André explained, adding that "we are called to witness concerning God's kingdom in the present age (Matt 24:14; Col 4:11)".⁸¹

Not until writing his fourth and final instalment did André present his seminal notion of a holistic Gospel, which he introduced in the context of a miscellany of related matters. André carefully made this point in terms obviously intended to be palatable for pietistic consumption, implicitly emphasising the ongoing and comprehensive nature of individual sanctification. "We know very well that many things take place spontaneously when a person accepts Christ", he began. "Yet people do not automatically lose all their bad habits nor do their prejudices melt. They need to be instructed concerning the practical implications of the Faith (or else we had better scrap a third of the New Testament)". André also tacitly underscored the general inconsistency and intervening self-interest of many Baptists on matters of social ethics. "People do love to hear us speaking out about sins that are not a problem to them", he declared. "The same person who applauds the preacher's courage when he speaks out about

gambling may well object that the preacher is exceeding his mandate when he speaks about injustice". To André, the latter was not merely a defensible option but an obligation, and he admonished his colleagues to regard it as theirs, as well: "Pastors, let's not be intimidated by those for whom a pietistic gospel is convenient. If we are, we are doing *them* a disservice".⁸²

The miscellany which André presented in the same concluding segment of his article included several general suggestions of ways in which "Baptists can play a more constructive role in society". He defended the much-criticised practice of passing resolutions pertaining to public policies at the annual assemblies on the grounds that the practice did not violate the principle of congregational autonomy and the statements which it issued, though generally quite innocuous, were "more representative of grass-root opinions than those of more centrally-governed denominations". To the frequently Baptist heard refrain that "we need to be apolitical", André gave an emphatic "No!", explaining that "silence also constitutes a decision. To many it implies acquiescence in the *status quo*". Furthermore, he urged readers to question the assumed objectivity of their ostensibly Biblically based positions on social issues. "We may like to think that our attitudes and opinions come directly from the Word of God", André cautioned in terms familiar to anyone with the most rudimentary grounding in social psychology but much less so amongst South African Baptists in general. "Unfortunately this is not so. Look at the wide variety of political convictions among believers with similar theological standpoints. Our ideas are intimately bound up with our social environment in at least an unconscious way. We cannot think and act in some antiseptic laboratory. . . . We need to take cognisance of our own social conditioning". Turning to practical matters, André offered a few pithy suggestions on the individual, congregational, and denominational level. He urged his denominational fellows to cultivate greater personal contacts with people from other racial groups, Christians from other denominations, and even non-believers, a radical suggestion for a white Baptist clergyman to make. "Have you ever honestly *listened* to a Black brother expressing his feelings about the *status quo*?" André challenged his readers. He was less specific in addressing the question of how local churches could become more

meaningfully involved in contemporary social issues, but he suggested that they should "exert a sound influence" on community affairs, especially in concert with congregations representing other denominations. André held no brief for those who argued that "the Church as church ought not to become involved". He asserted that "the burden of proof rests with those who contend that two or more Christians may not do together what one Christian may do in his private capacity". André understood that given the polity of the Baptist Union, there was a relatively low ceiling on what it as a denomination could do in terms of social ethical relevance. Nevertheless, he believed that the theological colleges should pay greater attention to current public issues, co-operating with the Christian Citizenship and Human Relations committees to prepare papers on such matters.⁸³

It is impossible to gauge the impact of André's endeavours to sensitise his fellow Baptists to the social ethical implications of the Gospel and to counter the attitudes within the Baptist Union which impeded the holistic kind of ethical outlook which he believed should prevail. In retrospect, it seems obvious that André could have stated some parts of his argument more forcefully and, by providing more explicit examples, would have given it more currency and thrust than it probably had. Clearly, he failed to sway all the politically conservative white Baptists. The warnings of people like R.A. Gorven, cited earlier in the present chapter, that the denomination was becoming political, were prompted by *inter alia* André's serial article.⁸⁴ What is striking as a historical fact, however, is that André's public espousal of his position resonated with the greater boldness of the Christian Citizenship Committee and, to some extent, the Executive of the Baptist Union *vis-à-vis* the South African government behind the scenes. Moreover, André's position on relations between church and state, which was among the most progressive which any white South African Baptist had expressed on the subject until that time, signalled at least a gradual shift in the thinking of prominent members of the Baptist Union. Challenges to the government could no longer be dismissed as merely the province of a radical fringe on the periphery of the denomination. Slightly more than a year after the publication of his serial article, André was elected president of the Baptist Union.

Reactions to *The Kairos Document*

No consideration of South African Baptist social ethics during the latter half of the 1980s can fail to consider Baptist reactions to *The Kairos Document*. This statement, which several theologians affiliated with the Institute for Contextual Theology in Johannesburg drafted in 1985 when South Africa was in a paroxysm of political and social violence, immediately became one of the most controversial ethical policy declarations to emerge from South Africa since the publication of the SACC's *Message to the People of South Africa* seventeen years earlier. Indeed, it caused international debate as countless essays and articles in support of or challenging its essence dotted theological journals, the religious press, and other media. Conservatives and, for that matter, many reform-minded theologians like Archbishop Desmond Tutu, either unequivocally condemned or at least rejected the initial version of *The Kairos Document* as heretical, one-sided, misdirected, poorly written, and even typographically flawed. Many other South Africans and foreigner observers, however, regarded it as an imperfect but nevertheless useful instrument for identifying the white domination and political captivity of theology and ecclesiastical life in South Africa.

In brief, *Kairos* was a blistering critique of the white-dominated or Eurocentric theologies which prevailed in the churches of South Africa and both the ecclesiastical and political misuse of them. The authors of the document, deeply indebted to South African variants of liberation theology, believed that most of the theology in the country fell into three categories. "State theology" was defined as "simply the theological justification of the *status quo* with its racism, capitalism and totalitarianism". A hallmark of this was identified as the unnuanced interpretation of Romans 13:1-7 as meaning unquestioning obedience to governments, regardless of whether they conducted themselves in a manner consonant with Christian ethics. "Church theology", which was regarded as being typical of the so-called "English-speaking churches", involved moderate criticism of apartheid, an emphasis on reconciliation and justice, and the absence of a definite commitment to the involvement of the church in politics. According to the drafters of *The Kairos Document*, advocates of

"church theology" had failed to understand the economic underpinnings of apartheid or empower the oppressed to cast off its yoke. Such churchmen had tried without success to end it or ameliorate its effects through political means. "Prophetic theology" was the approach which *Kairos* viewed as the only legitimate Christian voice in the South African conflict. The situation in the country was portrayed dualistically, with the government playing the role of Satan. In such extreme circumstances, according to *Kairos*, no compromise, such as that which "church theology" ostensibly represented, was defensible. Christians and their churches, according to the final chapter, titled "Challenge to Action", must throw their weight with the poor and oppressed and participate directly in the liberation of South African society.

For a variety of reasons, not least the simplistic dualism of the theology and the categorical identification of the oppressors with Satan and concomitant failure to recognise the universality of sin, many theologians and other ecclesiastical figures of all races, including, to the surprise of many, Desmond Tutu, refused to sign the first version of *Kairos*. An enormous controversy about the validity of the statement ensued. Supporters questioned whether those who either refused to sign or openly opposed it were sincerely interested in the application of the Gospel to the crisis of racist oppression in South Africa. On the other hand, many on the other side of the fence believed that the theological, logical, and other weaknesses of *The Kairos Document* rendered it virtually useless in or even counterproductive in the struggle against apartheid.

Amongst South African Baptists, reactions to *Kairos* varied immensely. Very few affixed their signatures to the document, although some whose inclinations are to liberation theology have insisted privately that if they had been given the opportunity to sign, they would have done so.⁸⁵ Most white Baptists criticised it to varying degrees, however, often calling it well-intended but theologically naive and carelessly drafted. Within the scope of this study we shall limit our consideration to two negative responses, one virulent and the other moderate. Considered together, these two probably represent much of the spectrum of white Baptist reactions to the controversial statement.

Edward Cain, whose positions on certain public issues we shall examine in detail in Chapter VIII, vilified *Kairos* in *Signposts*, the staunchly conservative newsletter he edited for United Christian Action. Since the 1970s this former missionary to Moçambique has been preoccupied with halting the proliferation of communism in southern Africa and believes it is part of his calling to call public attention to what he regards as Marxist tendencies in the churches of the region.⁸⁶ To anyone acquainted with his personal and organisational agenda, therefore, the tone of his response to *Kairos* was predictable, even if not all of the contents were not.

Cain devoted an entire issue of *Signposts* to the topic. Most of this was an attempt to prove that "it is based solidly on Marxist/Leninist ideological concepts with a sprinkling of Bible quotations to give it a religious flavour!" He sought to substantiate this assertion through various means, most of which involved taking passages of *Kairos* out of context and showing that some of the language and part of the conceptual framework in it were similar to that of forms of Marxism. Cain had little difficulty proving that the authors of the document, in harmony with classic communist theory and rhetoric, divided society into two major classes, the oppressors and the oppressed. He quoted several passages to demonstrate this, perhaps none more incisive than this: "Here we have a god who is historically on the side of the white settlers, who dispossesses black people of their land. . . . It is the god of the casspirs and hippos, the god of teargas, rubber bullets, shamboks, prison cells and death sentences".⁸⁷ What Cain failed to mention, however, is that this is at best a weak and incomplete manifestation of Marxism, which traditionally divided society into three or more classes. Furthermore, and far more significantly, he failed to come to grips with the underlying fact that South Africa is a society with severe internal divisions, some of which run along intersecting racial and economic lines. Indeed, Cain did not seem particularly interested in knowing whether the socio-political analysis presented in *Kairos* was empirically correct; his concern was with sniffing out elements of Marxism which he perceived in the document. The same could be said of Cain's rhetorical question, "Does it accept the concept and inevitability of the class struggle and that the oppressed are the instrument for change who will create a just society?" Again, he found

it a simple task to answer it affirmatively by reproducing eleven passages in which this kind of language was used. On slightly firmer ground, Cain pointed out certain weaknesses in the argumentation of *Kairos*, such as the failure to define the "just society" which it envisaged (and which he dismissed as in any case illusory) or the semantic legerdemain surrounding uses of the word "violence". He suggested that Christians demand that the authors of *Kairos* explain how their teachings differed from Marxism.⁸⁸

Cain also attacked *Kairos* on other grounds. One was guilt by association. Given the anti-SACC bias of his readership, it was easy for him to score cheap points by pointing out that of the 151 signatories of the first version, no fewer than 142 were members of churches which belonged to that controversial body. In a quantitative analysis of these people by denomination, he showed that such communions as the Church of the Province of South Africa and the Methodist Church, both of which had gained reputations as institutions in which social and political protests against the *status quo* in South Africa were commonplace, were most heavily represented. Similarly, Cain could denigrate the document by underscoring that "as far as can be ascertained, all the signatories who are politically involved are associated with the United Democratic Front" and that some were also attached to the Institute for Contextual Theology. "This strong link", he wrote, "makes one question whether the *Kairos* document is merely a party political paper".⁸⁹

The tone of Peter Holness' response to *Kairos* was much less paranoid than that of Cain, and its contents were more closely reasoned. In a series of articles published in *Baptists Today* during the last few months of 1986, the chairman of the CCC began his analysis by arguing for the relevance of *Kairos*, of which, he declared, "responsible Christians" in South Africa should be aware. He found it significant because it had emerged during and addressed a critical period in the nation's turbulent recent history, claimed to be "a Christian, biblical and theological comment", had made an impact both in South Africa and abroad, and was "a powerful popularisation of a type of liberation theology", something which he would explicitly reject in a subsequent segment. In this first one, however, Holness was content to explain the popularity of *Kairos* by pointing out that it

"appeals to a tradition in Church history which has taught that a tyrannical regime has no moral legitimacy" and that according to it "the South African state has become such a tyrant". He emphasised, however, that in this introductory segment he was reserving judgment on the document.⁹⁰

In the second part of his serial article, Holness explored briefly some of the principal reactions to *Kairos*, seeking to explain to his fellow white Baptists, most of whom were probably hostile to the document, why they should give both it and critical responses to it serious consideration. He believed that despite the weaknesses which many detractors had attacked, *Kairos* could teach Christians at least three lessons, each of which confirmed Holness' own general attitude towards the relevance of Christianity to social ethics. First, it "highlights grave injustices with our society" and "expressed the anger and dissatisfaction which many people of colour feel very deeply". Secondly, *Kairos* "rightly stressed God's concern for social justice, and His particular concern for the poor and oppressed". Finally, overlapping with this, the document "reminds us that there is a social and political dimension to the gospel which must not be lost if the church is to retain its prophetic ministry". That some of his conservative colleagues had denied this did not deter Holness from declaring in a related statement that "the criticism by *Kairos* of 'State Theology' is largely valid". He acknowledged that much of the document rested on liberation theology, but this did not seem to bother Holness greatly at this stage. Instead of rejecting that current wholesale, Holness sought to explain what the essence of liberation theology was and why readers should make some rudimentary attempt to understand it as a major phenomenon in contemporary Christian thought. He made clear, however, his ultimate disagreement with the heart of liberation theology as an expression of Christian salvation: "As evangelicals we insist that God's redemption for lost sinners and not political and economic liberation is the heart of the gospel".⁹¹

Not until Holness had laid this foundation did he spell out what he regarded as the principal "doctrinal deficiencies" in *Kairos*, areas in which it "parts company with a biblical, evangelical theology". He began this final segment, sub-titled "Weighed in the Balances and Found Wanting", with the general approach to theology in *Kairos*

which, he believed, issued from "man and his situation instead of God and His revelation". Holness lamented that "in *Kairos*, theology has virtually become a synonym for socio-political activism". He also expressed dissatisfaction with some of the use of the Christian Scriptures in the document. The authors of *Kairos*, Holness believed, violated his understanding of II Timothy 3:16 in that they supposedly did not regard the Bible as "the normal and objective authority". Precisely what he meant is unclear because of a typographical error in the article. The gist of his complaint, however, appears to be that to the authors of *Kairos* the text of the Scriptures does not have inherent meaning but gained it only when applied to a specific context, such as "the political and economic injustice in South Africa". When used in this way, Holness argued, "the human situation becomes the starting point, and inevitably, the decisive factor". He found specific instances of eisegesis resulting from this approach and gave as two examples the use of Romans 13:1-7 and the Exodus in *Kairos*. The Pauline text pertaining to the state, Holness believed, was fundamentally misunderstood in that document because its authors had overlooked the "abiding principle", namely that "the State derives its authority and function from God and must be obeyed - unless obedience to it would involve disobedience to God (Acts 5:29)". He also accused the authors of *Kairos* of caricaturing the Exodus by regarding it as "an act of political and economic liberation which came about 'from below' through the oppressed Hebrew slaves in Egypt". Holness saw no common ground, metaphorical or otherwise, between that interpretation and his own, which was that the Exodus was "the sovereign act of God, linked to His covenant relationship with Israel". In another point of criticism, he took *Kairos* to task for beginning with social analysis and proceeding from that to Christianity, not *vice versa*. By using Marxist social stratification as the foundation, the authors of the document had in effect contradicted the Biblical view that "while God is particularly concerned for all who are wronged and underprivileged, He is no respecter of one group above another". The emphasis on the typology of "oppressors" and "oppressed" had violated the doctrine of original sin. It struck Holness as conspicuous that "*Kairos* says far too little about the sins of the 'oppressed'". The view of the church also drew the fire of this dedicated Baptist

churchman. He conceded the obvious point that "the Church has often confined its ministry to the spiritual realm and ignored vital social and moral matters about which the Bible has a lot to say". But *Kairos*, in his view, went to the opposite extreme in that it "seems to reject the spiritual dimension altogether and to transform the church's ministry into nothing more than socio-political involvement" which ignored the transcendence of God and the "vertical" nature of Christians' relationship to the divine. Turning to the role of the church *vis-à-vis* the state, Holness disagreed that it was "futile" for the former to work for the reform of the latter or that the latter was "irreformable". That view, he contended, ran counter to the experiences of the Old Testament prophets, who repeatedly addressed civil governments and implored them to change. "How much more vital it is for the Church in South Africa to be the moral conscience of a country which professes to be Christian", wrote Holness, who had experienced no small degree of frustration in his endeavours to prompt P.W. Botha's government to reform. Like many other commentators, including Cain, Holness found fault with the tacit condoning of violence in *Kairos*. "This is unbiblical", he declared without explaining why he believed such was the case or citing a single verse of Scripture. "Anything which goes beyond the legitimate maintenance of society, or beyond self-defence, is violence. The end never justifies the means". The spirit permeating *Kairos*, Holness subsequently asserted, was not that of Jesus Christ and his commandment to love one's enemies and pray for those who persecuted. Finally, Holness summarised his critique of *Kairos* by cataloguing its what he regarded as its doctrinal deficiencies. They were, in brief, "a humanistic view of liberation 'from above'", "a secular understanding of the Kingdom of God", "a loss of transcendence and of the sovereignty of God in history", "a weak view of sin", "a blurring of the distinction between the Church and the world", and "a false conception of forgiveness". "*Kairos* purports to be a theological and biblical document. It claims to be God's prophetic word to South Africa today", Holness declared in his conclusion. But such, he judged, it was not. "In Revelation 21:2 one finds a vision of the New Jerusalem descending from God. By contrast *Kairos* seeks a secular city".⁹²

The Rustenburg Conference

In November 1990 more than two hundred South African and foreign delegates and observers attended an *ad hoc* interracial "National Conference of Churches in South Africa" at Rustenburg in the western Transvaal. Representing a relatively broad spectrum of denominations and ecclesiastical agencies, most notably the SACC, they discussed the implications of Christian social ethics for the rapidly changing national situation in the country. This five-day meeting gained international attention when Professor Willie Jonker, a relatively prominent Dutch Reformed systematic theologian at the University of Stellenbosch, issued a public apology to the black South Africans present for the sins which Afrikaners had committed in oppressing their race. Archbishop Desmond Tutu accepted the apology on behalf of the people to whom it was given. Jonker's move, and the spirit of reconciliation which prevailed at the conference, won praise from foreign ecclesiastical leaders in general, as did a significant speech by Methodist ethicist Charles Villa-Vicencio of the University of Cape Town, who painted a scathing portrait of white responsibility for black suffering in the country. In the charged atmosphere of rapidly changing South Africa, however, reactions to the Rustenburg parley varied enormously, not least amongst white and other Baptists. Some praised the conclave as a timely step in the direction of sorely needed racial harmony. Others, including some participants, questioned its instrumental value and on theological grounds criticised the "Rustenburg Declaration", a statement which delegates adopted outlining their analysis of South Africa's racial problems and the implications of Christian social ethics in coming to grips with them.

Generally speaking, the National Conference of Churches in South Africa received at least the qualified approval of those Baptists who had sought to prompt the Baptist Union to speak out more boldly about social ethics, especially against apartheid, during the 1980s. While praising the conciliatory dimension of the meeting, some expressed dissatisfaction with the liberationist mode of theological expression which marked much of the "Rustenburg Declaration". The conference did not get extensive coverage in the denominational magazine, however, and the fact that the 1990 annual assembly had met

a month before the interdenominational parley in Rustenburg obviously limited the attention it otherwise may have gained in that forum.

One prominent Baptist who spoke freely in public about the conference and whose words received sufficient journalistic coverage to occasion controversy was Ellis André, an official delegate and former president of the Baptist Union who had recently become pastor of the nondenominational Rosebank Union Church in Johannesburg. He conceded that the Baptist Union, like many other denominations, had fallen short of fulfilling its ethical responsibilities in South Africa. André noted that "in a long list of resolutions we have repeatedly condemned apartheid, not only the effects of its implementation but the ideology itself" but that while "our resolutions have been impressive . . . our witness has been defective". He explained cryptically, "We have been pietistic and, in that respect, we have been less than faithful to the Gospel". André intensified his negative judgment of the Baptist Union's record *vis-à-vis* apartheid by remarking categorically that "we are guilty. We were wrong. We have failed miserably. We have been conformed to the world". Not mentioned in the journalistic account of André's comments was the fact that while he was one of the Baptist Union's delegates to the conference, he was not authorised to speak for the denomination and that he was merely offering his private opinion to a reporter from *The Citizen*. Compounding possible misunderstanding, the misleading title of the article in which he was thus quoted was "Baptists confess the sin of apartheid".⁹³

At the opposite pole of the spectrum, the both the conference and the "Rustenburg Declaration" met with vilification by politically conservative Baptists, some of whom went to great lengths to condemn it. In the penultimate chapter of the present study we shall examine in detail the Baptist role in so-called "right-wing Christian groups" in South Africa. Two prominent Baptist leaders of such organisations, one of whom attended the National Conference of Churches in South Africa, roundly chastised the meeting both in the daily press and in the newsletters which they edited. Peter Hammond, the founder and director of Frontline Fellowship, and Edward Cain of United Christian Action, an umbrella organisation which co-ordinates the activities of various conservative religio-political agencies, are both known as

outspoken critics of liberation theology and unrelenting foes of communism who regard it as part of their calling to halt the perceived proliferation of Marxism in southern Africa. A reporter from *The Citizen* interviewed these two shortly after the conference, curiously calling them "moderate churchmen", a relative appellation which arguably reveals much more about that daily newspaper than about either Hammond's or Cain's ideological commitments. Their associations, moreover, were identified as "moderate-traditionalist church organisations". If these terms were deceptive, those in which Cain and Hammond expressed themselves accurately represented their attitudes towards the Rustenburg conference. Hammond, who like André was an invited delegate to the meeting, though unlike André did not represent the Baptist Union there, criticised the published statistics of representation at it, calling them "grossly inaccurate". By his count, only forty-four denominations were represented, not the 200 which some of the organisers claimed. He also called attention to the fact that while twenty-two of those present were officials of the World Council of Churches and denominations affiliated with the SACC was very well represented, others, such as the large Zion Christian Church, were vastly underrepresented. Hammond wondered, therefore, how such a parley could hope to work effectively for national Christian reconciliation. Furthermore, this political and theological conservative was irked by what he regarded as the domination of the conference by liberation theologians. "Evangelicals", amongst whom he numbered himself, were relegated "to the back seats" of the assembly and expected to accept passively what he labelled "a socialist economic programme". When Hammond and others had sought to introduce motions from the floor to condemn Satanism, international economic sanctions against South Africa, child abuse, political murders, and terrorism, they were not recognised. He concluded that "the whole nature of the conference was one of rubber-stamping by the African National Congress" and that this meeting, "which was meant to promote 'a united Christian witness'[,] was monopolised by the SA Council of Churches, to promote a political programme similar to that of the ANC".⁹⁴ Hammond hurled further accusations at the organisers of the conference in a letter to *The Citizen*. "Instead of tackling the breakdown of morals and the breakup of families", he declared, they

had preoccupied themselves "with promoting the unworking socialist programme of State interventionism and 'land redistribution'". Guilt by association, innuendo, unsubstantiated allegations, and faulty grammar formed the conclusion of his angry epistle: "Humanism, Socialism, and radicalism, support of terrorist groups, and a lack of concern for pro-life and moral concerns have become the trademarks of the World Council of Churches and their friends".⁹⁵

These remarks apparently caused the leadership of the Baptist Union a great deal of embarrassment. They issued a statement that neither Hammond nor Cain was one of its recognised clergymen.⁹⁶ The CCC clearly sided with André in the public dispute about whose views at Rustenburg represented those of the denomination. At the committee's meeting on 5 February 1991, members agreed that Andre and the other official Baptist delegate to the conference prepare a report for publication in *Baptists Today*. They also decided to convey to the Executive of the Baptist Union their misgivings regarding the denomination's recognition of Hammond as one of its "associate missionaries".⁹⁷

Writing in late 1990 in the newsletter which he edited for Frontline Fellowship, Hammond launched a frontal assault on the recent conference. Much of his argument hinged on showing common ground between the "Rustenburg Declaration" on the one hand and the "Luanda Declaration" of the ANC and the "Harare Declaration" of the Organisation for African Unity on the other. Shared elements which he found unacceptable included "one person, one vote, on a common voters role in a unitary, non-sexist, non-racial, democratic state", "a Bill of rights", "affirmative action", "parity in standards of living", the demand that society "eradicate poverty", and the "transfer of economic power", although why these were anathema he did not explain. Instead, Hammond was content merely to assert, "Basically the Rustenburg Declaration is a humanist document advocating a Socialist programme". He also attacked the procedures of the conference with unrestrained melodrama. "The conference was characterized by emotional speeches, guilt manipulation, slanderous attacks on traditional Christian values and denigration of missionaries", Hammond alleged without adducing supporting evidence. "There was an irrational obsession with the redistribution of land, an uncritical

acceptance of socialism and an adulterous love affair with liberation theology. The tolerance for inane drivel was unbelievable".⁹⁸

Two months later Cain devoted an entire issue of his eight-page newsletter, *Signposts*, to a similar condemnation of the Rustenburg conference. This was necessary, he explained, because that assembly had received what he believed was a surfeit of unjustly favourable journalistic coverage. "It is in order to balance this overwhelmingly positive publicity, that *Signposts* offers a critical assessment of the Rustenburg Conference". Critical it indeed was. Cain also rejected the meeting and its findings on theological grounds. Doctrinal and ecumenical pluralism were clearly not for him. In one of the many crass and unsubstantiated generalisations which mar much of his writing, Cain asserted that "When Bible-believing Christians associate in an enterprise with those who reject the inspiration of the Bible, the Fall of Man, the Deity of Christ, the Virgin Birth, the Atonement, Justification by faith and even question the very existence of the God revealed by the Bible, are they not in violation of Paul's injunction in II Cor 6:14-18?" Who these wholesale heretics at Rustenburg were, however, he did not specify. Cain went into considerable detail, however, in dissecting the exaggerated figures of representation and noted with unveiled glee that after he and Hammond had **challenged** them the organisers of the conference had issued **scaled-down** statistics to the press. Not only quantitatively but also qualitatively did Cain find the meeting distasteful. "Ecumenicals played a major role at Rustenburg", he declared, playing on a widely held prejudice against the World Council of Churches and the SACC. **Predictably, Cain** rejected the statement which these delegates issued. Much of his attack on the "Rustenburg Declaration" lacks theological substance, consisting instead of little more than accusations of guilt based on association. "Among the '*apartheid laws*' the Declaration calls on the government to repeal are the Homelands, Black Local Authorities and Internal Security Acts (para. 3.3.)", he sniffed. "This is in line with ANC demands". Furthermore, "By calling for a fully representative body to negotiate a new constitution and the setting up of a transitional administration (para. 4.2.5.), the Declaration echoes the ANC's call for a constituent assembly and a transition government". "Fully in line with ANC policy, the Declaration calls for the

establishment of a unitary state". "The demand that 'White' schools be opened to all races (para. 5.2.) is also in line with ANC policy". When Cain attempted to wage his struggle on the battlefield of Biblical exegesis, he meandered into a minefield of difficulties. He found it offensive that in several places the "Rustenburg Declaration" used the term "justice", which, he noted with disdain, was "a favourite of liberation theologians". To Cain this seemed indefensible because he could not find it in the New Testament of his Authorised Version. What he failed to mention is that it occurs repeatedly in the Old Testament, especially in the Prophets, and that it also can be found in modern translations of the New Testament. No less seriously, Cain failed to examine the specific usages and contexts of "justice" in the "Rustenburg Declaration" and assay them with the touchstone of Christian ethics. Nowhere did he probe deeper than the surface of the texts of that hastily drafted statement and his seventeenth-century English translation of the New Testament.⁹⁹

Martin Holdt, the changing contours of whose thinking of the role of the church in social issues we examined earlier in this chapter, also criticised the National Conference of Churches in South Africa, though in somewhat more temperate language and in considerably fewer words. Writing in his journal *Reformation Africa South*, he found in that assembly "nothing to cheer the true believer". It was, in his judgment, nothing more meaningful than "a typical ecumenical gathering where the spectrum of representatives ranged from Roman Catholic to Pentecostal" and where "political rather than spiritual issues were addressed". To Holdt it was particularly troubling that politics had taken precedence, for "merely changing political structures will not eradicate the core problem of sin in the heart of man". When, if ever, churches should address social issues on a co-operative basis he did not indicate. Holdt thought it "sad" that Baptists had participated at Rustenburg, although he did not explain why that role was inherently unhappy. He did, however, chide Ellis André for stating publicly that Baptists should repent for the weakness of their criticism of apartheid and noted that André was not entitled to speak for the denomination as a whole, something which André himself had noted in his interview with *The Citizen*. "Are we soon to follow the tragic example of British Baptists in selling our spiritual birthright for a mess of false

ecumenical potage?" Holdt asked rhetorically without explaining what had been false or evincing any awareness of the history of a prophetic social voice in British Nonconformity.¹⁰⁰

The Question of Theological Education

A comprehensive consideration of the relationship of South African Baptist theological education to the social ethics of the Baptist Union necessarily lies outside the scope of the present study. We must touch on it, however, for at least two reasons. First, there exists in the previous scholarly literature at least one serious indictment of the denomination's seminaries in this regard which has never been proven or even adequately tested. Secondly, an examination of the way in which ethics has been taught to Baptist seminarians in recent years may shed light, though not necessarily a great deal, on the direction the denomination can be expected to move on social issues as South Africa endures the vicissitudes of profound social and political change in the waning years of the twentieth century.

Louise Kretzschmar, whose scathing critique of the social ethics of the Baptist Union we dissected in Chapter II, has accused the denomination of using its programme of pastoral training for black Africans as a "mechanism of dominance". At Fort White College in particular, she has alleged, the curriculum has been both "Euro-centred and privatised" with social ethics receiving "little or no emphasis". As a consequence, graduates of that institution have been ill-prepared "to minister within a context of political oppression and economic deprivation".¹⁰¹ The racial integration of the Baptist theological colleges in Johannesburg and Athlone, she believes, has not significantly improved this state of affairs, for at them non-white students are educated in essentially European theology which has failed to take into adequate consideration the unique contexts in which they will conduct their ministries. As an example of this, Kretzschmar suggests that the techniques of grief counselling which Baptist students learn are not applicable to death situations resulting from violence in black townships.¹⁰²

Kretzschmar does not stand alone in making these accusations. Several black and Coloured graduates of the theological colleges in Athlone and Johannesburg whom the present writer interviewed in 1991 echoed them with varying degrees of severity, although not all agreed entirely with them. Edgar Carolissen, for instance, a former Coloured Baptist pastor who received his ministerial training in Athlone, gave his education there a mixed review. He described the ethics course as "very introductory" but nevertheless helpful for understanding some of the issues he was already confronting and subsequently had to deal with in his pastorate. Carolissen believed it was necessary, however, for his *alma mater* to broaden its curriculum and include a much greater variety of theological approaches, not merely those which stem from "white" or "western" civilisation. He expressed the wish that the small faculty of the institution could be enlarged so as to include at least one black. Moreover, in Carolissen's view practical theology should be revamped. He suggested that the administration of the college should place greater emphasis on contextual field education so that the students would gain greater experience in aspects of practical ministry other than evangelical "soul winning". Related to this, Carolissen believed that in addition to taking theology into the secular world, students of theology should gain more experience in bringing their secular experiences into the world of theology where they could be interpreted in a Christian context. A vital question which he has repeatedly asked himself is, "How does my experience colour the spectacles I wear when I read the Bible and theological works?" Reflection on this encompassing question in the context of a theological college, in his opinion, would go far towards bridging the gap between theological education and subsequent ministry. When asked why the college had not taken such steps, Carolissen expressed the belief that it was reticent to do anything which would substantiate the opinion within the Baptist Union that it is a moderately liberal institution and thereby antagonise the individual Baptists and their congregations which support it financially.¹⁰³

More disillusioned with both his education and the Baptist Union in general is another Coloured alumnus of the college in Athlone, Jack Bruce. The son of a couple who separated when he was five years old,

Bruce experienced great poverty as a child and had to move often. He attended a school in the Zonnebloem area of Cape Town while his mother worked as a domestic servant for a white family in Rondebosch. Nominally an Anglican, he began to read the Bible when fourteen years old and overcame his earlier prejudices against it as an irrelevant collection of fairy tales. Bruce began to view the Israel of the Scriptures not as the Afrikaners but as his fellow Coloureds and prayed fervently that God would set them free from political oppression. At age sixteen he had his first significant contact with Baptists and underwent a conversion experience. This did not prevent him from developing an intense animosity towards whites while at high school. This hatred extended in the mid-1970s to a general dislike of white Baptists, whom he regarded as apolitical mollifiers who preached pietistically and waited for their rewards in heaven. Nevertheless, Bruce began his theological studies at the Baptist theological college in Athlone in 1981. At that time that institution still had a white faculty and a racially integrated but predominantly Coloured student body. He found the racial integration there superficial and the theology he learnt irrelevant to the world he experienced away from the college. Bruce recalls with unveiled bitterness that in 1983 he and the other Coloured students had rejected the national referendum on the creation of a tricameral parliament but that the administration of the college had refused to stand in solidarity with them on that matter. Nevertheless, Bruce completed his studies and in 1985 accepted a call to ministry in the Baptist Union. Within two years, though, he had become "totally disillusioned" with the denomination and left it to serve as a minister in Namibia. This move failed to live up to his expectations. Bruce found the unspecified "evangelicals" with whom he interacted in that country to be "irrelevant" to its struggle for independence from South Africa and consequently left the ministry. In 1991 he stated that he was still trying to discover who both he and God were.¹⁰⁴

By no means are Carolissen and Bruce the most disgruntled alumni of a Baptist theological college in South Africa. That appellation might be reserved for Des Hoffmeister, who is one of the angriest and most disaffected former members of a congregation in the Baptist Union. This native of Cape Town, by his own account, began to ask theological

questions while still unregenerate, and these multiplied after his conversion experience. He found it impossible to harmonise his understanding of Christianity with the Gospel as he heard it preached in Baptist churches; the ostensibly good news of Jesus Christ seemed to be abused as an instrument of oppression. Precisely how Hoffmeister perceived this as a teenager is unclear. In any case, while serving on an itinerant Baptist Union music team, he experienced racial discrimination, as very few host families who accommodated his colleagues were willing to extend hospitality to him. His eight years on the Youth Executive of the Baptist Union proved frustrating, because others constantly rebuffed his suggestions. Nevertheless, Hoffmeister enrolled at the Baptist theological college in Athlone. He quickly became disgruntled with what he called "master's theology", "racist theology", or "Euro-American theology", terms of opprobrium which he uses interchangeably. Hoffmeister consequently transferred to the Baptist college in Johannesburg to complete his formal education but found more of the same at that institution and remained an angry student. He declared in 1991 that none of the books he was required to read seemed relevant to his personal life and complained that he had been compelled to leave his true identity outside the door of the college and play white man inside, engaging in superficial bantering about "white rugby and white cricket". After graduating, Hoffmeister tried without success to "make sense out of the nonsense" he had learnt at college and eventually burnt the "worthless" lecture notes he had taken there. When interviewed in 1991, he stressed repeatedly that the goal of theological education in South Africa, particularly in the Baptist Union, should be the development of "Third World" theologians but found it difficult to articulate specific reforms which would aid in the achievement of that goal.¹⁰⁵

David Mkwai, though apparently less thoroughly disaffected with the Baptist Union than Hoffmeister, echoes some of the same criticism from the viewpoint of an indigenous African. The son of a Xhosa father who was a mineworker and an illiterate, Zulu-speaking mother, he was born in 1947 near the area which later became Soweto and grew up in stifling poverty there. Mkwai describes the living conditions of his childhood succinctly: "It was tough". He became a Christian in 1963 through Youth Alive, a ministry which an American missionary had

established in Soweto. Seven years later Mkwai joined a Baptist congregation in Meadowlands and remained very active in it. In 1975 he began studies at Johannesburg Bible Institute, which later closed its doors. Mkwai left that school in 1977 to join the staff of Youth Alive, which he served for approximately five years. Believing that he was called to complete his theological education, however, he resigned in order to matriculate at the Baptist seminary in Johannesburg. By his own account, he had become politically awakened while serving Youth Alive and begun to regard Christianity and politics as related. Mkwai therefore had two purposes in resuming his formal studies, namely to acquire "book knowledge" and to engage in dialogue with white Christians. Despite some opposition from fellow Africans to his decision to study at a white-dominated college, he enrolled in 1983 and spent three years at the institution in Parktown. In some respects Mkwai was soon disappointed with it. He perceived most of his fellow students as believing that apartheid was ordained of God; few seemed to question its moral tenability. Some conservatives regarded him as a political radical and referred to him as "Tutu". Undeterred, Mkwai tried to avoid giving the impression of being an "angry black" but quietly read the works of such South African theologians as Simon Maimela, a Lutheran advocate of "black theology" at the University of South Africa, and liberation theologian Allan Boesak. Books by these luminaries seemed to stand in stark contrast to most of the European and North American works which his lecturers assigned. Even the latter reading material, Mkwai recalls, was second-hand; he insists that the college placed greater emphasis on plastic-covered interpretative notes which the lecturing staff prepared than on primary texts. Supplementing his courses on the Johannesburg campus, he took what he regards as helpful and stimulating correspondence courses in missiology and systematic theology at the University of South Africa. Further stimuli came from Hoffmeister, whom Mkwai befriended at the college. He regarded Hoffmeister as an atypical Coloured in that he was strongly anti-white. Mkwai believes this friendship was highly influential on the development of his own theology.¹⁰⁶

Not all the non-white students at the Baptist theological colleges agree with these negative assessments. Johann Luface, for example, a

Shona from Zimbabwe who attended the one in Johannesburg during the early 1990s, lauded that institution as "perhaps one of the best [theological colleges] in Africa". When interviewed in 1991, he emphasised that he did not believe the education he was receiving there was or would prove irrelevant to his foreseen ministry to black Baptists. Luface pointed especially to the courses in Old and New Testament, all of which were taught by white theologians, as being equally relevant to black as to white seminarians. He qualified his praise only by pointing out that the instruction in homiletics had to be adapted to make his proclamation of the Gospel more appropriate to indigenous African congregations.¹⁰⁷

Nearly all the white students at the Baptist colleges in Johannesburg and Athlone whom the present writer interviewed expressed general satisfaction with the education they were receiving at those institutions. Christo Heyns, for example, an Afrikaner and convert from the Dutch Reformed Church who was the head student at the college in Athlone in 1991, regarded the training he was then getting as satisfactory preparation for his envisaged ministry as a missionary, possibly in France. He gave Holness' course in ethics moderate praise as "thought-provoking" and stated that John Stott's *Issues Facing Christians Today*, one of the assigned books, was "reasonably balanced". Heyns points out candidly that before enrolling at the college his political and racial views were typical for Afrikaners of his generation. He accepted apartheid and dutifully reported for conscription. Moreover, Heyns could not recall ever hearing social issues mentioned in the pulpit before he undertook his theological studies. How great an impact those studies made on him is impossible to ascertain. In any case, when interviewed in 1991 Heyns left no doubt, that he had not become a political liberal. He still supported the SADF and believed it was "right for the army to quell uprisings". Furthermore, Heyns found that some measure of racial segregation was "natural" because whites had a "standard of culture" different from that of black Africans. The prospect of South Africa being ruled by the African National Congress, Heyns stated, "disturbed" him. "I've seen what they've done to Angola and Moçambique", he reasoned. Absent from his logic is an awareness that the ANC had never ruled in either of those countries; Heyns' fear was apparently of either Marxism

or black African hegemony. On the other hand, he stated that there was "no Biblical reason why apartheid should be upheld" and quoted Paul on the disappearance of the boundary between Jew and Greek before Christ as a relevant New Testament text in this regard.¹⁰⁸

One of Heyns' fellow students, Edvard Kristian Foshaugen, more explicitly praised his theological education in 1991. This aspiring minister, whose father was an immigrant from Norway and who spent part of his childhood in that country, had been subjected to a bewildering array of religious, psychological, political, and other influences before taking up theology in 1990. He had served as a parachutist in the South African army but deserted in order to visit his ailing mother in Norway. Upon returning to South Africa, he was court martialled and found guilty but escaped imprisonment when he threatened to expose the case in the national press. Foshaugen then was diagnosed with cancer and underwent surgery four times as part of his treatment. He nevertheless tasted incarceration, though for only a week in Pollsmoor Prison, after selling a motor vehicle and being, by his own account, wrongly accused of falsifying documents in connection with the sale. Married in 1981, Foshaugen experienced a divorce five years later and considered enlisting in the French Foreign Legion. Instead of becoming a mercenary, however, he engaged in business during the latter half of the 1980s. Along the way Foshaugen had been influenced by the Rhema Church of Ray Macauley as well as by Francis Schaefer and other prominent churchmen and religious movements. At the theological college in Athlone, where Foshaugen had found emotional and spiritual stability, he praised Holness, Roy, and New Testament scholar Crutchley as "very good" lecturers and expressed appreciation for their open-mindedness. "They don't try to indoctrinate us, even though they certainly have their own views", he stated.¹⁰⁹

In the early 1990s, as South Africa began to go through the birth pangs of its post-apartheid era, many white Baptist theology students were still moderately conservative and only slowly emerging from the traditional belief that Christian social ethics was something quite peripheral to their faith and/or believed that improvements in this regard would flow naturally from their receiving Christ. This was expressed by three students from the Quigney Baptist Church in East

London, which is generally regarded as one of the most conservative congregations in the Baptist Union. When interviewed in 1991, they also stated, however, that they believed their positions in this regard were gradually changing due in part to their studies. One, the daughter of a policeman, admitted that while growing up she had "hated" blacks but stressed that her attitude towards them had changed markedly in recent years. Yet they agreed that they had not been exposed to current public issues while at high school, and none had any sympathy for conscientious objection, though all stated that they had never given the matter much thought. It may be revealing that none had heard of their denomination's Christian Citizenship Committee.¹¹⁰

We shall consider briefly the courses in Christian ethics taught at the principal Baptist theological colleges in South Africa, namely those in Johannesburg and Athlone. They do not mirror the overall shape of social ethics in the Baptist Union particularly well, but in any event they indicate some of the concerns of the educators involved and may indirectly shed light on the directions in which ethical thought is headed within the denomination.

Usually Dr Rex Mathie, the principal of the college in Johannesburg, teaches the course at that institution. While the present writer was conducting the research for this study, however, Mathie was on leave and had bestowed on one of his younger colleagues, Dr Donald L. Morcom, who normally teaches ecclesiastical history, responsibility for the course in ethics. It should be noted that Morcom is a much different person from the conservative Mathie. Morcom was born in Australia in 1950 and emigrated to South Africa in 1955. He had considerable meaningful contact with black Africans as a child, partly because his father taught religious instruction in Soweto and, according to Morcom, was the first pastor in the Baptist Union who customarily allowed blacks to enter his house through the front door. Another major formative influence on Morcom's ethical development was his education in the United States of America, where he received a doctorate at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Meta-ethically, Morcom states that Biblical prescriptive ethics still influences him and that while he is aware of the difficulties involved in ethics based on the imitation of Jesus Christ, he regards Christ as a "role model" with

"powerful implications". Morcom rejects totally the belief fairly common amongst his fellow Baptists that Christian ethics is exclusively a private matter without social and political ramifications.¹¹¹

The outline of the course in Christian ethics which Morcom taught during the first semester of 1990 is quite revealing, although not everything it reveals corresponds to what one might expect from one with his background. Much of the course consisted quite predictably of broad considerations through lectures and readings of ethics in general and Christian ethics in particular, the Biblical sources of Christian moral theology, the history of both Christian and non-Christian ethics from the classical period of western civilisation to recent times, and various approaches to Christian ethics, such as antinomianism, situationism, and Biblical prescription. In the latter half of the course, which Morcom described as its "central core", each student gave an oral presentation of a book. The volumes from which they could choose included H. Richard Niebuhr's *Christianity and Culture*, Roland Bainton's *Christian Attitudes Towards War and Peace*, Ronald Sider's *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, Walter Rauschenbusch's *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, John Howard Yoder's *The Politics of Jesus*, Stephen Charles Mott's *Biblical Ethics and Social Change*, Wesley Granberg-Michaelson's *A Worldly Spirituality*, and Richard J. Foster's *Freedom of Simplicity*. The students then used these presentations to discuss such issues as bio-ethics, ecology, substance abuse, capital punishment, and suicide. In addition to this oral assignment, the students were required to write a mid-semester test and a final examination.¹¹² Missing from the outline of the course is any evidence of immediate relevance to current political issues in South Africa and works written by South Africans. The assigned texts are quite representative of North Atlantic civilisation, not of South Africa in any sense, and certainly not of black Africa. It is not surprising, therefore, that Morcom could declare without being prodded that there is a "considerable amount of truth in the accusation that much of the education imparted at the college in Johannesburg is irrelevant to the black students there. On the other hand, Morcom was pleased to report that a conservative Afrikaans seminarian who had taken the course assured him after its conclusion that it was one of the best in which he had participated.¹¹³

This is not to suggest that Morcom's ethical views are harmonious with those of conservative Afrikanerdom, of course, but in any case the reactions of both Morcom and that former student underscore the cultural captivity of Baptist theological instruction in ethics within the cocoon of western civilisation. The bitter complaints of Hoffmeister and Mkwai become more comprehensible in the light of this.

This part of the curriculum appears to be stronger at the Baptist college in Athlone than at its counterpart in Johannesburg. We have already discussed the efforts of the indefatigable Peter Holness to influence through the Christian Citizenship Committee government policy on various social issues. To some degree his course on Christian ethics reflects Holness' concerns, as it does his indebtedness to twentieth-century "evangelical" thinkers. As textbooks in this required course, he assigns H. Barnette's *Introducing Christian Ethics* and John Stott's *Issues Facing Christians Today*. The shape of the course is conventional. During the first few weeks the emphasis is on defining Christian ethics, comparing schools of Christian ethics, and such Biblical *loci classici* as the Decalogue and the Sermon on the Mount. The focus then shifts to specific issues, such as relations between church and state, homosexuality, abortion, and conscientious objection. In addition to two class tests and a major final examination, each student is required to write an essay on a topic chosen from, in one recent year, the involvement of the Baptist Union in political and social affairs, the ordination of women, capital punishment in South Africa, and the policy of the government of the United States of America with regard to nuclear weapons.¹¹⁴ Obviously one should exercise caution when seeking to judge and compare two courses on the basis of their outlines and interviews with the lecturers who teach them, but this kind of evidence suggests that Holness' course addresses contemporary South African issues to a significantly greater extent than does Morcom's. It also indicates, however, that the reading material is entirely from the Northern Hemisphere. There is no evidence in the outline of material of South African provenance.

Conclusion

More dramatically than during any previous decade of its existence, the Baptist Union evinced changes in both theological sophistication and in the positions which it and many of its individual members took on social issues in the 1980s. At the beginning of the decade the denomination was still largely uncritical of the socio-political *status quo* and had not yet begun to question seriously the nature of its relationship to the state, which in some respects had departed from its tradition of nonconformity. It had undeniably accommodated much of the apartheid culture to which whites had grown accustomed since the middle of the twentieth century. There were exceptions, of course, as indeed there always had been. Nevertheless, the overall impression one gains from a consideration of the social ethics of the Baptist Union during the 1980s is one of a denomination which had only limited success in coming to grips with the enormous challenges of a society in rapid change, though hardly rapid enough to resolve the deeply rooted structural problems which contributed so heavily to the severity of those moral questions. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the voices which the denomination raised were too weak and came too late to make a significant difference. Whether they could have been effective under any circumstances is another question.

That the Baptist Union as a whole and, arguably, an increasing number of individual white Baptists sought to take seriously the monster of racism in their country during the turbulent decade of the 1980s is beyond dispute. It is not difficult to find many cases of individual sensitisation to the profound ills of racial exploitation and injustice in South Africa, and in increasing numbers Baptists expressed the need to examine critically the national crisis in the light of Christian ethics, including a re-appraisal of relations between church and state. There is no compelling reason to question the sincerity of those who did so, although it is highly unlikely that all of them appreciated the enormity of the implications which racism had in terms of Christian social ethics. The limitations of the overall response underscore this. The shape of the general rejection of *The Kairos Document*, despite the awareness of people like Holness of the gravity

of the abuses against which it cried out, suggests that some Baptists, not all of them politically conservative, were more concerned about theological niceties than the outrages of "state theology" and related ills. The "open letter" which the Baptist Union sent to P.W. Botha in 1985 was obviously a bold step towards coming to grips with the grave and deepening crisis in which South Africa found itself at the time, but again the extent and character of the hostility towards that action demonstrates a widespread consistency of attitudes with those of the previous two or three decades when rejection of anything which smacked of "political" involvement was the rule. André's detailed reconsideration of relations between church and state arguably served a useful purpose by analysing and revitalising a fundamental tenet of the Baptist Union's heritage of nonconformity, but by the mid-1980s when it appeared it was questionable how effective, if at all, such publications could be in extricating the denomination from the corner into which it had painted itself. Granted, the virtual absence of a hierarchy in the Baptist Union and the concomitant emphasis placed on the autonomy of the congregations and the freedom of individual consciences militated against the effectiveness of all these and various other attempts during the decade to address the national crisis. The character of all of them, however, and no less the nature of the reactions to them, underscore the fact that the Baptist Union remained a predominantly white, middle-class denomination, most of whose members found it impossible to escape the circumstances in which their religious and political beliefs had been shaped in an apartheid society. As the decade of the 1990s dawned, and the sun of a new social and political order in South Africa began to rise, the Baptist Union was arguably not a great deal better situated to deal with major problems of social ethics than it had been in 1980.

Endnotes

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3. *Ibid.*
4. Interview with Louise Kretzschmar, Johannesburg, 16 March 1991.
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8. Interview with Kevin Roy, Rondebosch East, 17 February 1991.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Interview with Gisela Nicholson, Pretoria, 20 March 1991.
11. Interview with David Walker, Pietermaritzburg, 5 March 1991.
12. Interview with Martin Holdt, Florida Park, 22 March 1991.
13. M.P. Holdt (Constantia Park) to *Pretoria News*, undated, in *Pretoria News*, 3 October 1985, p. 15.
14. "Peace for Our Time" (Glenstantia) to *Pretoria News* undated, in *Pretoria News*, 22 July 1985, p. 17.
15. Interview with Martin Holdt, Florida Park, 22 March 1991.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*
19. Interview with Wesley Gavin, Pietermaritzburg, 4 March 1991.
20. *Ibid.*
21. Interview with Ivor Jenkins, Pretoria, 20 March 1991.
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23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 4, 6-7.
26. Archives of the Christian Citizenship Committee, file "Christian Citizenship up to 1988", Bernard Green (London) to T.M. Swart, 29 July 1985; Bernard Green (London) to P.A. Holness, 25 July 1988.
27. Archives of the Christian Citizenship Committee, file "Christian Citizenship up to 1988", T.M. Swart (Roodepoort) to The Secretary to the State President, 24 August 1985; "Memorandum to the State President".
28. Archives of the Christian Citizenship Committee, file "Christian Citizenship up to 1988", Trevor M. Swart (Roodepoort) to Executive Members, 29 August 1985.
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32. *The South African Baptist Hand-Book 1985-1986*, p. 171.
33. R.A. Gorven (unspecified provenance) to *The South African Baptist*, undated, in *The South African Baptist*, December 1985, p. 12.
34. Les Kilham (unspecified provenance) to *The South African Baptist*, undated, in *The South African Baptist*, December 1985, pp. 12-13.
35. P.J. Raubenheimer (unspecified provenance) to *The South African Baptist*, undated, in *The South African Baptist*, December 1985, p. 13.
36. Wendel Stander (unspecified provenance) to *The South African Baptist*, undated, in *The South African Baptist*, February 1986, p. 10.
37. Bryan Smith (unspecified provenance) to *The South African Baptist*, undated, in *The South African Baptist*, February 1986, p. 10.
38. Nan Cross (unspecified provenance) to *The South African Baptist*, undated, in *The South African Baptist*, February 1986, p. 11.
39. John Castle (unspecified provenance) to *The South African Baptist*, undated, in *The South African Baptist*, February 1986, p. 12.
40. K.B. Roy (unspecified provenance) to *The South African Baptist*, undated, in *The South African Baptist*, February 1986, p. 10.
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57. Interview with John Poorter, Durban, 22 February 1991.
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59. Interview with R.A. Gorven, Pietermaritzburg, 6 March 1991.
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62. Interview with Gisela Nicholson, Pretoria, 20 March 1991.
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64. Interview with Gisela Nicholson, Pretoria, 20 March 1991.
65. Interview with Des Hoffmeister, Johannesburg, 21 March 1991.
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67. "The Baptist Convention of Southern Africa", *Fellowship of Concerned Baptists Newsletter*, I, no. 2 (August 1988), unpaginated.
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CHAPTER VII

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION TO MILITARY CONSCRIPTION

Introduction

Few issues have galvanised Christians on an international basis more since the early 1960s than that of how to respond to involuntary conscription into the armies and other military structures of the world. During the latter half of the 1960s and the early 1970s, thousands of young men in the United States of America, to cite one major example, refused to co-operate with their national Selective Service System and risk being sent to the battlefields of South-east Asia. At the same time, large numbers of western Europeans expressed their own objections to their nations' participation in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, or NATO, by defying conscription. With considerably less success, counterparts in eastern Europe sought to escape the clutches of military service in the now defunct Warsaw Pact. Collateral activities have included *inter alia* attacks on conscription offices, the writing of large numbers of books and articles about the ethical ramifications of military service, both voluntary and involuntary, and attempts to liberalise pertinent laws to allow men who are not categorical pacifists but conditional objectors to participation in specific wars which they regard as unjust to be excused from conscription. Much of the debate has involved individual Christians and their churches. Students of theology and their teachers explored the moral implications of war and militarism. In one country after another denominational commissions and other ecclesiastical agencies did likewise and drafted policy statements with varying degrees reflecting meta-ethical sophistication and cultural captivity. In some cases concerned Christians either individually or in collective units directly challenged laws and governmental policies which they believed were incompatible with their theological and ethical convictions. Other believers gave conscription in general their unqualified support or believed that exemptions from it should be granted only in quite exceptional cases, usually to members of religious bodies which categorically opposed participation in military endeavours. In many lands Christian defenders and

opponents of conscription locked horns in protracted verbal controversies in which theological issues often became entangled with political and other cultural ones. Christian ethics as such frequently took a back seat in the disputes.

For reasons which will become clear shortly, these debates did not reach full stride in South Africa until several years after they were well around the course in the United States of America and much of Europe. Indeed, neither active Christians nor other South Africans paid the matter much attention until 1974. At that time, however, a major controversy erupted with little advance warning, pitting one Christian against another, one denomination against another, and unleashing a bitter confrontation between some members of the South African Council of Churches and the government of the country. The debate over military conscription would continue through the rest of the 1970s and span the entire following decade as well, as South Africa lurched through periods of unprecedented urban violence, protests against apartheid, and threats to the general stability of the country. All of these dimensions of national life, and many others, necessarily involved the South African military machine, which continued to grow and become more modern throughout this period. Conscription remained in place, in some respects making a steadily greater impact on the lives of the people whom it most directly involved, though by the end of the 1980s allowing for somewhat more exemptions than hitherto had been the case. Christian voices against and in defence of the system continued strong, though inconsistently so.

The intensity of the struggle, which was carried on during a period when many South Africans believed that the South African Defence Force was performing a vital service by defending the country against domestic chaos and perceived foreign threats, brought Christian ethics into sharp relief. Academic debates gained a sense of immediacy as some conscripts chose to go to gaol rather than the battlefields of either international borderlands or riotous black townships. Overarching approaches to Christian ethics clashed with one another, in some instances with adherents of agapeist situation ethics finding virtually no understanding for their principles amongst advocates of traditional prescriptive ethics. Even in the latter camp there was no consensus. Defenders of the *status quo* adduced Old

Testament battles sanctioned by Jahweh in support of their position, while protesters often appealed to the ethics of Jesus in defence of their own. For that matter, the New Testament supplied both sides with verbal ammunition. Pauline injunctions about obedience to the state in Romans 13 came to the fore across from the Sermon on the Mount. In practically none of this did participants in the debates say anything which had not already been said overseas.

On an international scale, Baptists have played at most a secondary role in both the history of Christian pacifism and an even lesser one in its historiography. Reid S. Trulson could comment in 1991 that "pacifism among Baptists has been little known and largely undocumented".¹ His remark pertains primarily to the United States of America and is arguably exaggerated, but in a more carefully qualified form could apply to South Africa as well. The number of genuine pacifists in the history of country's Baptist Union has been infinitesimal, and there have not been many selective conscientious objectors, either. Histories of the denomination tell us virtually nothing about them, quite understandably, because the few South African Baptists who have refused to comply with conscription have all done so only since the late 1970s.

Despite the relatively low profile which the South African Baptist Union had maintained in political matters for much of its existence and especially since the accession of the National Party to power in 1948, the denomination was to some degree inescapably entwined in the debate over conscription, if for no other reason than the fact that the young white male members of its congregations, like those of other churches, were generally liable to military service. Undoubtedly owing to the loose, congregational polity of the Baptist Union, it did not as a unit become heavily involved in the debate, although delegates to its annual assemblies discussed the matter several times and the Christian Citizenship Committee had much to say about conscription. On an individual level, however, several South African Baptists became prominent leaders in the struggle against compulsory military service. They wrote and spoke extensively about it and gained some measure of international exposure for their efforts. In response to this, other Baptists avidly defended the *status quo*, shedding further light on the use and abuse of relevant Scripturally prescriptive and other

theological arguments. The resulting furore pitted Baptist against Baptist at the annual assemblies, in the pages of the denominational periodical, and in various other *fora*.

In the present chapter it is our intention to set the stage for the Baptist debate over and involvement in movements against conscription by briefly describing the history of compulsory military service in South Africa, examining the genesis of the controversy in 1974 which led to the debate within the Baptist Union, take a more detailed look at the specific roles of individual Baptists in it, and consider arguments which Baptists have presented both for and against conscription.

The Unfolding of Conscription in South Africa

As mentioned in Chapter III, the Defence Act of 1912 included a rudimentary form of conscription against which Joseph J. Doke and the South African Baptist Union protested vigorously. For approximately the next half-century, however, few South Africans were compelled to perform military service. In the meantime, the South African parliament passed the Defence Act of 1957, which would serve as the legal foundation of subsequent conscription. Initially very few men were called up under its terms, which involved a lottery system to select conscripts from a pool which vastly outnumbered the need, owing to the fact that the country was still in a period of relative internal political stability and under no apparent external military threat. That situation changed in the early 1960s, when the massacre at Sharpeville and other incidents of unrest, together with severe police actions and the mobilisation of the still small army to quell them, brought South Africa under heavy international criticism. In 1961, in consequence of this state of affairs, the period of compulsory service was extended from three to nine months, and 7 000 men were conscripted into the "Citizen Force". The deterioration of the internal political situation during the 1960s, decolonisation and military conflicts elsewhere in southern and in central Africa, most notably the origins of the civil war following the "Unilateral Declaration of Independence" in Rhodesia (subsequently Zimbabwe) and armed rebellions against South African

hegemony in South West Africa (subsequently Namibia), and South Africa's growing isolation from the international political arena prompted a gradual sharpening of conscription and heightening of the militarisation of the country. By 1964 the annual intake had risen to ca. 16 500. Pieter W. Botha became minister of defence in 1965, Hendrik F. Verwoerd was assassinated the following year, and in 1967 the government, still in the hands of the National Party, introduced universal conscription for all while male South African citizens and some resident aliens. As amended that year, the Defence Act did not allow for individual conscientious objection as such; religious objectors were not exempted from military conscription. In this respect, the law lagged behind corresponding statutes in many European and American countries. Nevertheless, members of the few pacifist churches in South Africa, such as the Society of Friends, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Seventh-day Adventists, were allowed to perform non-combatant service in the South African Defence Force but were not given a right to demand this alternative. The discretionary power to assign them to non-combatant units or to perform non-combatant service in combatant units resided with registering officers and boards which reviewed cases to determine whether applicants for special status were *bona fide* adherents of recognised denominations. This system soon proved unacceptable to many such members, especially to Jehovah's Witnesses, whose faith prevented them from performing any kind of military service whatsoever. Their uncompromising noncompliance in an arguably paranoid society with steadily decreasing tolerance of nonconformist behaviour immediately led to an ongoing series of civilian prosecutions for violation of the Defence Act which generally resulted in imprisonment in "Detention Barracks", incarceration which often involved severe harassment and both physical and emotional deprivation.²

It cannot be overstated that at that time South African society, notwithstanding the high degree of quantifiable religiosity of various sectors of its population, did not have a noteworthy pacifist tradition in its mainstream. Much of its history had been written in blood, and Christian opposition to attempts to settle internal conflicts by military means had been either weak or ineffective. This applied to both the large denominations, such as the Church of the Province of South

Africa and the Dutch Reformed Church, and those confessions which stemmed from British Nonconformity, despite certain anti-war episodes in the traditions of the latter. The "peace churches" mentioned above remained on the periphery of the variegated national religious landscape. It is not too much to say that pacifism, especially at a time of deepening national crisis, was widely regarded with suspicion and disdain. Perhaps this is nowhere better illustrated than by a speech which Defence Minister P.W. Botha, an active member of the Dutch Reformed Church, delivered in parliament in 1970. On that occasion he made no attempt to veil his contempt for the Jehovah's Witnesses as the most visible group of people who had refused to co-operate with the South African military machine. Botha invoked a common rhetorical theme, declaring that "the dangerous international situation demands that every citizen performs his duty when it comes to preparedness for defence". He reported that "full co-operation has been achieved with all denominations except the Jehovah's Witnesses". Botha had no sympathy for their argument that spiritual beliefs took precedence over national policy. "The honour and duty to defend one's country should not be made subservient to one's religious convictions", he insisted without elaboration.³ Two years later the temperamental Botha declared in the same chamber that the Jehovah's Witnesses "are not a denomination. They are just a lot of opstreperous [*sic*] people. They are not only opstreperous [*sic*] in respect of military service; they make a nuisance of themselves in every field". He added gratuitously, "I have absolutely no time for these people, for I say they are the disciples of disorder". No enthusiastic advocate of religious freedom, Botha vowed that "we must not give them half a chance in South Africa. There are countries which have prohibited them; there are countries which are seriously considering prohibiting them".⁴ This spirit of intolerance, though expressed in almost extreme terms by a man who would be known increasingly for his censorious attitudes towards those who disagreed with him, permeated much of the debate over conscientious objection at that time and would continue to do so for nearly two more decades.

During the early 1970s, *i.e.* during an era when white supremacy in South Africa was still essentially without effective challenge but shortly before the advent of its glacial undoing beginning with the

Soweto riots in 1976, the Defence Act was again amended and its terms made more severe. The length of compulsory service was increased from nine to twelve months followed by nineteen days' annual service for a decennium. At the same time, the maximum period of imprisonment for noncompliance with conscription was set at fifteen months. Resisters normally received sentences of that length but were released after one year. Jehovah's Witnesses continued to be strongly represented in detention barracks, although in contrast to some other detained pacifists they were freed from the obligation to wear military uniforms and excused from military drill during their periods of incarceration there.⁵

The 1974 South African Council of Churches Resolution

1974 proved unexpectedly to be a watershed year in the South African general debate over conscientious objection, unleashing controversies which affected the country's churches generally, including the Baptist Union. Much of the central dispute centred on the South African Council of Churches, from which, it will be recalled from the immediately preceding chapter, that denomination had withdrawn in 1969 while retaining observer status, but it soon had broader ramifications which involved the national government, parts of the South African Defence Force, and denominations which had no official ties with the SACC. Comments made in the highly publicised debate over conscientious objection shed a great deal of light on ethical thinking at that time. Furthermore, the dispute within the SACC, and between its leaders and other prominent political and religious figures in South Africa, would eventually not only be one cause of the Baptist Union's withdrawal from that organisation but indirectly prompt some Baptists to become internationally known objectors who subsequently severed their ecclesiastical ties. The matter thus merits description at length here.

Unleashing the debate was a resolution, unprecedented in South African history, which the SACC passed at its annual convention in August 1974. Meeting at Hammanskraal north of Pretoria, delegates at that interdenominational and interracial, though white-dominated,

assembly heard General Secretary John Rees call for the dismantling of apartheid. They also considered the question of conscientious objection, an issue which the SACC had taken up at previous meetings. Douglas Bax, a Princeton-educated Presbyterian who was then teaching at an Anglican theological seminary, presented a resolution which he and Beyers Naudé of the Christian Institute had drafted on short notice. This statement, which asked young men who were facing conscription to consider becoming conscientious objectors, prompted a strong reaction at the convention. Some delegates were perturbed at having something that monumental thrust upon them without adequate time to study it properly. After a debate of five hours' duration, the resolution passed without a dissenting vote.⁶

The text of the resolution is in itself significant for understanding the South African debate over conscientious objection and what Baptists were protesting against in their generally critical reaction to it. Beyond this, it is necessary to examine the text, albeit briefly, because in the ensuing public debate its contents were commonly misunderstood as pacifistic and/or primarily political to the exclusion of Christian ethics.

That gross misunderstandings of the text should have dominated much of the debate is, on the surface, inexcusable, because it was promptly printed *verbatim* in many prominent newspapers as well as in various ecclesiastical periodicals. Within weeks, moreover, thousands of copies of the resolution had been circulated in South Africa and abroad.⁷ In brief, the statement contained a preamble declaring South Africa to be a "basically unjust and discriminatory society" and that it was not the automatic duty of Christians to engage in violence, or to prepare to do so, merely because the state demanded such behaviour. This was an implicit reliance on the Augustinian "just war" principle which officially or unofficially occupied a central place in the social ethical traditions of many denominations in South Africa. Then followed six points which ostensibly rested on those premises. The first stated unequivocally that the SACC "deplores violence as a means to solve problems". Secondly, it at least broached the possibility of selective objection to military service by asking member churches "to challenge all their members to consider, in view of the above, whether Christ's call to take up the cross and follow him in identifying with the

oppressed does not, in our situation, involve becoming conscientious objectors". Thirdly, mindful of the fact that large numbers of the individual members were not whites and that many had fled the country since the early 1960s, it called upon those member churches which had chaplains in the South African Defence Force "to reconsider the basis upon which they are appointed" and "to investigate the state of pastoral care available to their communicants at present in exile or under arms beyond our borders". No less provocatively, the resolution commended "the courage and witness of those who have been willing to go to jail in protest against the unjust laws and policies in our land and who challenge all of us by their example". Fifthly, the SACC urged further study of "methods of non-violent action for change which can be recommended to its member churches". Finally, the resolution called for "rapid, peaceful change in our society" so that the "violence and war to which our social, economic and political policies are leading us may be avoided".⁸ With little meta-ethical basis, this statement did not present much that had not been said many times before. The significant element of novelty was that for the first time a major ecclesiastical organisation in South Africa made an explicit call for selective conscientious objection. Even in doing so, the men who drafted the resolution did not fully explain the linkage between the South African situation as it existed in 1974 and refusal to perform military service. The only explicit allusion to this was the oblique reference to "Christ's call to take up the cross and follow him in identifying with the oppressed". Had the statement been more carefully written, it is conceivable that the ensuing debate would have taken a different form in some quarters. As we shall see shortly, however, much of the hostile reaction to the resolution revolved not around theological nuances but rather on apprehensiveness in a tense political climate.

To appreciate the mood of white South Africa at that time and the threatening nature of the 1974 resolution as many privileged people perceived it, it must be understood that white reactions to that statement were swift, widespread, and decidedly negative in most quarters. Not only political figures and newspaper editors from virtually all points of the legal compass, but also churchmen in many denominations publicly condemned the resolution, notwithstanding the

unanimity with which their representatives had passed it at Hammanskraal. Both the pulpit and the pages of religious journals became vehicles of vilification during the next few months. Baptists would soon join in this verbal crusade against a cautious call for consideration of selective conscientious objection.

We can begin our brief review of the context in which Baptists reacted by examining the most severe public denunciations, namely those which National Party politicians unleashed in August 1974. Prime Minister B.J. Vorster almost immediately issued a thinly veiled threat in a statement delivered at Stellenbosch on 2 August. "Ek wil ernstig waarsku dat diegene wat op hierdie wyse met vuur speel, baie deeglik moet besin voordat hulle hul vingers onherroeplik verbrand".⁹ Defence Minister Botha also responded with a threat. He informed journalists that as soon as he had received the full text of the resolution, the judicial department of the South African military would study its legal implications to determine what actions should be taken.¹⁰

Hostile reactions also came from people within the military establishment who identified themselves as Christians. A group of 126 English-speaking servicemen in training at Walvis Bay who belonged to denominations affiliated with the SACC announced that the Hammanskraal Resolution had "embarrassed and disgusted" them. Rather than rejecting the SACC statement on theological grounds, these men professed that "SA is threatened by conscienceless guerrillas whose avowed aim is to terrorise especially defenceless people" and that under these circumstances they could not support conscientious objection.¹¹ A group of eight Anglophone chaplains in the South African Defence Force betrayed scarcely more meta-ethical or other theological sophistication in a statement they issued in response to the resolution. They took issue with its preamble, claiming that it was unwarranted to describe South African society as "basically unjust" and "violent" on the grounds that South Africa was a unique country. These military chaplains also asserted that the concept of the just war was "almost impossible to define", despite the numerous definitions of it which had been given in Christian ethics since the time of Augustine. Their chief reason for opposing the Hammanskraal Resolution, however, appears to have been political and not theological: "We as chaplains of the SADF who are familiar with the aims, objects

and methods of the communistically inspired terrorists who by murder and force attempt to gain access to our land urge every member of our churches and especially the young men to make their personal contribution in the defence of our country".¹² Whatever argument that could have been made to link this to specifically Christian ethics they failed to make. In the rhetorical climate of that day, it was axiomatic in white South African society that anything which smacked of terror and/or communism was intrinsically antithetical to Christianity and thus did not require further explanation. The chaplain-general of the SADF, General-Major J.A. van Zyl, who was an ordained minister in the Dutch Reformed Church, probably surprised no-one in simultaneously lambasting the resolution. Claiming, no doubt correctly, to speak on behalf of both the Afrikaans and the English-speaking chaplains under his command, he professed on 5 August his "diepste verontwaardiging en afkeer uitgespreek teenoor die SA Raad van Kerke se besluit oor militêre diensplig".¹³ No more than his subalterns did van Zyl seek to present a detailed case against the resolution. As we shall see later in the present chapter, this politically conservative chaplain would reappear in predictable if controversial fashion in the debate over conscientious objection before the end of the decade.

Editors and political correspondents of the Afrikaans daily press, at that time still closely associated with the governing National Party, spoke with practically one uncompromising voice against the Hammanskraal Resolution. An editor of the arch-conservative Johannesburg daily *Die Vaderland* vilified it as a demonic sign of the unstable times. Writing under the title "die teologie van chaos", he declared: "Dit is inderdaad so dat die vrede, wet en orde in Suid-Afrika bedreig word deur 'n nuwe ideologie van chaotiese persoonlike vryheid, dikwels met sataniese lis gedryf onder die dekmantel van Christelikheid. . . . Die jongste besluite van die Suid-Afrikaanse Raad van Kerke kan gesien word as maar een uitvloetsel daarvan".¹⁴ Playing on the familiar theme that South Africa was on the verge of falling victim to international terrorism, his counterpart at *Die Transvaler* wondered whether the denominations which belonged to the SACC should reconsider whether they should remain in it during a period of tension on the borders of the republic. "Voortgesette steun aan die SA

Raad van Kerke, kan ook blyk steun aan terrorisme teen Suid-Afrika te wees", he warned.¹⁵

Political opposition to the resolution came not only from the National Party but also from the relatively liberal Progressive Party. The reasons for the latter's position, however, were markedly different. Within a few days Professor Fredrik van Zyl Slabbert, one of its deputies in parliament and its spokesman for defence, curiously argued that his party's opposition to the government's unjust policies necessitated prevented him from supporting the resolution. Non-violent means were necessary for effecting justice in South Africa, he declared. "Therefore the very institutions, political, economic and social, which could serve as instruments of peaceful change have to be defended against attack and violence from outside". The leader of the United Party, Sir de Villiers Graaff, informed journalists that it believed it was "the duty of every South African to assist in the defence of his country against aggression, including terrorism. The encouraging of conscientious objection to this duty could only serve the cause of violence".¹⁶ That party's defence spokesman and subsequent leader, W. Vause Raw, differentiated between legitimate political criticism and encouraging prospective servicemen to avoid conscription. He chastised churchmen who, in his words, sought to give terrorism a "cloaking of sacrilegious respectability".¹⁷

In the light of these parties' wariness about or express opposition to the Hammanskraal Resolution, it is not surprising that the English-medium daily press, which in varying degrees served unofficially as a counter-weight to the National Party, did not generally support that statement. The coverage which the resolution received in these newspapers is particularly relevant to the subject of this study, because during the last few months of 1974 South Africa still did not have television and, consequently, the English-language newspapers were presumably even more influential in shaping Anglophone Baptist opinion then than they would be after the advent of television. Yet the precise extent to which the English-medium press criticised the resolution is not easy to gauge. It has been asserted in one significant survey of conscientious objection in South Africa that "virtually the entire English press pursued a similar line" to that which the avowedly hostile conservative Afrikaans newspapers trod.¹⁸ This

sweeping generalisation is unquestionably hyperbolic. In practically none of the major English-language South African newspapers did general coverage of the resolution have a tone similar to that of corresponding articles in the Afrikaans press, and editorial comment also varied significantly, though not diametrically, from the paranoid, intemperate rejection which typified many of the Afrikaans leaders. This held true especially for the *Rand Daily Mail*, which was then regarded as one of the newspapers which was most outspokenly critical of the Vorster regime. In such newspapers as *The Star* of Johannesburg and *The Cape Times* of Cape Town, which at that time tended to be only moderately critical of the government, coverage of the SACC was less sympathetic but nevertheless hardly in the same hostile category with the bulk of the Afrikaans press. One obvious respect in which the English-language newspapers differed from their Afrikaans counterparts was in the space they devoted to the mixed reactions of and within such denominations as the Church of the Province of South Africa, the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa, and the Methodist Church to the resolution. This coverage tended to be reasonably balanced and not tendentious.

Ecclesiastical and quasi-ecclesiastical reactions to the resolution also tended to be largely negative, especially in Dutch Reformed circles. Like the responses from politicians, they tended to emphasise political more than theological matters. J.D. Vorster, the irascible brother of the prime minister and moderator of the Dutch Reformed Church, accused the SACC of "playing into the hands of leftists" and announced that his denomination rejected the resolution entirely "because it did not have any scriptural foundation". This Vorster also resorted to guilt by association by linking the resolution to the World Council of Churches' Program to Combat Racism, which was anathema in conservative white South African circles. Referring to the leaders of the SACC, Vorster asserted that "the language they speak is the language of the World Council of Churches, which is always against war unless it is a leftist war. I do not say these people are communists, but they are playing into the hands of the leftists".¹⁹ The editor of *Die Kerkbode*, the official periodical of the Dutch Reformed Church, lent support to the assault ecclesiastical-political assault on the resolution. Again emphasising political loyalties at the expense of

serious ethical discussion, he declared that "elke land het reg en aanspraak op sy burgers om sy grense teen vyandelike magte en aanvallers van buite te beskerm. . . . Daarom roep ons in ons Kerke mekaar ook op om getrou in ons voorbidding vir ons manne op die grense in te tree en ons probeer om langs verskillende weë ons waardering vir hulle en ons kommer oor hulle te laat blyk". On the basis of these postulates, the editor asserted that "die besluit oor militêre diensplig wat by Hammanskraal geneem is, uiters vreemd en beslis onbesonne en onverantwoordelik. Dit openbaar, om de minste te sê, 'n uiterste gebrek aan patriotisme want ons kans ons wel afvra of ons nie hier 'n geval het van wie nie vir ons is nie, is teen ons".²⁰ The moderator of the denomination's Northern Transvaal Synod sang a similar political tune in response to the resolution. "Dit is niks minder as 'n oproep tot verset en stryd teen die bestaande orde in Suid-Afrika nie. Dit is 'n aanmoediging vir alle ontevrede elemente om nou maar noodgedwonge van ongeoorloofde maatreëls gebruik te maak om hulle doeleindes te bereik", he warned without explaining how the resolution encouraged such revolts. "Terrorisme word geregverdig as antwoord op die heersende onreg in ons land".²¹

It would be quite incorrect to assume that the Dutch Reformed stood alone on the national religious landscape in condemning the Hammanskraal Resolution. Many members of the so-called "English-speaking churches" also expressed reservations about and varying opposition to it, as did some of those denominations as such. Almost immediately the Anglican bishop of Pretoria, Edward Knapp-Fisher, announced that while he believed the intention of the resolution was good he could not support the practical recommendations which it contained, partly because it was not always possible for individual Christians to differentiate between just and unjust wars.²² He was quoted as emphasising, however, that conscientious objection was "an issue for each individual Christian to decide".²³ Edwin Pons, the general secretary of the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa, a denomination never known to stand near the cutting edge of Christian social criticism, informed journalists that he had voted against the preamble to the resolution and that he was "not happy about the military aspects of it" but failed to explain why he had voted in favour of the resolution as such. Various other Anglophone clerics refused to

give straightforward opinions when questioned about the resolution in August 1974.²⁴ Within days the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa officially dissociated itself from the resolution pending final action by the denomination's executive commission.²⁵ Outside the Protestant orbit, Cardinal Owen McCann of Cape Town expressed disagreement with the implied argument in the preamble that the just war theory excluded the defence of an unjust society. Without making any explicit claims about conditions in South Africa, he argued that the preamble did not take into account the eventuality that the defence of such a society allowed for controlled and non-chaotic change. McCann also rejected the notion of "institutionalised violence" as being relevant to the just war argument.²⁶

In some diffuse if not particularly influential quarters, however, the Hammanskraal Resolution gained virtually immediate support. One was in the Roman Catholic Church. Denis Hurley, the archbishop of Durban, pointed out that the Second Vatican Council had reaffirmed conscientious objection to military service, particularly by people who performed alternative service. He warned that the confrontation between B.J. Vorster and the SACC had brought the "time of crisis very close". One of Hurley's Anglican counterparts, the suffragan bishop of Natal, Kenneth Hallows, stated that he might be prepared to face conviction in criminal court and imprisonment if P.W. Botha followed through with belligerent threats to take legal action against supporters of the resolution. He noted, however, that the statement was less radical than some of its opponents had construed it and emphasised the word "consider" in its sentence pertaining to what individual Christians should do concerning conscientious objection.²⁷

Not surprisingly, strong support for the resolution also came from people who themselves were facing conscription and who had higher than average educations, namely the members of the National Union of South African Students, or Nusas. In Cape Town the leadership of that organisation, which encompassed chiefly Anglophone students, issued a statement which branded the hostile reactions to the Hammanskraal Resolution as "typically negative" and short-sighted. "It is the young people of South Africa who are being asked to fight this war", the drafters of the statement noted. "Many of us are questioning the basic issues relating to this problem". One of the moral difficulties cited

was "the willingness of the Government to involve the people of South Africa in a protracted war to defend a system in which the interests of the Whites are protected and which discriminates against the Blacks at all levels". Another was "the suppression of organised and peaceful Black opposition to the conditions of oppression and exploitation which was responsible for Black, fellow-South Africans taking up arms".²⁸ These concerns mirrored that of the preamble to the SACC resolution. In a related development, the lecturing staff and students in the Department of Divinity at Rhodes University, where many white Anglophone ministers received their training, responded to it by urging the government to convene an interracial conference at which people of all political persuasions could discuss the plight of South African society and means for redressing it.²⁹ At the English-medium and ostensibly liberal University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, the student body was divided on the issue.³⁰ On balance, however, general public reaction to the Hammanskraal Resolution was decidedly more negative than supportive.

Probably fuelled by the broad public and interdenominational reaction against the SACC resolution on conscientious objection, the government of Prime Minister Vorster proceeded before the end of August to amend the Defence Bill in ways which actually militated against both pacifism and conscientious objection. One central point which the government believed needed change was the existing legality of encouraging people to resist conscription. In a lengthy parliamentary speech in which he sought to explain the need for outlawing this, Defence Minister Botha cited the Hammanskraal Resolution and the positive reaction of Nusas to it. To this politician, such actions were a threat to the security of South Africa and thus "reprehensible conduct" which should be severely punished. The rhetoric which he marshalled against pacifism as an ostensibly subversive activity was especially revealing of the paranoid mentality which prevailed in the South African government at that time of military instability in southern Africa. Botha quoted former French Prime Minister Michel de Bré in the conservative Parisian daily *Le Figaro* that pacifism was often abused: "Many democratic leaders and agitators are not pacifists, but abuse words, ideas and emotive choices of pacifism to rise in the world and, if the opportunity arises, to gain

power". Rather than the capitalist world, it was in communist-dominated lands that the otherwise anti-communist Botha found a commendable response to pacifism: "Behind the Iron Curtain nobody will be allowed to undermine the defence force of China, Russia or of Czechoslovakia, but in the Western world there are enough lackeys of the communistic doctrines who are engaged in this kind of undermining while wrapping themselves in a cloak of sanctimoniousness".³¹

Baptist Responses to the SACC Resolution and the Defence Further Amendment Bill

Like many members of various other denominations, white South African Baptists generally responded negatively to the Hammanskraal Resolution, although they did not speak with one voice even when doing so. Some of their reactions in 1974 were also to the Defence Further Amendment Bill. Furthermore, once again the question of maintaining even observer status within the increasingly controversial SACC came to the fore. The positions of the two most visible Baptist commentators clearly, if somewhat obliquely, reflect the backgrounds of those two men. The president of the Baptist Union at the time of the SACC annual convention in 1974 was Alexander Gilfillan, the Scottish immigrant minister who had resisted conscription during the Second World War. His pacifist views may have softened, but there was no evidence at that time that he had jettisoned them wholesale. The moderately conservative defender of the *status quo*, Allen C. Townsend, still edited *The South African Baptist*. Both men evidently wielded considerable influence within the denomination, the former particularly on men who had studied at the theological college in Johannesburg during his tenure there, and the latter obviously on readers of the denominational journal.

Townsend's opinion of the Hammanskraal Resolution was predictably negative and theologically naive. He began by seeking to differentiate between the selective objection inherent in the resolution and the position "of the conscientious objector in the generally-accepted sense of the word", which in his perception was evidently that of

unconditional pacifism. Townsend acknowledged the venerable Baptist principle of the freedom of the individual Christian's conscience, especially in ethical dilemmas where differing opinions prevailed. Two such matters, he believed, were the injunctions in the Sermon on the Mount to love one's enemies and to return good for evil. This Baptist editor conceded that he was thus compelled to respect practitioners of universal pacifism on New Testament grounds. "We may not agree with his decision, but we must respect it particularly when his obedience is matched by a similar and equally costly obedience in other fields of conduct". Townsend, in other words, evinced support of prescriptive ethics, at least in so far as it related to literal interpretation of these texts, although he made that respect subjectively contingent on the conduct of the pacifist in other walks of life. But he explicitly ruled out an agapeist interpretation which departed from simple and unconditional obedience to Biblical texts with ethical commands, especially situation ethics which openly touched on political matters about which he had been defensive for years in the editorial columns of *The South African Baptist*: "The man who refuses to bear arms on any other grounds than this does not, we believe, fall into the same category as the conscientious objector as defined here. Every other consideration than that of obedience to the commands of Christ as mentioned above, is situational and relative, and therefore secondary". Townsend nowhere betrayed any comprehension of the complexity of the ethical decision process, even for witting or unwitting adherents of prescriptive ethics. That dilemmas constantly arise and commandments can conflict when one seeks to apply prescriptive ethics in daily life he did not seem to grasp. Specifically, Townsend appears not to have understood that there is a deep Biblical basis for condemning social injustice rather than defending it to the death, and that this could clash with such texts as Pauline injunctions to respect the authority of the state in Romans 13. The intended if inadequately stated crux of the matter, in other words, was lost on this commentator. In fairness to him, it should be stated once again that in the preamble to their resolution at Hammanskraal Bax and Naudé had neglected to spell out that central point. But, for that matter, Townsend does not even seem to have understood the inescapable centrality of the "just war" theory in any serious debate of this

matter in South Africa at that time. On the contrary, he asserted that "the fine distinction between the 'just' and the 'unjust' wars is merely a side-issue". What *may* have steered much of Townsend's thinking on the matter, however, was fear of the future on a turbulent continent. Like many other ecclesiastical and political opponents of the Hammanskraal Resolution, he adduced a well-worn argument concerning international threats in seeking to undermine the SACC. If we Baptists were to follow the suggestions in its resolution, he averred, then we might just as well "hand ourselves, and all the fellow-members of our Society, to the predators on our borders, regardless of the moral and ethical standards which *they* profess". As it did to countless other Christians of that day, it remained axiomatic to Townsend that South Africa, despite what he conceded were disappointing national patterns of conduct with regard to such personal matters as marital infidelity and immoderate consumption of alcohol, was still a bastion of Christian civilisation. He believed that South Africa needed prophets to call its people back to what he believed were more auspicious times in this respect, but, he professed, "we shall not put the matter right by refusing to cherish and, if need be, to defend, the good which remains to us from our long Christian heritage".³²

A few weeks before the 1974 assembly of the Baptist Union, the denomination's president, Alexander S. Gilfillan, commented publicly about the Defence Further Amendment Bill then in parliament. Mindful of both the controversial nature of the matter and the low ceiling which Baptist polity placed on his ability to speak for the denomination, he emphasised that his opinions were his own. This did not prevent Gilfillan, however, from joining other church leaders in taking a very critical attitude towards the proposed statute. He conceded that any state had a right to protect itself against "subversive activity", especially in times of national emergency. How a government which professed to act in accordance with Christian principles could construe as "subversive" acts of individual Christians who were following the dictates of their own consciences he could not comprehend. Undoubtedly with his own wartime experience in mind, Gilfillan noted that since the first century *anno domini* Christians had struggled with the dilemma which conflicting legal requirements to bear arms and New Testament injunctions against violence had posed.

He found it gratifying that in many countries governments had devised means of respecting individual convictions in this regard. Moreover, in view of the ongoing dilemma, it seemed obvious that it was the responsibility of ministers of the Gospel "to urge their people to examine the whole of life in the light of Christian principles. This examination must include the matter of the relationship of the citizen to the state". Realising that in its final form the germinating South African statute might deviate from this international norm and even restrict serious discussion of the matter, Gilfillan declared that "if the Defence Amendment Bill in any way infringes on this right, I find it completely unacceptable. . . . I cannot accept that I will be prohibited from having frank discussions on such issues as these with my people".³³

Shortly thereafter delegates to the annual assembly debated at length both the Hammanskraal Resolution and the Defence Further Amendment Bill. The conservative Border Baptist Association presented a resolution regarding the former which was redrafted in plenary session and received the approval of the assembly. As amended, it contained three points. The first declared vaguely that "this Assembly is not in agreement with many aspects of the so-called 'Hammanskraal Statement' and in particular entirely dissociates itself from Clause 2 of the Resolution in which the profession of conscientious objection is advocated as a method of registering disapproval of the political and social status quo in South Africa". This was a fundamental and eisegetical misreading of the resolution, which did not advocate conscientious objection as a "method of registering disapproval" but rather urged Baptists to consider whether their faith was commensurate with the defence of what was termed an unjust society. Secondly, the Baptist resolution took issue with the questioning of the military chaplaincy and declared unqualified support of the men who served in it. Finally, going beyond defensiveness if not beyond obliqueness, the resolution urged the government "to review existing legislation with a view to improve race relations so as to remove any barriers to the whole-hearted co-operation of all races in our land in the defence of our country should the necessity arise". In a very mildly prophetic warning, it stated that "the time to do this is running out".³⁴ On the surface, this challenge stood in what we have seen was

a deeply rooted South African Baptist tradition of addressing the government on legislative matters. Delegates did not, however, propose any specific statutory changes at that time.

Undoubtedly stemming from its hostility to the Hammanskraal Resolution, the Border Baptist Association also moved in 1974 that the Baptist Union immediately terminate its observer status at the SACC. Evidently there was considerable sentiment for this at the assembly, for the question was deliberated at length. In the end, however, it was decided to defer the matter until the following year and in the interim give the executive of the denomination the opportunity to study and submit a report on its relationship to the SACC.³⁵

The 1974 assembly then considered the Defence Further Amendment Bill, though not before Gilfillan requested all journalists and others who were not delegates to leave the chamber. The general secretary of the Baptist Union, on behalf of the executive, then proposed six resolutions. Reflecting the input of more critical voices and a marginally greater measure of theological sophistication than the resolution which the Border Baptist Association had moved, these nevertheless contained no reference to Biblical prescription or other meta-ethical matters. The first was a general acknowledgement of the right of the state to "call upon its citizens to share in the defence and to contribute to the stability of the country", a statement reminiscent of the one which Gilfillan had recently made to the South African press. The second, equally reminiscent, noted that throughout its history the Christian church in general had been divided on the question of "countering violence with violence". As a corollary to this, the resolution mentioned that historically some but not all Baptists, both individual believers and churches, had "adopted pacifist principles". The third resolution affirmed that "genuine conscientious objection" based on Christian principles had "a legitimate place within the Christian tradition and in Baptist conviction" but did not give any means for discerning genuine from false conscientious objection. The fourth, in direct response to suggestions that the proposed statute should forbid counselling objectors, claimed "the right to discuss pacifism freely, and to expound Scripture in support or refutation of pacifism according to one's personal understanding". The fifth resolution acknowledged and thanked the government for exempting

certain categories of conscientious objectors from combatant service but said nothing about the expansion of those categories. The final resolution called upon the government to delete from the proposed Defence Further Amendment Bill Clause 10 (c) so as to allow freedom of discussion of conscientious objection. The six resolutions passed by an overwhelming majority.³⁶

Conscientious Objection in the Baptist Union

Although valid generalisations are particularly difficult to draw when discussing social ethics in the Baptist Union of South Africa, the foregoing consideration of the events of 1974 indicates that there was little unqualified support or sympathy for either categorical pacifism or selective conscientious objection in the denomination at that time, but that the government's efforts to stifle discussion and freedom of conscience ruffled many believers' feathers. Before the end of the decade this would change. Appreciable numbers of Baptists would lend at least vocal support to resistance to conscription as a viable Christian ethical alternative, though one should not exaggerate the enthusiasm with which they did so, and some outspoken Baptists continued to deny that Christian citizens had such a legitimate moral option. This paralleled developments in various other white-dominated, "English-speaking" denominations. Precisely why there developed amongst South African Baptists a greater toleration of conscientious objection is not easy to ascertain. On the one hand, it has long been customary to point to such phenomena as the Soweto riots of mid-1976 as having alerted many white South Africans across the denominational spectrum to the gravity of racial tensions in their country and the necessity of relieving them through peaceful means. The so-called "Muldergate" information scandal of 1978 undoubtedly eroded public confidence in the government to some extent. The costly and protracted wars on the borders of South West Africa and elsewhere in southern Africa, which seemed to drag on year after year without conclusion probably also caused some disillusionment with the military machine in South Africa, as did the lack of success in its efforts to prevent a Marxist takeover in Angola, although it should be stressed

that South Africans never mounted an effective anti-war movement during either the 1970s or 1980s. On the other hand, the government's rhetoric of a "total onslaught" by communists and other ostensible enemies at the gates remained effective, apparently moreso than countless domestic and international warnings that the greater enemies were fomenting in the socio-economic and political oppression of the masses within. In that climate, and with ongoing international tension in southern Africa, the South African Defence Force remained entrenched as a keystone public institution, to which general white loyalty may actually have been enhanced by international arms boycotts and other sanctions as many South Africans, having entered the television age, reacted defensively to becoming pariahs on the international stage. Whatever the reasons for changes in public attitudes were, the number of conscientious objectors tended to rise during the mid-1970s. In 1973 only 159 people, most of them Jehovah's Witnesses, were convicted for refusing to render military service. By 1976 the figure had rocketed to 916 and included many people who did not belong to historic "peace churches". Thereafter the number of convictions declined somewhat but remained above the level of the first half of the 1970s.³⁷ Conscientious objection in various forms and undoubtedly for a multiplicity of motives had become a noteworthy phenomenon in South African religious and political life.

As much of southern Africa remained in turmoil, Marxist governments in place in both Moçambique and Angola, and the spectre of one in Rhodesia (subsequently Zimbabwe) threatening, the South African government elected to increase the size of and modernise its military apparatus. One consequence of this was the amendment of the Defence Act in 1978. The provisions pertaining to conscientious objection were modified somewhat. This involved *inter alia* making punishment for refusing to perform military duties more severe. Those who refused were imprisoned and/or fined only once if they belonged to recognised peace churches. Other resisters, however, could be thus punished repeatedly if they failed to appear to serve in the military forces. Theoretically, recalcitrant resisters could be imprisoned until they outlived their liability to perform military duties at the age of sixty-six, although in practice that extreme was never taken. In an related provision, jurisdiction in cases of conscientious objection was

transferred to military courts. Men who refused to follow orders to enter the military, in other words, were nevertheless compelled to appear in its courts and, in hundreds of cases, to serve sentences in its prisons or "detention barracks".

Perhaps nothing more vividly illustrates the hostility to conscientious objection which still prevailed in politically conservative church circles than the remarks which Chaplain-General van Zyl made about the subject in 1979. In his Christmas message published in the SADF monthly magazine *Paratus*, he trod the well-worn rhetorical path of anti-Marxism, arguing that Marx threatened to dethrone Jesus Christ in southern Africa while failing to mention the vicious social injustices which were making fertile the ground for Marxist revolutions there. South Africans, in van Zyl's simplistic view, were confronted with the choice of either supporting military intervention against Marxist governments and movements in the adjacent countries to the north or betraying Christian civilisation in the region and, by doing so, abandon their own spiritual heritage. There was no middle ground: "Daarom kan geen gewetensbeswaarder en geen pasifis in hierdie tyd met 'n skoon gewete by die krip van Betlehem gaan neerkniel nie. Hoe kan hy Christelike vryheid geniet sonder om daarvoor te veg; hoe kan hy Christus volg sonder om Hom en sy boodskap te verdedig?"³⁸

Complicating the plight of the Baptist Union in its consideration of conscientious objection at a time when such attitudes went almost unchallenged in some quarters was the fact that one of its senior ministers, Andrew van den Aardweg, was by the mid-1970s a highly placed officer in the chaplaincy corps of the SADF and a close associate of van Zyl. Indeed, only five months before the SACC passed its historic resolution in 1974 Townsend included a laudatory article about him in *The South African Baptist*. Readers of that journal were informed that Colonel van den Aardweg had recently been appointed senior staff officer of Chaplain Services. This post effectively placed him in charge of chaplaincy services to all English-speaking Christians in the SADF. The new appointee was quoted in highly respectful terms as assuring the congregation of Central Baptist Church during a recent service that "gone were the days . . . when there was a place for the hard-drinking, back-slapping chaplain striving for popularity

as 'one of the boys'. To-day's need was for high-principled men of God, able to point other men to the Lord Jesus Christ".³⁹ Had van den Aardweg been an outspoken critic of his government's racial policies, as his father-in-law, C.M. Doke, had been, and more in tune with the particular social and political needs of South Africa during the 1970s and 1980s, his presence very near the top of the chaplaincy services may have made a noteworthy mark on his denomination's struggle for relevance in the debate over conscientious objection and intimately related matters. But as he was either unable or unwilling to distance himself from those debilitating policies and raise a critical voice against them, his case is of interest only as an illustration of *de facto* religious collaboration with the *status quo*, a ministry which helped to provide religious legitimation for it. Not that van den Aardweg was an unprincipled or conspicuously immoral man; in some respects he appears to have upheld high standards of conventional pietistic behaviour. There is no reason, moreover, to doubt that he failed to keep in mind what he understood to be the spiritual interests of the men to whom he had been appointed to minister. Indeed, the respect which he gradually accrued within the Baptist Union was sufficiently great for him to be elected its president in 1990. The point is that he remained irrelevant to some of the burning public questions at the height of his career and in effect impeded the efforts of many of his denominational fellows to counter effectively the stultifying effects of its military apparatus. It is van den Aardweg's essential conservatism and typicality which makes his case relevant to our study.

Van den Aardweg's background was in many respects fairly typical but in a few quite unique for a Baptist minister of his generation. Born in Pretoria in 1929, he was the son of a Roman Catholic Hollander whose father had emigrated from the Netherlands. His mother belonged to the Dutch Reformed Church. Once a farmer, his father became an employee of the Department of Native Affairs, and it was in this capacity which Andrew van den Aardweg knew him as a parent. Despite his denominationally mixed origins, he attended a Baptist Sunday school and, while a teenager, became a Baptist. Van den Aardweg attended high school in Pretoria and felt called to become a minister of the Gospel. In the late 1940s there was no Baptist theological college in South Africa so, lacking the funds to attend one in London, he studied

theology instead at Rhodes University. Among the teachers there who van den Aardweg believes exercised particular influence on him were Leslie Hewson in New Testament and Horton Davies in ecclesiastical history. By his own admission, his study of Christian ethics at Rhodes was quite limited. Virtually nothing in van den Aardweg's few written works clearly indicates the influence of a single ethicist.

Following his graduation from Rhodes, van den Aardweg was ordained in 1952 as the youngest Baptist minister in South Africa. Not content with his undergraduate degree, he did post-graduate research in sociology at the University of Chicago and received a Master of Arts at the University of Pretoria with a thesis on the origin, methodology, and purpose of military sociology in South Africa. Van den Aardweg's hopes of taking a doctorate in sociology at the University of South Africa, however, fell victim to a heart attack which compelled him to terminate his formal studies.

His personal ethical position was from the outset emphatically pietistic and individualistic. Van den Aardweg claimed in 1991 that he had never gone to a dance, smoked tobacco or imbibed alcoholic beverages, and that during his student days he rarely visited a cinema. His own approach to Christian ethics is, by his own account, primarily imitative, though this is not exclusively the imitation of Christ; van den Aardweg finds models of faith at work in daily life in both the Old and New Testaments. Yet he also believes that Old Testament Law is "still applicable" to twentieth-century Christians and exercises considerable influence within the Baptist Union, although specific application of much of it, particularly with regard to such matters as individuals' observance of Sunday, has changed during his lifetime. Part of van den Aardweg's inspiration and understanding of Christian ethics may well come from his perception of historic individuals. He admits that he has never read a novel but that he loves biography. Consistent with this interest, van den Aardweg, like many Afrikaners, subscribes to the "great man" school of historiographical interpretation, believing that individuals have shaped the course of South African history. Yet he insists that he finds no genuine heroes in that history, though he knew and respected J.H. Hofmeyr and Jan Smuts. Van den Aardweg also emphasised in 1991 that since Smuts' defeat in 1948 South African politicians have been "not great men at

all", that this generalisation applies to State President F.W. de Klerk, and that "nothing" about Hendrik Verwoerd, B.J. Vorster, or P.W. Botha stood out for him to admire. In contrast to recent South African political figures, men like nineteenth-century missionaries Robert Moffatt and David Livingstone as well as General Montgomery of Alamein appeal to van den Aardweg as admirable for retaining the courage of their spiritual and other convictions despite constant adversity.⁴⁰

Van den Aardweg's career as a minister in civilian life extended from 1952 until 1966. For twelve years he was a pastor in Rhodesia, and during six years of that time he also served as a part-time military chaplain. Van den Aardweg entered the chaplaincy of the SADF in 1966 and rose rapidly through its echelons, retiring in 1989 with the rank of brigadier. He has no regrets about serving in the SADF during its years of incursions into South Africa's northern neighbours, curiously asserting without explanation that in his capacity there he had "more opportunities to proclaim the Gospel than would have been the case in Civvy Street". Van den Aardweg also declares that as a military chaplain he was "never vetted" in his preaching or writing. He believes that it was God's will that he entered the SADF and therefore would not change his choice of ministry if he could relive his life. When asked about the frequent complaint that military chaplains in South Africa, as officers in the SADF, find it difficult to be politically neutral, van den Aardweg responds that the "chaplain doesn't have to be neutral". During much of his career he served immediately under Chaplain-General van Zyl, whom he described as "one of the most terrific fellows to work with" and a man whose "Christianity came through loud and clear". In 1991 the present writer, while interviewing van den Aardweg at the latter's house in Pretoria, asked him to read orally van Zyl's 1979 Christmas message. He agreeably read excerpts but skipped over the controversial statement that no pacifist or conscientious objector could with a clean conscience kneel at the crib of Christ, and declared that he "would go along with the Chaplain-General in that statement". When it was called to his attention a few minutes later that van Zyl's message also contained this disputable assertion, van Zyl stated unambiguously that he disagreed with his former superior on that.⁴¹

Van den Aardweg's case *may* illustrate how little lasting impact resolutions sometimes have. When interviewed in March 1991, almost seventeen years after the SACC issued its highly controversial statement about conscientious objection, he professed that he "can't even remember" it. Van den Aardweg was then showed a newspaper cutting about the Anglophone chaplains the SADF rejecting the resolution. Again he professed ignorance, claiming that van Zyl had stated that his staff was not to be affected by such statements. Van den Aardweg's assertions in this regard seem highly implausible and perhaps are most prudently taken *cum grano salis* as the utterances of a denominational official caught in a sensitive position, one made all the more precarious by the passing of time and shifts of public attitudes towards conscientious objection. Yet it may well be that he and other chaplains were too preoccupied with their duties during a time of high tensions related to the international strife in which many of the men entrusted to their spiritual care were engaged.⁴²

In any case, according to another source hardly more disinterested than van den Aardweg, this prominent chaplain and Baptist churchmen participated in a debate relating to conscientious objection at an annual assembly during the latter half of the 1970s. Theodore D. Pass, the conscientious objector from England who had been deeply involved in the affairs of the Christian Citizenship Committee beginning at an early stage, and others sought to move a resolution pertaining to conscientious objection at that time. Van den Aardweg and other delegates successfully opposed it on the floor. At the end of the session, as the delegates were leaving the hall where they had debated the matter, van den Aardweg reportedly shouted with glee to Pass, "It's a dead duck!"⁴³ This seems plausible in the light of some of van den Aardweg's other statements. Precisely what his attitude towards conscientious objection was during the 1970s may be impossible to demonstrate, but if the statement cited in the South African press was correct, he was apparently opposed to it, at least insofar as the Hammanskraal Resolution called upon members of its affiliated denominations to consider resisting conscription. Consistency on van den Aardweg's part is frustratingly difficult and maybe impossible to trace. He is not known to have published anything on the matter, and when interviewed he was cordially guarded about his statements. By

1991 he could claim to regard conscientious objection as a legitimate Christian position to take, but at the same time he insisted that his Christian ethics had not undergone any great shift.⁴⁴

The largely uncritical acceptance of the military as a respected South African institution and obedience to conscription as the duty of all white men in South Africa remained the normative position in the Baptist Union throughout the period under consideration. Only in the 1980s did an appreciable number of Baptists refuse to perform military service, and at no time were they more than exceptions to a well-entrenched pattern of submission to the authority of the law. Van den Aardweg was an atypical Baptist in some respects, but it was hardly in his conformity to this model which made him different from some of his colleagues. Indeed, after the Hammanskraal Resolution was announced the number of Baptists serving as chaplains in the SADF actually increased, although strictly speaking that fact says virtually nothing about conscientious objection or the rejection thereof. Editors of *The South African Baptist*, though obviously aware of the debate on the matter which was affecting South African society in general and their denomination in particular, may have reinforced the uncritical acceptance of conscription by commenting favourably about the Baptist Union's contribution to the chaplaincy corps. In April 1977, for instance, when clergymen no longer were exempted from military service, it was proudly reported that two Afrikaans Baptists, Gerhard Venter and Barnard Burger, were in the first group of conscripted chaplains undergoing training at the South African Army College at Voortrekkerhoogte near Pretoria.⁴⁵ Six years later readers of a lengthy and entirely uncritical article in the same journal learnt that four Baptists, including van den Aardweg, were serving as full-time chaplains in the SADF, in which all were officers, while nineteen others were part-time civilian chaplains.⁴⁶ In 1983 *The South African Baptist* also carried a laudatory piece about van den Aardweg's promotion to the rank of brigadier and his concomitant appointment to the position of Director Personnel Chaplains' Service of the SADF.⁴⁷ Entirely absent from all these and related articles was any consideration of the ethical implications of military service as such or, more specifically, difficulties for Christian ministry arising from the participation of clergymen as uniformed officers in the SADF. The debate about the

desirability of civilian chaplains as opposed to those in the officer corps had not reached the Baptist Union in any significant way, although it would do so later in the 1980s. For that matter, nothing about possible violations of the venerable Baptist tradition of the separation of church and state appeared in *The South African Baptist* in connection with its relatively extensive coverage of Baptist ministers serving in the armed forces. The nature of this religious journalism is apparently still further evidence of the widespread subordination of ethical principles to worldly values in the Baptist Union of South Africa.

The Watershed Case of Richard Steele

Notwithstanding the continuation of the general acceptance of militarism and conscription by the Baptist Union and from the 1970s into the 1980s, the latter decade did witness a partial breakdown of the denominational consensus against conscientious objection. One of the many factors arguably responsible for if not necessarily illustrative of this was the case of the most celebrated Baptist pacifist, Richard Steele, who gained international recognition as being nearly a Christian martyr in a country whose reputation for civil and human rights in the international community was rapidly approaching its nadir. He failed to make many converts to his total refusal to participate in the military machine of his country, but through his well-publicised and courageous actions he probably raised the matter of conscientious objection in the consciousness not only of Baptists but of many other South Africans, as well. Beyond that, Steele's case is significant because it illustrates more clearly than any other the factors which caused a young South African to swim against a swift current of popular attitudes and the tribulations which he was compelled to endure for doing so.

Steele was born in Pretoria in 1956. His father was a Scotsman who had emigrated to South Africa shortly after the conclusion of the Second World War; his mother was a native of the country who had long been a member of Central Baptist Church in Pretoria. The Steele family was, by Richard's account, very pious and had devotions every

evening after supper. The usual pietistic strictures obtained; tobacco, alcohol, chewing gum, the cinema, card-playing, and riding bicycles on Sundays were forbidden. One dormant seed of Steele's subsequent pacifism may have been sown when his parents decreed that no militaristic toys would be allowed in their home. When on one occasion Richard received a toy firearm for his birthday, his mother immediately confiscated it. The family attended not only his mother's congregation in Pretoria but also Walker Memorial Chapel and Rosebank Union Church in Johannesburg. Like many other Baptist children, Steele sat the Scripture Union's examination on the Bible annually. After four years of primary education in the Transvaal, he was sent to the Baptist Union's boarding school at Treverton near Mooi River in Natal. Steele regards his years at that institution as highly influential in his spiritual formation and social consciousness, owing partly to a weekly "current affairs session" for the pupils. The principal, Derek Hudson-Reed, moreover, urged them to volunteer to assist at a soup kitchen in a nearby township on Sundays. In what he considers one of his first social ethical decisions, Steele did so when he was in Standards IV and V. On the other hand, the racial dissection of South African society was not challenged at Treverton during his stay at what was then that all-white school. Steele does not recall ever hearing apartheid criticised there. After five years at Treverton, he returned to the Witwatersrand and spent three years at an Anglophone government high school in Kempton Park, where he matriculated in 1974. An outstanding learner and fairly talented athlete, Steele was very active in the Student Christian Association there and also participated in secular extracurricular activities. He was the head prefect of his class, captain of the cricket and athletics teams, and, by his own admission, one of the best students. While serving on the junior city council and as junior deputy mayor he had his first significant contacts with Afrikaans-speaking students from other schools, but he does not attribute any particular importance to his interaction with them.⁴⁸

Steele believes that his deep involvement in worship and Bible studies at Bonaero Park Baptist Church in Kempton Park as a teenager did not arm him heavily for his subsequent encounter with the SADF. Many of the other members of the congregation were post-war British

immigrants who laboured at the nearby Atlas factory, which was affiliated with Armscor, the government-held munitions corporation. Steele estimates that 60 per cent of the students in his high school were the children of these and other British immigrants and that "crass racism" prevailed amongst them, many of whom he characterises as "skinheads". He cannot recall the pastor at Bonaero Park, Ray Trew, preaching a single sermon which directly pertained to justice in South African politics or related matters of racism or militarism. This clergyman reportedly exhorted members of his flock in general terms to turn from their sins but rarely identified sin, and practically never spoke about institutionalised sin in South African society. Like many other white Baptist congregations, however, Trew's church arranged a weekly Sunday afternoon service for black Africans.⁴⁹

Yet Steele emphasises that his spiritual formation during his years at Bonaero Park were not entirely irrelevant to his later Christian political activism. Without creating strictly exclusive categories, he characterises Trew's ethical emphasis as being partly on the imitation of Jesus Christ, which complemented his parents' stress on prescriptive ethics and formed part of the background of Steele's conscientious objection. Moreover, another lay member of the Bonaero Park congregation conducted a Sunday afternoon ministry which included worship and soup for alcoholics and other people on the periphery of society in the partly decayed Doornfontein section of Johannesburg. Steele assisted him in this outreach and attributes to his involvement in it a heightened social consciousness.⁵⁰

Steele also added an international dimension to his social and political awareness while a teenager. At age sixteen he registered for future conscription in accordance with South African law and had no plans to refuse to perform military service. During his final year of high school, a teacher encouraged him to apply for exchange scholarships from both the American Field Service and Rotary International. Steele received one from the latter organisation and spent most of 1975 at a high school in Cortland, New York, a small city near Ithaca. Steele regards his time there as a "crucial year" in his formation as a Christian and cites two reasons for this. First, it gave him his first opportunity to experience a foreign culture, including a racially integrated high school, and compare it with South Africa. He

thereby came increasingly to regard his native society as an "abnormality". Secondly, his host family was "not religious at all", a fact which Steele says was "quite a shock for me". Coming from a very pious family, this posed a dilemma for the young exchange student and made his own faith stand out in sharper relief. Steele attended a Baptist church in Cortland but found little social ethical consciousness in it. Nevertheless, during his year in the United States his faith "matured" because he was confronted with the choice of maintaining it or conforming to the secular world of his host family and many of his schoolmates. A close friendship with a devout Roman Catholic boy in Cortland helped him to uphold his faith. Steele found that his Christian values gave him an anchoring point in this new milieu, where morals, in his words, seemed "loose, to use an old Baptist phrase".⁵¹

Steele experienced one incident in Cortland which particularly sensitised him to racial injustice in distant South Africa. State University of New York at Cortland sponsored an Africa focus week, which included a showing of the film "Last Grave at Dimbaza" about a township near East London which served as a dumping ground for people whom the government had forcibly removed from other urban areas. This was a graphic indictment of the homelands system, one which made the initially defensive Steele feel "incensed" at what he perceived as a propagandistic assault on his country. Steele consequently complained to the co-ordinator of the event, insisting that the homelands were a "good thing" because they allowed the indigenous peoples of South Africa to develop along their own cultural lines and have their own governments. The American responded that this was precisely what the government of B.J. Vorster had deliberately trained him to believe. This answer made Steele realise that he was "captive" to his white environment in South Africa.⁵²

Steele was a changed young man when he returned to his native land early in 1976, but his transformation was far from complete. He still had no qualms about responding obediently to conscription, but the question was not immediately relevant because he followed in the wake of his slightly older cousin and subsequent fellow conscientious objector, Peter Moll, to the University of Cape Town, where he initially intended to study business administration. For unspecified "ethical reasons", however, he shifted his academic course immediately before

setting out on his first term and elected instead to study for a Bachelor of Arts with majors in psychology and English and a sub-major in religious studies. It was the last-named subject on which Steele concentrated in 1976 and 1977. At that time he was very active in the Student Christian Association. Midway through his first year in Cape Town the Soweto riots erupted near Johannesburg, plunging the university into a cauldron of political unrest. Together with many of his fellow students, Steele thus attended a political protest meeting on nearby De Waal Drive, the first of many in which he would participate. The entire episode was an agonising heightening of his critical social conscience which opened his eyes to the profundity of black anger. He was shocked by both black violence in Soweto and elsewhere and the violent response to it by the SADF. In a matter of days the blatantly interracial clash stripped away the tranquil veneer of black and white interaction in the suburban environment in which Steele had grown up. He began to believe that at its most basic level the "the reality of society was hatred, violence, and separation". This represented a Copernican shift in Steele's *Weltanschauung*, as he had been nurtured on a diet of divine love and principles such as love of one's neighbour, turning the other cheek when assaulted, and seeking to harvest the fruits of the Holy Spirit as described in Galatians. In a period of profound spiritual *Anfechtung*, he pondered at length the question of what was the greater reality, New Testament ethical ideals or the hatred and brokenness of South African reality. "Had I been hoodwinked all these years about Christianity?" the young student asked himself. As he sailed through the tempestuous seas of this struggle, the influence of several people on both sides of the Atlantic allowed him to keep his Christian faith afloat. One was the guidance of his more experienced cousin, Peter Moll, whose own battle with the SADF we shall discuss later in the present chapter. Another, amazingly enough in ideological retrospect, was the American conservative Rousas Rushdoony, whose influence on right-wing Baptists in South Africa will be discussed in Chapter VIII and whose understanding of the relationship of Christianity to contemporary society Steele later came to regard as "warped". A third was the support of Bill Houston, a Baptist evangelist in the Student Christian Association. Fourthly, Steele read the works of Martin Luther King, Jr., the renowned Afro-

American Baptist minister civil rights activist and advocate of Christian passive resistance who had been murdered in 1968. Finally, Steele developed a great deal of respect for Michael Lapsley, an Anglican chaplain at the University of Natal who spoke at the University of Cape Town and asked his audience whether there was "room for hope after Soweto". He had answered his own question affirmatively, reminding the Cape Town students that the crucifixion had preceded the resurrection. Buoyed by the witness of these and other Christians in that hour of national crisis, Steele, together with several of his fellow students, founded a Christian social awareness group at the University of Cape Town. One of its first actions came in response to a threatened removal of squatters near Cape Town. Steele went to the site several times to support these people, including one occasion in response to a suggestion made at a meeting at Rondebosch Congregational Church to engage in passive resistance when bulldozers were supposedly rolling towards the squatter camp. Steele went there but nothing happened and no such machines were in sight. He nevertheless regards his decision to participate in this kind of resistance as an important one to his ethical development. During the next few years Steele engaged in various other actions of that sort. Whatever relevant training in Christian social ethics he received during this period came from such para-church organisations. Steele worshipped at Claremont Baptist Church during his student days, but the preaching of John Walton, whom he described as a competent Bible teacher, did not touch on contemporary South Africa. Nevertheless, Walton stressed Christian discipleship, so Steele regarded him as "quite valuable" despite the absence of sermons immediately pertinent to the deepening socio-political crisis in the country.⁵³

With his essential Christian faith intact and his social consciousness vividly awakened, Steele began to read Christian ethics in the Anabaptist tradition. He also heard the American Mennonite ethicist, John Howard Yoder, speak at an SCA meeting. This theologian's study of imitative ethics, *The Politics of Jesus*, had appeared in 1972 and quickly gained internal recognition. Yoder was the first significant Christian pacifist whom Steele had encountered, and he was immediately attracted to his social analysis of relations between church and state. At approximately the same time, South

African Congregationalist theologian John W. de Gruchy, an increasingly outspoken critic of the Vorster government who was lecturing in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Cape Town, also began to exercise an influence on Steele's ethical formation, which was evolving in the direction of pacifism. This was at a crucial stage of the latter's life, because he was approaching the end of his three-year period of undergraduate studies and facing the almost certainty of conscription after receiving his degree in 1978.⁵⁴

By that time some other conscientious objectors had given themselves an alternative to the choice between military service and imprisonment by emigrating from South Africa. Steele emphasises that in 1977 he never gave that eventuality serious consideration, despite his gratifying experience in the United States two years earlier. In coming to grips with the dilemma which this posed, Steele consulted many Baptists and other Christians, but found no support for his suggestion that he simply resist conscription on the basis of universal pacifism. Repeatedly fellow believers whom he consulted broached the spectre of communism in southern Africa. No-one impugned his motives for considering noncompliance questioned his sincerity or directly challenged him on explicitly ethical grounds. Some, however, used the term "foolish" to describe his behaviour and sought to influence his thinking by arguing that normal service in the army would give him abundant opportunity to witness to Christ, apparently without considering the possibility that resisting conscription might in itself be a vivid witness. His own pastor countered the suggestion of resistance by appealing to the Pauline injunction in Romans 13 to obey secular authorities. Steele's parents were "very upset" because disobedience in this case would almost certainly lead to imprisonment, though they respected (but never agreed with) his subsequent decision. Notwithstanding these pressures, the ethics of the imitation of Christ remained dominant in his thinking about the matter. "I continued to ask myself the old Baptist question, 'Would Jesus have done this or that?'" , remembers Steele. In his own situation, the specific form of the question became whether Jesus would have co-operated with conscription. To Steele, by then the answer was obviously negative. He had come to regard Jesus as essentially a healer rather than a militant being.⁵⁵

In December 1978 Steele received his baccalaureate degree in English and psychology and briefly returned to the United States, a journey which confirmed his tentative decision to resist conscription and ultimately altered the course of his life. After working in a temporary capacity at a hotel near the Grand Canyon in Arizona, he visited the offices of the Mennonite Central Committee in Akron, Pennsylvania, where, in his words, "it balmed my soul to speak with those nonviolent folks". Steele left Akron with a sheaf of books about pacifism and related topics as well as a list of Mennonite missionaries in southern Africa apart from the Republic of South Africa; revealingly enough, virtually no Mennonites had been able to acquire visas to pursue missionary work in that country. Later in 1979, after returning to his homeland, Steele contacted many of these people. He also returned briefly to his *alma mater* to acquire a higher education diploma in order to be qualified as a high school teacher.⁵⁶

Steele's second stint at the University of Cape Town brought him yet another step along the road to resistance. He became involved in a Quaker alternative service project which Professor Paul Hare, an American sociologist then temporarily at that institution, had initiated. A small group of Quakers had bought a combi which they converted into an ambulance and begun to convey children from squatter camps to a pediatric clinic at a hospital. Steele served in this endeavour once a week. From the fertile soil of this project sprouted the plan to drive an unofficial ambulance to a war zone in northern Namibia and, in collaboration with a missionary hospital, spend two months treating people in need of medical care as a graphic example of what conscientious objectors could accomplish if given such an opportunity instead of being incarcerated. Both military and civil authorities initially approved the project, but when the ambulance reached the operational area security forces halted it and escorted it back to Windhoek. They then interrogated, held in custody for a night, and deported from Namibia Steele and his fellows as "undesirable" in December 1979. Despite the failure of the project to reach maturity, Steele regards it as significant to his own development, because it gave him an opportunity to put his ethical insights into practice.⁵⁷

In the meantime Steele had written and sent to several people in the SADF a nine-paged, double-spaced letter explaining the basis of

his conscientious objection and stating categorically that despite receiving an order to appear for induction into the army he would "not report for duty on 4 July 1979, and will treat any future call-up for military service in the same manner". This statement, essentially a rejection of violence on the grounds of Christian conviction, is one of the most revealing Baptist documents in the struggle against conscription in South Africa and therefore merits fairly detailed consideration.

Steele began his case by stating that he was a Christian, specifically a Baptist, and declaring that "Christ is at the centre of my life, and so he acts as a reference point for all that I do, think or say". This keynote pointed in the direction of imitative ethics, although Steele's meta-ethics cannot be entirely characterised as such. Intimately related to the imitation of Christ in his understanding of ethics is the supremacy of *agape* and concomitant total rejection of violence: "I believe violence is the antithesis of love, and love as taught and practised by Jesus Christ is at the very centre of the Christian way of life". Violence in all its forms, he reasoned, was not only inherently unchristian, but indeed itself sinful, "because it arises out of man's alienation from God and from his fellow man". Steele linked this to Old Testament anthropology by spelling out in conventional fashion the fall of Adam and Eve as the fountainhead of this alienation from the divine, the murder of Abel as the first instance of resulting interpersonal violence, and God's consequent punishing of the human race beginning with the flood. There was little in this with which most other Christians would have disagreed. Steele's use of the New Testament is appropriately selective and emphasises both Gospel and Pauline texts which correspond to his understanding of the imitation of Christ as the essence of Christian discipleship and of Christian *agape* as the source of healing and life. Among these were Ephesians 5:1-2 ("Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."), the Lord's Prayer and its epilogue in Matthew 6:14-15 ("For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."), and John 13:34-35 ("A new commandment I give to you,

that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." Building on these and several related prescriptions and precepts as his New Testament foundation, Steele proceeded to spell out his understanding of Christian discipleship as peacemaking, the core of which he found in active, imitative love as referred to in Matthew 5:9 ("Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."). "Love is the lubrication in the peacemaking process", he declared, without, however, defining love. "A peacemaker is not a detached observer of violence and hostility, but plunges right in and actively seeks to bring about peace and reconciliation in that situation. In whatever situation he finds himself, he actively works for peace". Postulated in this line of reasoning was the assumption that one could fulfil the commandments of Christ. Steele's beliefs thus bordered on Christian perfectionism. Be that as it may, in his conviction that peacemaking lay at the core of discipleship, Steele believed he had found his true calling. "I want to be a peacemaker here in South Africa. I want to be used by God in the process of reconciliation between the peoples of our land so that we may live together in true peace - a peace undergirded by justice and righteousness". He could not do so by becoming a soldier, for that would mean dispensing with Christian injunctions to turn away from the sin of violence and indeed casting overboard his entire understanding of Christian ethics:

I am striving to cultivate a non-violent lifestyle: non-violence is the refusal, ever, to leave out of consideration the affirmation of the dignity of the other person, because he bears the image of God (Gen 1:27; 9:6). In situations of conflict, non-violence does not seek to defeat or humiliate the opponent, but to win his friendship and understanding. The end is not the destruction of the opponent, but his redemption.

Steele sought to obviate objections to his generalisations on the well-worn grounds that South Africa's conflicts were different and justified on the grounds that they were defensive or ultimately promoted a larger good: "I do not believe that there can ever be such a thing as

a Just War because violence cannot ever be justified: one can never get round the theological fact that violence is contrary to the command to love, no matter in what context it is used - whether to maintain the status quo or to overthrow it". If Steele was aware of conventional "Christian realist" responses to what some critics might dismiss as the naiveté of his argumentation, the counter-argument that the exercise of healing might at times necessitate the use of force to protect life from relentless aggression, he gave no indication of such awareness in his statement.

Steele knew of nothing more antithetical to this understanding of Christian love and its apposition to violence than militarism. Without initially mentioning the SADF, he made his theological discourse immediately relevant to the case at hand by declaring in general terms that "violence and war dehumanise. War is only possible in as much as men become things. Military training, as preparation for war, conditions the whole man - physically, psychologically and spiritually - to become an efficient mechanism of death". Steele then related this macrocosm to the microcosm of his own land and, within it, his own status:

As I see it, the South African Defence Force is caught up in the spiral of violence, as is any country's defence force. I do not wish to join the Defence Force because I do not wish to participate in that violence. In this respect I could be classified as a universal pacifist because I would refuse to do military service in any country anywhere in the world under any circumstances.⁵⁸

Steele's letter apparently threw a spanner into the works of conscription. Less than a fortnight later he received a telegram from the SADF informing him that his call-up had been postponed until 1980.⁵⁹ As 1979 drew to its close, however, Steele realised that his hour of conscription was imminent. Believing that it would be most prudent to take again an activist approach to the matter rather than being entirely passive, he arranged interviews with four people in the SADF, namely Chaplain-General van Zyl, the prominent Baptist chaplain van den Aardweg, the registering officer who would assign him to national

service, and the legal officer of the unit that he knew would call him up. Steele had two purposes in making these interviews. First, he regarded it as a matter of courtesy and tact to contact the men in question personally; secondly, he wanted to express as clearly as he could his willingness to perform alternative service outside the SADF. The interviews took place at the end of 1979 and very early in 1980 and failed to accomplish anything. Steele found van Zyl to be "extremely hostile". The chaplain-general showed him the Christmas message he had recently contributed to *Paratus* (quoted earlier in the present chapter) and informed him that the SADF distributed Bibles and other Christian literature in Angola, an action which the young resister thought "contradictory" in the light of what he believed was its utterly unchristian military activities there. (In an appendix to this confrontation, one which Steele aptly characterises as a "remarkable story", he visited van Zyl after completing his subsequent period of incarceration in detention barracks. To his pleasant surprise the chaplain-general greeted him warmly this time, thanked him for coming, and informed him that in the interim he had become an advocate of conscientious objection.) The registering officer was no less antagonistic and reportedly told Steele that "conscientious objectors should be made to walk through mine fields or simply put up against a brick wall and shot".⁶⁰

Steele received orders to report for induction late in January 1980. Following a classic pacifist practice, he informed the legal officer in writing that he did not intend to obey this command. His initial confrontation with his unit was a bizarre illustration of the SADF's inability to deal competently with conscientious objectors. Steele's parents transported him to its headquarters near Johannesburg. He entered the building and repeated his intention not to serve. The legal officer, who was to deal with this case of noncompliance, was out playing sport, however, so another officer sent Steele to the military police. Upon arrival at their office, they declared that since they did not have proper documentation pertaining to him he was free to go home for the night. Steele thus took a commuter train to a point approximately two kilometres from his parents' house and walked the remaining distance. "It felt like coming home from the dead", he recalled several years later. "It was like visiting from another planet".

The following day Steele was transferred to the regional headquarters of the SADF in Pretoria but again was told to go home temporarily. This time his father, who was employed in Johannesburg, collected him. Steele thus remained a free man, though one awaiting prosecution for refusing conscription, for another three weeks.⁶¹

His chances of escaping unscathed from a trial must have seemed remote, because only a few weeks earlier a military court had found his cousin, Peter Moll, guilty of a similar offence and imposed a sentence of eighteen months' incarceration in detention barracks. That incident, which we shall discuss at length in the immediately following section on Moll, had gained a great deal of publicity in South Africa and left the law challenged but unchanged. Steele's own trial took place before a military tribunal during the fourth week of February 1980. He was charged with failure to report for military service without having a good reason for not complying with that order. Steele pleaded not guilty on the grounds that he indeed had a good reason. He told the court that he regarded the SADF as a pillar of a fundamentally unjust society. "It is common knowledge that thousands of young men fail to report for their military service each year and that some flee the country", he argued, adding that in contrast to those who emigrated he desired to remain in South Africa and "serve my country as a peacemaker". Steele emphasised that he was not a totally recalcitrant resister seeking merely to avoid personal hardship: "I am prepared to work in circumstances similar to those of the national servicemen, in the operational area, if necessary for a longer period and for less pay. But I cannot subject myself to military authority or wear a uniform". The only witness called was Steele's pastor in Kempton Park, Ray Trew, who testified to his character and informed the court that while Baptists in general were not conscientious objectors, the denominational tradition laid great weight on the principle of individual choice in matters of conscience and therefore Steele was being faithful to his Baptist heritage. Privately, Trew told Steele that he still disagreed with his grounds for refusing to perform military service. In the end, all argumentation was to no avail, as the defendant and, one must assume, most informed observers knew it would be. The tribunal found Steele guilty and sentenced him to eighteen months' imprisonment in the detention barracks at

Voortrekkerhoogte. Six months of the sentence were suspended. It was declared that if, after completion of the initial term, Steele again refused to perform military service, a recurring sentence of two years might be imposed. The tribunal rejected a request by the defence counsel to allow Steele to investigate the possibility of performing rehabilitative alternative service in the Prisons Department, where he could apply his education in psychology, rather than merely being a prisoner himself.⁶²

Steele's life in detention barracks became itself a testimony to his principles, though not one without a considerable amount of emotional and physical hardship more severe than anything else he had experienced. He entered the facility at Voortrekkerhoogte, where he had visited Moll a few weeks earlier, entirely certain that he was being obedient in Christian discipleship and therefore confident that God would maintain him through the ordeal. Yet Steele was conscious of the peril which he faced, because he was aware that two years earlier two prisoners there had been ordered to march without respite until they died of exhaustion. At the time of his own entrance, he believed that he was crossing a crucial border and found some freedom in this conviction. He was, by his own retrospective account, prepared to die for it.⁶³

Steele sought to uphold his principles from the first day of his incarceration. Officially regarded as a soldier and thus ordered to wear a uniform, he refused to do so. A supervising officer consequently ordered him to be locked up in an ordinary cell. The following morning a man whom Steele calls "the chief bully" approached him at breakfast and ordered him to wear an overalls uniform. Again, not knowing what that man's disciplinary function was in the detention barracks was, he intrepidly refused to co-operate. Later that day he was court-martialled for this noncompliance to a regulation and sentenced to solitary confinement. Steele's third supposed infraction was to refuse to shave his beard. On this occasion he successfully defended himself on the basis of the detention barracks' own rules, however, which he knew permitted prisoners who had beards upon arrival to retain them, though not to initiate beards in captivity. Steele consequently boasted a beard throughout his imprisonment, a defiant symbol of his nonconformity. This victory did

not herald many others. On the contrary, Steele was repeatedly sentenced to solitary confinement for refusing to march and salute officers, addressing officers as "Mister", and generally refusing to execute orders but only doing tasks which he was asked in a "civil way" to do. He consciously tried to nurture cordial relations with the people around him, behaving as though he were in the civilian world and engaging in civilian conversation. In all of this Steele and Moll sought to give each other moral support. That, of course, was impossible during most of the time when either or both of them were in the block of six solitary confinement cells. Even when confined there, the two cousins were occasionally allowed to exercise together. Yet many hours Steele passed in stultifying boredom. The only reading material he was permitted to have in solitary confinement was the Bible. He refused to accept the version which the SADF offered him, preferring instead to use his more complete study version of the Jerusalem Bible.⁶⁴

In May 1980, some four months after his arrival at Voortrekkerhoogte, the SADF transferred Steele to a military prison in Bloemfontein. He believes the purpose of this move was to separate him from Moll, because their combined and persistence to comply with military regulations was influencing other prisoners. Steele estimates that 99 per cent of those men, most of whom were being punished because they had taken absence without leave or otherwise disobeyed regulations, regarded him and his cousin as heroes because of their disobedience. At Bloemfontein, Steele's behaviour again led to long periods of solitary confinement and, as a result, great mental stress. He sought to counter its effects by writing large numbers of letters. The resulting publicity began to yield results. Amnesty International adopted him as a prisoner of conscience. Helen Suzman, fiery critic of the Botha government and one of the few members of the Progressive Federal Party who sat in parliament during the early 1980s, brought up his case in that chamber. Letters of support reached Steele in increasing numbers; during 1980 he received over 2 000 of them. Steele's own efforts also prompted some degree of official response. He asked to be examined by a clinical psychologist and to have one-hour visits by members of his family every month. These requests were granted. In mid-1980, moreover, the SADF appointed a commission of

inquiry into his and Moll's cases. the board of inquiry included van Zyl, the head of the army, the surgeon-general, and the chief legal officer of the SADF. Sailing what it may have regarded as a pragmatic course, on 11 August the commission recommended that the two young Baptists no longer be given orders which they were likely to refuse to do and that in contrast to most other military prisoners they be accommodated with Jehovah's Witnesses for the remainder of their sentences. To Steele, however, this was an important victory, one which represented *de facto* recognition of their status as conscientious objectors, not merely "disobedient soldiers" or criminals who selfishly shirked their duty to perform military service, even though they did not belong to a recognised "peace church". Some opponents of conscientious objection later regretted making this concession. Brigadier C.J. Pretorius, a legal officer, declared in 1981 that it had been a "fatal error" because it set a precedent which would be awkward to respect and which led at least one other detainee to demand similar treatment that year. Major M.C. Krige, who commanded the detention barracks at Voortrekkerhoogte, declared in 1981 that no further concessions would be made to conscientious objectors.⁶⁵ But Steele and Moll were free men. Thanks to the victory they had won, the former spent the rest of 1980 living with Jehovah's Witnesses, wearing simple blue overalls without military insignia and working in his choice of prison occupation, namely gardening. Military chaplains visited him during this period, though the Baptist ones were not amongst them, a fact which the disappointed Steele did not forget. While he had been at Voortrekkerhoogte, only one, a Presbyterian names James Grey, seemed sympathetic. A Roman Catholic chaplain who called on him once in Bloemfontein complained to his superiors about the conditions under which Steele was being held and, perhaps owing to pressure from above, did not return. He also remembers the fact that his own pastor, Ray Trew, visited him only once, even though while he was at Voortrekkerhoogte more frequent calls could have been feasible. In Bloomfontein Steele's closest spiritual ally was a Dutch Reformed SADF hospital chaplain in the permanent force named Willie van Rooyen who eventually left the military establishment. Despite these exceptions, Steele found it impossible to respect SADF chaplains; he perceived them as essentially obliged to the military

hierarchy, beneficiaries of its salaries and perquisites, and otherwise beholden to worldly authority. Most seriously, however, Steele reacted negatively to their practice of rationalising warfare and military service to the soldiers to whom they ministered. He believed this was "the most distressing aspect" of their status.⁶⁶

Even after his transfer to Bloemfontein, Steele sought to nurture the development of his Christian faith and to witness to the people around him. His vegetarianism afforded one opportunity to do the latter, despite - or perhaps owing to - the practical difficulty of maintaining his dietary principles while in prison. Steele's persistent refusal to eat meat, he believes, convinced some of the people around him of the sincerity of his conscientious objection. Steele read the entire Old and New Testament and for a while conducted a Bible study for his fellow inmates, an activity which did not have the approval of the military authorities but one which they presumably would have found it awkward to halt. In connection with this Steele recalls doing a lot of reflecting on Biblical texts while confined and gaining many insights into them, owing to the stark contrasts between New Testament ethical ideals and the conditions he was experiencing. He became particularly close to those fellow prisoners who were Jehovah's Witnesses and, notwithstanding the gap between his university education and the modest schooling which most of them had, benefitted from "very valuable interaction" with them. Detention barracks became a venue for a lay ministry in other ways, as well. Steele reports that he carried on loving and caring for people, not least by counselling them, and therefore does not regard his period of incarceration as a waste of time.⁶⁷

Steele's ethics continued to evolve during this period, largely because of his extensive reading. He perused works by Mohandas K. Gandhi and was immediately impressed by the Mahatma's integration of spiritual values, especially his reverence for life, and their practical application. The young Baptist, disillusioned by some of the bitter fruits of the sectarian ethics he had experienced in South African Christian circles, also found that the universalism of Gandhi's approach to religion struck a chord in him. In harmony with this, an Anglican liturgical work to which he had access gave him insight into the ancient notion of the "communion of the saints" and prompted him

to appreciate more fully the spiritual presence of fellow believers and feel an affinity with them despite the physical distance from nearly all of them. This further nurtured a broadening personal spirituality spirit of religious toleration which Steele states continued to evolve within him long after his liberation. He became increasingly convinced that the divine was not confined to people of any one denomination, creed, or religion. By contrast, the militant passages of the Hebrew scriptures "disgusted and shocked" Steele, and he found the triumphalism of Judaism and Christianity, particularly as manifested in his own Baptist tradition, "too petty".⁶⁸

Given this further unfolding of his spirituality and ethical position, it would have been virtually impossible for Steele to resume active membership in a typical South African Baptist congregation after his release, and in fact since that time he has rarely darkened the door of a Baptist chapel. He states without rancor or immodesty that he grew beyond his denominational tradition, which he began to perceive as implicitly "rather hostile" to him and that it had become evident that the Baptist Union simply had not satisfied his needs when he was trying to take very seriously the implications of being a Christian in a fundamentally unjust and violent society. Steele's activities since his release in 1981 amply illustrate the direction which his spiritual pilgrimage has taken him. In 1981 and 1982 he spent several months in Europe and South America. The International Fellowship of Reconciliation, a broadly based, inter-religious pacifist organisation founded in 1914 and headquartered in The Netherlands, arranged a lecture tour for him in the United States of America and Canada. Steele then spent the 1982-1983 academic year in Elkhart, Indiana, as an irregular student at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries. In August 1984 he began to serve as the caretaker of the Gandhi Centre near Durban, an institution which was destroyed in interracial violence the following year. Steele and his wife, Anita Kromberg, were detained for two weeks in 1985 because of their involvement in anti-conscription activities. A year later the International Fellowship of Reconciliation gave him a post in Durban involving *inter alia* assisting foreign visitors interested in gaining insight into race relations in South Africa. In the early 1990s he was still active in the movement to end military conscription. Steele's

religious involvement since the late 1980s has been primarily in a Quaker meeting, where he finds the absence of ordained clergymen, the emphasis on the direct personal experiencing of the divine, general doctrinal latitudinarianism, silent worship (as opposed to what he in an uncharacteristically severe indictment generalises is "the pseudo-intellectual sermonising" of most Christian denominations), and rejection of violence amenable.⁶⁹

The Case of Peter Graham Moll

Peter Moll's encounter with the SADF had much in common and was closely intertwined with that of his slightly younger cousin and therefore need not be described in equally great detail here. In some respects, however, it differed, not least because Moll, unlike Steele, was not a universal pacifist, and therefore merits consideration as an important segment in South African Baptists' efforts to apply their faith to the dilemma which conscription posed for them.

Moll's familial situation differed somewhat from that of Steele. The two men's mothers were sisters, but Moll's father was a native South African of partly German ancestry and was employed as a magistrate in the Transkei, the Xhosa homeland which became an ostensibly "independent state" in the 1970s and in which Peter Moll, though born in Pretoria in 1956, spent much of his childhood. The younger Moll describes his father as an essentially conservative exponent of the Calvinist ethic who "believed in short hair and hard work". As such he frequently argued with his son by a previous marriage, Peter's half-brother Doug, who had become relatively liberalised while a student at Rhodes University but who nevertheless performed military service. He attended primary school in Alice and compiled an outstanding high school record at Selborne College in East London. Moll had little contact with non-Baptist churches before beginning his university studies and does not recall hearing any sermons on social ethics from Baptist pulpits while he was growing up. He scoffs at the suggestion that any such homiletics would have been heard during his spiritually formative years at Cambridge Baptist Church in East London. On the contrary, in his recollection the ethical emphasis there

was squarely on such personal matters as the avoidance of such evils as dancing and alcoholic beverages. "Christ was spiritualised, and even the prophets were spiritualised", Moll laments retrospectively. By his own account he was deeply religious as a teenager, though thoroughly in a pietistic sense. Moll claims that during the early 1970s he could give the chapter and verse numbers of nearly any New Testament text which he heard quoted. This memorisation developed from his personal crusade against what he then regarded as heretical threats to orthodox Christianity, such as those which the Jehovah's Witnesses as well as various charismatic and Arminian groups posed. The works of Francis Schaeffer also impressed Moll during those years. In accordance with the shape of his religious mind at that time, he remembers having very few political interests as a teenager. Contrary to many other white South Africans interviewed in connection with the present study, however, Moll emphasises that some of his high school teachers, especially Mr Goodwin in history and Mr Webster in English, encouraged discussion and debate in the classroom. This was not without its limits, however. While editing the school newspaper, Moll wrote an article in which he contended that the Voortrekkers had no right to complain about the Africans ambushing them when the former entered the Transvaal during the 1830s. Webster censored the piece on the grounds that such controversial views should not be put forth unless Moll could adduce evidence in support of them. Consequently, the piece was never published. Moll interprets the incident as indicative of early political ferment but does not believe that it had anything to do with his religious views at the time. Indeed, he sees a contradiction between the position he espoused concerning the Voortrekkers and his attitude toward military service during the 1970s. While in Standard 8, he complied with accepted practice by registering for conscription. One of his classmates, Hugh Robertson, a son of the well-known Presbyterian clergyman and pacifist Rob Robertson, questioned this practice. Moll and others chided him for his resistance. Moll argued with him about the matter and in what he recalls was an "incredibly fundamentalist" way quoted Romans 13 to bolster his own conformist position. To Moll, the only pertinent question was not an ethical but a pragmatic one, namely whether he should perform military service immediately after

completing high school or request a deferment until after he had received his university degree. He chose the former course and entered the army in January 1974.⁷⁰

Moll's initial twelve months of military life were disillusioning but not especially traumatic or politically sensitising, although he recalls that once during an argument with an officer he declared apartheid to be morally wrong. He first served at an administrative services camp which he "hated with a passion". After seven weeks of basic training, Moll was sent to Pretoria to become an officer because an IQ test he had taken indicated that he had the potential for such a position. Not liking that regimentation, either, he requested and received a transfer to a technical services depot in Grahamstown, where he spent much of the balance of 1974. In general this young Baptist found that the personal conduct of people in military life, especially those in the permanent force, contradicted the pietistic emphases of his upbringing. After completing his year in the army, Moll requested his father to write to its head to complain about aspects of the behaviour of officers which made their profession look "seedy", such as immoderate consumption of alcohol, bullying of young soldiers, and obscene language which both "shocked and horrified" Moll. His father complied with this request.⁷¹

Although Moll did not become a conscientious objector in 1974, that difficult year was not an entirely un consequential one for his subsequent ethical development. The young soldier passed time by reading the multi-volume Pelican History of Christianity and thereby increased his modest awareness of Christian traditions other than his own. He regards this as a crucial step in his education which would eventually lead him out of the pietistic, individualistic Christianity in which he had been raised. On the other hand, Moll read few newspapers that year, and the moderate SACC resolution on conscientious objection passed in August 1974 escaped his immediate attention.⁷²

It was his undergraduate career at the University of Cape Town, however, which played the greatest role in Moll's transformation into a conscientious objector. Early in 1975 he registered there to study for a Bachelor of Business Science in actuarial science, a degree he would receive in 1978. Moll dates his "change of heart" from his

second year at the university, when he was elected chairman of the local branch of the "fairly conservative" Students' Christian Association, which he had earlier served as literature secretary with responsibility for the sale and distribution of books and other written works. To fill part of his free time with something which corresponded to his interests in theology, he registered for a correspondence course in missiology at the University of South Africa. The readings for this course further opened Moll's eyes to a broader scope of Christian positions than he had previously known. During the mid-year winter vacation he attended an SCA conference in Pietermaritzburg not long after the outbreak of the Soweto riots. In two ways this parley helped to open Moll's eyes. First, some Coloured students from the University of Western Cape participated in the same conference but left it angrily because the accommodations were racially segregated. More immediately relevant to the subject of conscientious objection, the internationally known evangelist Michael Cassidy of Africa Enterprise spoke to the conference and declared that in military conflict there was morally not necessarily a significant difference between fighting on the "other side" and on "this side" because combatants on both believed they were fighting for human rights. "I was really shocked by that", recalled Moll. "I had learnt two things at the same time. One, that black people hated apartheid. I had never felt that really. They hated it with such a passion. Two, apartheid was connected with the military". In the wake of this conference he argued a great deal with his parents, who at that stage were, in his estimation, still "very conservative".⁷³

Back in Cape Town in August 1976, Moll joined a large student demonstration on De Waal Drive to protest against the detention without trial of two university lecturers. "That was a formative experience", he remembers, one which he described in an audio tape recording which to his parents, who reacted angrily to his participation. The SCA, together with other organisations at the university, held a conference at which the Anglican chaplain Philip le Feuvre spoke. Participants drew up a statement in which they made demands that the government implement changes in South African society. By then Moll was able to take part enthusiastically in functions of this sort, whereas previously he had felt "quite

threatened" when politically active speakers occasionally addressed SCA meetings. His studies in Cape Town also contributed to his political awareness. A "labour option" in Economics II, taught by Dr Johan Maree, proved to be a "conscientising experience" In it Moll learnt that the South African government actively opposed the unionising of black workers because collective economic power would eventually lead to demands for black political power. He emphasises, however, that he was one of only two politically "enlightened" students in the second-year economics class. The other was a secular, anti-Zionist Jew named Jeff Cohen whom Moll befriended and engaged in numerous debates about religious and political topics. At one point this partner in dialogue declared that he would not fight South Africa's racist battles. With all these and other influences working on him, Moll no longer regarded secular organisations such as the National Union of South African Students as "wicked". The events of 1976, in fact, had made him a *de facto* conscientious objector before the end of 1976, and he decided that he would not obey a call-up order if one came. Indeed, Moll believed that one might, because in the wake of the Soweto riots he was placed on twenty-four hour alert. This meant that he had to keep his rifle and other military equipment with him at all times, have a will, and be prepared to report to his military unit within twenty-four hours, if ordered to do so. Consistent with his changing political views, in 1976 or 1977 Moll joined the Progressive Federal Party.⁷⁴

At that time Moll was a very active member of Claremont Baptist Church near the university. His theological views in general and his meta-ethics in particular were in a state of evolution by the end of 1976. Moll freely admits that as a child and adolescent he had been raised in a tradition of deontological Biblical prescription. He never believed that the imitation of Christ could be a realistic foundation for Christian ethics, simply because he did not believe that it was possible for people truly to emulate Christ. During his undergraduate days, he began to read a fairly wide spectrum of theological works, including some by Rudolf Bultmann and other twentieth-century theologians who were either unknown in most South African Baptist circles or dismissed by them as unorthodox. After becoming a *de facto* conscientious objector in 1976, Moll discussed with a fellow member of

Claremont Baptist Church, Owen Tudor, a deacon whom he retrospectively describes as "moderately liberal by Baptist Union standards of that time", the eventuality of resisting a call-up order. In these discussions, Moll developed Biblical arguments in which he relied on both Old Testament prophets and the Sermon on the Mount to bolster his convictions that Christians must be concerned about justice. Tudor listened cordially but did not agree with Moll's position on the indefensibility of military service in defence of the apartheid regime. Moll clung to the belief that he could exert enough influence to change at least part of the Baptist Union.⁷⁵

In 1977 Moll further broadened his horizons by travelling overseas and *inter alia* visiting the headquarters of the African National Congress in London. At that time he was still suspicious of the ANC and its Marxist rhetoric. Moll feared that owing to Soviet influence of the organisation, South Africa's future would be violent under ANC leadership. In ca September of that year he was ordered to report for a three-month army camp in Namibia beginning on 1 December.

Like Steele, Moll drafted a statement explaining his views on conscientious objection and sent it to the SADF. Copies of it were distributed to the press and general public during his trial in Cape Town. Moll's declaration overlapped with that of his cousin at several junctures but also differed from it at others. He began by reminding readers that "the Christian Church has traditionally been concerned about involvement with the military which means the taking of men's lives", thereby indicating that the South African government, insofar as it gave conscientious objection short shrift, stood apart from at least part of the Christian heritage to which it pledged allegiance. In a second tenet, Moll asserted that "Christians obey the government, but reserve the right to disobey if obedience does not conform to their religious and moral convictions". Marshalling *inter alia* these two premises, this articulate young Baptist proceeded to enlighten the uninitiated by defining selective conscientious objection in broad terms as "the refusal to engage in a particular war, while making no necessary statement about war in general" and adducing three reasons in explaining why this was his general position. First, relying on what by the late 1970s was a well-entrenched rhetorical tradition, he declared that "in terms of Christian moral standards, South African

society in fundamentally unjust". Secondly, seeking to obviate the well-worn counter-argument that his country was under attack by enemies from beyond its borders, Moll stated quite imprecisely that "the insurgents are generally not foreigners but South African citizens - i.e. the situation is one of civil war". Finally, in the light of these two convictions, he thought that the predicament which Christians facing military service in South Africa faced was one which "makes one question very seriously just what one is required to fight for, and what is required to die for". Most of the details which Moll gave in support of each of these three reasons were quite conventional and shed very little light on his ethical thinking. They therefore need not be reproduced here. What is particularly significant for understanding the variety of Baptist thought on military service, however, is his explanation of why he could no longer serve the SADF in any capacity. Moll pointed out that in 1977, when he initially became an objector, he had requested duty "under civilian direction" and emphasised that the wording of his request was crucial. Non-combatant service, he explained, did not release him from the moral dilemma which the spectre of any co-operation with and support of the SADF had created for him. "A medic is a necessary part of the war machine; he too makes a direct contribution to the strength of the fighting force. Therefore I find it impossible even to be a medical officer. . . . If it is morally repugnant to be a fighting member of the SADF, then to be a medical officer is likewise problematic". Undoubtedly to obviate objections that he was departing from the injunction in Romans 13 and Christian orthodoxy regarding obedience to secular authorities, Moll quoted Martin Luther's oft-repeated "Here I stand" dictum from the Diet of Worms and John Calvin's *Institutes*, Book Four, Chapter XX, Paragraph 21: "We are subject to the men who rule over us, but subject only in the Lord. If they command anything against Him let us not pay the least regard to it". Moll then pointed out that his own denomination had a venerable tradition of nonconformity and freedom of conscience, even when the exercise of it necessitated disobedience to secular authority. The Baptist Confession of 1646 had stated:

It is the magistrate's duty to tender the liberty of men's consciences, without which all other liberties would not be

worth the naming. Neither can we forebear the doing of that, which our understandings and consciences bind us to do. And if the magistrates should require us to do otherwise, we are to yield our persons in a passive way to their power. But if any man shall impose on us anything that we see not to be commanded by our Lord Jesus Christ, we should rather die a thousand deaths, than to do anything against the light of our own consciences.⁷⁶

When tried before a military tribunal in Cape Town in December 1979, Moll enjoyed fairly broad if not extensive interdenominational support. At that time seventeen South African theologians representing *inter alia* the Roman Catholic Church, the Dutch Reformed Church, the Church of the Province of South Africa, and the United Congregational Church, many of them attached to the SACC or to universities which were becoming increasingly outspoken of governmental policies, issued a statement in defence of his case. They included such luminaries as Cardinal McCann and Archbishop Hurley, Bishop Desmond Tutu, Dr Wolfram Kistner, and Dr Allan Boesak. Conspicuously absent, though not surprisingly so, were the names of any of Moll's denominational fellows. The signatories pleaded with the government "to understand that in the present circumstances of our country, conscientious objection can be based on genuine religions and moral convictions". Accordingly, they encouraged the government "to regularize the position of conscientious objectors through the provision of alternative non-military forms of national service and in the meantime to exercise in regard to Peter Moll and all other conscientious objectors the humanity and clemency that should be characteristic of a Christian society". They did not, however, seek to present a case for conscientious objection or adduce any Biblical or other theological arguments in support of their position.⁷⁷

When Moll's trial began, his pastor in Claremont (and formerly in East London), John Wilton, testified that Moll was a member of Claremont Baptist Church in good standing, that he was a "most definitely committed Christian who takes it very seriously", and that he had discussed at length with him his "crisis of conscience" regarding military service. Wilton also pointed out that Baptists in

general were not pacifists and that the Baptist Union of South Africa did not have an official position on pacifism, although two months earlier its annual assembly had passed a resolution recognising the validity of conscientious objection and requesting the government to provide alternative civilian service for those who could not conscientiously participate in the SADF. He also stated that "we would recognize the right of the State to call on its citizens to defend this country" and that he had three sons in the SADF. But Wilton also undergirded Moll's defence by emphasising that Baptists tended to support wars which they regarded as just while maintaining as a "very important thing" the freedom of conscience to refrain from doing so.⁷⁸

Moll had the opportunity to define his views more fully when the court questioned him. South Africa's current military activities against the African National Congress, the Pan-Africanist Congress, and the South West African People's Organisation, he declared, did not meet the criteria of a just war which he, influenced by Calvin, thought necessary, because not all means of resolving the underlying conflicts through peaceful means had been exhausted. It seemed crucial to Moll that "there has not yet been a round-table conference of black and white leaders in South Africa. . . . Thus the present war is certainly not the last resort, and on the basis of Calvin's teachings I must decline to participate". By appealing to Calvinism, Moll probably thought he was being rhetorically astute, because he thereby could imply that the influential Dutch Reformed Church was not being fully loyal to the social ethical implications of its own confessional tradition. It should be pointed out, however, that after repeating his belief that he could not conscientiously serve the South African military even in a non-combatant capacity, he explained that "in addition, by wearing the uniform I would be symbolically identified with those [military] structures. Therefore, it is unacceptable for me to be a **non-combatant**. But I am willing to perform service of national interest under civil direction". When asked by the president of the tribunal whether the views he had expressed in his detailed written statement were purely political, Moll replied negatively and qualified this by asserting that "religious views always have political implications". He illustrated this

by noting that on the basis of Christian ethics the Dutch Reformed Church had once condemned the system of migratory labour. Moll emphasised that he did not regard himself as a martyr and that he would be satisfied to perform a longer period of civilian alternative service than he was required to serve in the SADF. Without indicating that he had considered the moral implications of participating in the economic policies of the black "independent homelands", which before the end of the decade would draw heavy criticism as extensions of exploitative South African policies, he mentioned his willingness to work in either the Transkei or the Ciskei, where his ability to speak Xhosa would be useful. Moll did not seek to present a particularly detailed theological justification for his conditional conscientious objection apart from his questioning of the justness of South Africa's present military ventures on the basis of Calvinism.⁷⁹

The argument of the prosecution and the judgment of the court illustrated clearly the kinds of hurdles which South African conscientious objectors, especially those whose pacifism was not universal, confronted but could not possibly clear. The prosecutor, Lieutenant D. Mills, argued that "our courts do not administer a moral law . . . and it is not the courts' duty to question laws passed by Parliament". To him the defence of South Africa and the maintenance of discipline within the SADF were "paramount"; by failing to report for duty Moll had "gravely undermined" both. Mills thus sought to keep Moll's case on secular ground. He pointed out that the Defence Act did not recognise the Baptist Union as a denomination whose tenets forbade participation in war and that therefore Moll could not qualify for exemption on the basis of his church membership. The Defence Act specified certain reasons as adequate to justify failing to report for duty, but Mills contended that Moll's rationale for not complying was not among them and therefore was inadequate. The court accepted part of the prosecution's reasoning, especially with regard to the last-named point. Moll, in the opinion of the court, had failed to follow defined procedures with regard to compliance. The president of the court told the defendant that "basically what has happened is that you have taken the law into your own hands". A sentence of eighteen months in detention barracks accompanied the finding of guilty.⁸⁰

The Conscientious Objection Debate in the Baptist Union

The publicity surrounding the Steele and Moll cases helped to stimulate a minor debate in the Baptist Union over the validity of conscientious objection in Christian ethics. When delegates to the annual assembly in October 1979 passed a moderate resolution recognising precisely that and asking the government to provide conscientious objectors with non-military opportunities for alternative service, a storm of protests from the laity ensued. Several, most of them by Baptists with either Afrikaans or German surnames, were printed in *The South African Baptist*. The writers reflected very little theological or meta-ethical sophistication and thus stood squarely in the South African Baptist tradition of expressing strong opinions but offering scant evidence to substantiate them. Generally speaking, they failed to differentiate between absolute pacifism and selective conscientious objection, and rarely did their letters suggest that they had any understanding of the internal situation in South Africa which had prompted people like Moll to adopt the latter position. Their thinking was thus largely unnuanced and postulated Biblical prescription as the only touchstone for Christian ethics, although conservative political influences also apparently had made their mark. One reader in Phalaborwa stated that he was "shocked at the Resolutions coming from a Bible-believing church". He asked rhetorically, "Does the Assembly side with those churches that water down the gospel to suit each individual?"⁸¹ One of his fellow townspeople rested his case on what appears to have been an uncritical acceptance of the South African government's incessant rhetoric about the threat of external enemies, particularly the "total onslaught" of Marxist-inspired Africans threatening Christian civilisation, *i.e.* white domination. "Our country is fighting a war against the evil onslaught of communism, a tool of the devil", he declared. "Let us rise to the defence of the land, even if it has to be with a gun, for nowhere in the Bible can I find any support for conscientious objections [*sic*]"⁸² Also writing from a privileged and at least superficially secure white perspective, a Baptist in Rondebosch objected that "a man may stay at home to work or study, while his

countrymen spend two years defending the country so that he is safe - and when some of them are killed, does he not feel guilty?"⁸³

Not all Baptists agreed with these positions and showed so little understanding of the factors which had led conditional objectors like Moll to refuse to defend the *status quo* in South African society through military means. One, whose letter was for some unexplained reason published anonymously in the denominational magazine, took exception to the writer who had referred to "the evil onslaught of communism, a tool of the devil". This line of argumentation, he wrote, "makes one wonder if the Israelites did not say something similar of the invading armies of Nebuchadnezzar when they were taken into captivity by the Babylonians". The contemporary South African situation seemed analogous to that Old Testament scenario: "We whites are only reaping what we have sown, and I am not at all surprised that many of our young men are having serious doubts about undergoing military training. It is our own black fellow countrymen who are taking up arms against us and the communists are only too glad to take advantage of the situation and supply them with all the weapons they need". He suggested that anyone who doubted that internal racial dissatisfaction lay at the root of the crisis merely had to ask black Baptists in South Africa whether they would be willing to fight for the defence of the country. Even within the Baptist Union, this writer argued, racism prevailed in religious matters in forms of "petty apartheid" as well as in larger ways relating to the overall organization of South African society: "This shows itself in a reluctance to encourage blacks to come to our white services, and an unwillingness to get involved in any effort to change the unjust structures in our land. . .".⁸⁴

R.A. Gorven, an Anglophone Baptist lay preacher of Norwegian ancestry who had scant formal education but who would contribute quite frequently to debates about social ethics during the 1980s, sought to clarify what he perceived as a widespread misunderstanding of South African law regarding military service. To him it was self-evident that "if the law states, as it does, that young men must do their national service, then they cannot be excused from it". Yet this well-intending writer himself apparently misunderstood why many pacifists and other conscientious objectors refused to perform any

duties for the SADF. Hoping to ply a *via media* in the conflict, Gorven believed that any Christian whose principles prevented him from bearing arms could ask to be placed in a non-combatant position and cited his son-in-law as an example of this.⁸⁵ What was at issue, however, as anyone who had followed the debate reasonably closely should have been aware, were the convictions that violence was inherently antithetical to Christian ethics, as Steele believed, or that the SADF was a pillar of support for an unjust society whose maintenance in its existing form ran counter to Christian ethical norms, as conditional conscientious objectors like Moll believed. Gorven's ignorance and reduction of difficult ethical questions to matters of expedience are significant insofar as they probably typified the level of comprehension of the matter amongst many of his denominational fellows and other South African Christians.

The Baptist Union and Conscientious Objection in the 1980s

After reaching an early peak in 1980 while both Steele and Moll were in prison, the debate within the Baptist Union over conscientious objection subsided during the balance of that decade. Generally speaking, Baptists' positions on the matter tended to become more tolerant, perhaps owing to a growing awareness of the gravity of South Africa's internal problems and the waning of external threats. Some politically conservative Baptists, however, most notably Peter Hammond of the Frontline Fellowship missionary organisation, have staunchly held the line against conscientious objection, seeking to demonstrate that Christian ethics not merely allows but mandates participation in military life. Their arguments will be covered in Chapter VII, which deals with Baptist participation in certain right-wing movements because they are arguably not in the mainstream of Baptist thought and life, however variegated that has become.

By and large, however, the Baptist Union continued to accept and tacitly condone conscription. Perhaps nothing testified more vividly to that fact than a three-page article which Lucas Potgieter, an Afrikaans Baptist chaplain in the SADF, contributed to *The South African Baptist* in November 1980. "National Service is here to stay", he asserted.

"Christian young men will always have to do it. . . . But if we approach it with God on our side, as Christians, then no evil from Satan's host will ever be able to overcome us". Rather than addressing the burning issue of conscientious objection, therefore, Potgieter's poorly written article consisted largely of practical advice to young Baptists whose entry into the SADF was imminent. His counsel was exclusively on the level of the individual's religious life. He warned prospective conscripts that they would be subjected to intensive training, pressure, and material deprivation which could lead to depression and physical illness. Instead of seeking to investigate the moral and political dimensions of the military activities in which they would be involved, Potgieter issued a thinly veiled admonition to young men not to impregnate their girlfriends on the eve of their departure from civilian life, to practise running distances of 2,4 kilometres, and to toughen their hands and feet. He did not neglect purely religious advice; Baptist conscripts should try to schedule "Quiet Time" and read their Bibles systematically on a daily basis. Potgieter predictably urged them to keep in touch with their military chaplains and become active in the "Free Churches" ecclesiastical unit within the SADF, which would also involve Congregationalists and Presbyterians. This chaplain concluded his uncritical article by asserting in an allusion to Ephesians 6 that faithful soldiers for Christ who put on the whole armour of God had nothing to fear during their stints in the SADF, for the South African military had a protective deity in its corner. Military life would not be easy, he conceded, "but if we approach it with God on our side, as Christians, then no evil from Satan's host will ever be able to overcome us".⁸⁶

Potgieter's uncritical acceptance of the *status quo* and tacit encouragement of young Baptists to comply with the country's militarisation in no way departed from the behaviour which one might expect of a professional military chaplain. Nothing in his article suggests that he was in a position to rise above the cultural captivity of his background and calling. What in some respects was more surprising was the acceptance of conscription inherent in a speech by Olwyn Pass, whose husband Theodore Pass was then the missions secretary of the Baptist Union and had long been a conscientious objector as well as a member of the denomination's Christian

Citizenship Committee. *The South African Baptist* also carried that piece without critical comment. Pass, noting that she was the mother of three men who had served in the SADF, directed her remarks at women whose sons were also on the verge of being conscripted, not at prospective conscripts themselves. As in the case of Potgieter's article, however, the tone was partly one of resignation to what by then had become the well-entrenched pattern of compliance with the law. No more than Potgieter did she make any reference to Steele, Moll, or any of the other conscientious objectors whose names and cases had received considerable amounts of journalistic publicity. Instead, Pass urged parents to counsel their sons to be obedient to military authorities, because "to answer back only brings punishment for oneself and one's fellows". Rather than challenging the reality of being in the army, the conscript "must realise that he might as well knuckle down to it. If he works well, his superiors will notice and reward him accordingly". Nowhere did she suggest that mothers and fathers of recruits discuss with their sons the Christian moral implications of their activities in the SADF. She did, however, broach the matter of unwanted pregnancies and mentioned the minefield of other temptations to which ostensibly innocent young soldiers from Baptist families were subjected: "He will have to mix with all sorts, some of whom will be smoking, drinking, taking drugs, using bad language, etc." In a bit of advice particularly relevant to white South Africans who were on the verge of leaving their parental homes, Pass noted that before marching off to the army they should learn to make their own beds, wash their own dishes, and wash and iron their own clothes.⁸⁷

How much light do pieces such as those by Pass and Potgieter shed on the general tenor of the Baptist Union with regard to militarism and conscientious objection during the early and mid-1980s? Obviously one could easily make an invalid inference by drawing sweeping generalisations on the basis of two examples. What is striking, however, is the virtual absence from the pages of *The South African Baptist* and the records of most of the annual assemblies during this period of critical comment pertaining to the matter. One must assume, however cautiously, that by and large white South African Baptists had accepted the institution of conscription while

subjecting it to very little if any critical appraisal and rarely assaying it with the touchstone of Christian ethics of any kind. The Steele and Moll cases appear to have been passing phenomena which failed to make a noteworthy impact on the denomination.

To some extent this state of affairs would change during the latter half of the 1980s. 1985 was in several respects a pivotal year in this regard. South Africa was mired in ongoing township violence which led the government to impose a "State of Emergency" on the country the following year. In October the Baptist Union issued its controversial open letter to State President P.W. Botha. On an interdenominational front, Christians launched the National Initiative for Reconciliation. At nearly the same time liberation theologians in and near Johannesburg published *The Kairos Document* discussed in Chapter VI. At the other pole of the political spectrum, the Conservative Party under the leadership of erstwhile Dutch Reformed minister and philosopher Dr Andries Treurnicht continued to gain the support of whites who feared that the crisis in South Africa would lead to the demise of their political and social control. Others joined paramilitary organisations pledged to the reversal of the relatively few reforms which the Botha regime had implemented in its largely unsuccessful efforts to ease racial tensions. White emigration to Australia and other countries reached new peaks. As will be seen in the immediately following chapter, some Baptists continued to play key roles in religious or quasi-religious organisations which supported right-wing political positions. In this national crisis, it was not uncommon for white Baptists to remain largely detached from social issues, but remaining entirely ignorant of them became an increasingly greater feat. By and large, consciousness of them appears to have risen markedly, if so crude a gauge as the coverage given contemporary issues in the denomination's monthly periodical is even remotely accurate. In the process, more took a critical look at the place of the military establishment in South Africa and the legitimate part of the Christian in it. This inevitably affected the Baptist Union.

Early in 1986, with the national imbroglio and the threat of escalating violence threatening whatever cohesiveness there was in the loosely organised denomination, Baptist Union President Terry Rae signalled an awareness of the general matter in a piece he contributed

to *The South African Baptist* without, however, grasping the hot potato of conscientious objection. His views as expressed at that time provided no specific answers to the military and related predicaments of the day. At most they shed light on a consciousness of the dilemmas which Baptists, like other Christians, faced when seeking to apply their faith to the national crisis in the country. "Are we Christians losing our way in the present political climate in South Africa?" he asked. Rae regretted that Baptists seemed to be confronted by an unholy trinity of possible responses to the crisis. The first, which he labelled "The Way of Violence and Revolution", he rejected on the grounds that it violated imitative ethics; "Our Lord never took this way - and He lived under one of the most oppressive political powers the world has ever known", reasoning which would soon repeatedly crop up on his right flank in *de facto* and deliberate defense of the *status quo* in South Africa. Hence, Rae could generalise that "Christ's disciples can never ever take this road!" He did not attempt to define the principal concept of violence in his brief argument or mention whether he believed that the SADF or other agencies in South Africa which wielded the sword engaged in it. The second option Rae called "The Way of Total Passivity and Inaction". This too he repelled as out of character for Jesus of Nazareth, who "ministered so often to the downtrodden, the sick and needy". Thirdly, Rae rejected as a contradiction in terms "marching, peaceful demonstrations, boycotting, staying away from work, hunger strikes, etc.", *i.e.* what some South Africans had begun to call "Non-violent Confrontation" even though, in his perception, "many Baptists are following this way as a balance between violence and inaction". Non-violent resistance was essentially counterproductive, Rae believed, because "it invites violent action from those in power and authority to restore order. It invites others to acts of aggression. This cannot be the way of Christ or the Christian". Few options, it seemed, remained for Baptists who sought ways to apply their faith to the deeply seated problems in South African society and politics, and Rae was unable to offer any precise ones. In lieu of practical advice, he counselled "the way of self-sacrifice and self-denial - to stand with Christ between the makers of laws and the people affected by laws and minister in both directions in the Name of Christ, the Gospel of salvation together with its practical outworking

of love, even if it costs us our lives". In his zeal to convince his fellow Baptists to serve as agents of reconciliation, however, Rae neglected the fact that most of the white members of his denomination were at least nominal members of a quasi-democratic society and as such were both intrinsically entwined in structural violence and expected to exercise political rights. Indeed, nothing in this essay suggests that Rae understood that even if Baptists remained totally aloof from conscious political activities such as voting and holding office, they still tacitly supported a government which, though professing to govern a Christian land, daily engaged in behaviour which ran counter to the ideals which he touted as representative of Christian life. More specifically, Rae's piece provided no real direction to young men facing conscription, which by then had become a key issue in Christian social ethics in South Africa, as it had been in many other countries for more than two decades.⁸⁸ One can generously attribute Rae's unwillingness to address specific issues of violence and resistance thereto to the ostensibly politically neutral role which his position as president of the Baptist Union had compelled him to play. Whatever justification might inhere in that reasoning, the fact remains that his advice failed to provide noteworthy meta-ethical or ethical guidance on issues then confronting Baptists with a sense of immediacy. It was thus fairly typical of much of the tradition of passive captivity to the *status quo* which reigned without significant challenge in the Baptist Union.

Fortunately for Baptists seeking more specific guidance in dealing with burning public issues, Rae's muted voice was not alone. Throughout the 1980s others spoke more boldly and with greater and more immediate relevance, particularly on the question of conscientious objection. Preceding this, the Christian Citizenship Committee, like analogous agencies of other denominations, had quietly worked behind the scenes to influence the government to amend the Defence Act in such a way as to allow individual Christians who were not members of recognised "peace churches" to qualify for alternative forms of service. In 1980 the committee reported that it had spent "a considerable amount of time" on the matter and found the provisions of the existing law "inadequate since they deny recognition of the individual conscience which is recognised in Scripture".⁸⁹ Theodore

Pass and other denominational leaders subsequently called on P.W. Botha to present the case for amendment. Van den Aardweg reportedly informed the Christian Citizenship Committee that its representations to the State President were instrumental in bringing about the eventual change to the consideration of cases on an individual as opposed to a denominational basis, because Botha would not have listened to similar arguments from, for example, Roman Catholics or Anglicans. The Baptist Union had not antagonised the government through severe criticism, as had the leaders of certain more outspoken denominations, especially those which were still affiliated with the SACC.⁹⁰

The Baptist Union could arguably claim part of the credit for this victory for conscientious objection, but it never again played a significant role in the campaign against the militarisation of South African society or the resulting dilemma which this posed for Christians who were simultaneously citizens of that troubled land. This is not to say that the issue disappeared from denominational consideration after the early 1980s. Indeed, the Christian Citizenship Committee continued to deal with it for the remainder of the decade. Much of its attention in this regard was focused on efforts to persuade the government to allow conscientious objectors to military service to perform alternative service in religious or other civilian agencies. In 1985, for example, the committee subscribed to much of a proposal which the SACC had drawn up and sent to the minister of defence in this regard. In a letter of 13 August 1985, chairman Peter Holness informed Brigadier D. Jacobs of this fact but also delineated certain nuances in the Baptist position. Holness emphasised, for instance, that alternative service should be available to every "genuine objector" but added that if the proposal were modified so that "a soft option became available to Conscientious Objectors", it would not find Baptist support. He did not specify how he believed the authenticity of asserted convictions in this regard could be verified. Holness expressed the belief of his committee that making alternative service universally available would not lead to burgeoning numbers of men refusing to perform military service. Going a step further, Holness expressed support of the SACC's advocating of the "just war" doctrine in motivating cases of selective objection as opposed to universal

pacifism. He conceded that that venerable principle posed innumerable problems which he did not seek to specify or solve. Thirdly, Holness agreed with the SACC that the constitution of the board which reviewed cases of conscientious objection left room for improvement, but again he did not attempt to propose changes.⁹¹ Nearly two years later Holness, again in his capacity as chairman of the Christian Citizenship Committee, wrote to Minister of Defence Magnus Malan about this matter. The thrust of the argument which he presented was that the committee supported plans about which it had heard to amend the Defence Act so as to allow alternative service to be performed in private agencies, not merely in governmental ones. Holness did not undergird this suggestion with a theological argument but merely stated that "it would also be pragmatically wise as conscription is a very sensitive issue in our country" and asserted that "broad-based community service has functioned effectively in other countries".⁹² Holness and his colleagues were ill-informed, however, as Deputy Minister of Defence W.N. Breytenbach informed him a few weeks later. There were no official plans to modify the conditions under which alternative service could be rendered. An unofficial "National Community Servers Group" had made the proposal to which Holness had referred and contacted religious and other private organisations to get their reactions to it. Breytenbach emphasised that the position of the SADF in this matter remained unchanged. Owing to such legally determined technicalities as remuneration, it was ostensibly unfeasible to broaden the conditions of alternative service beyond well-defined government-related positions.⁹³

Later in 1987 Holness responded to a proposal which an organisation based in Pretoria called the Alternative Service Programme sent to religious bodies in South Africa. This statement called for abolishing both "any kind of board to test a person's conscientious objection" and, ultimately, conscription as such in South Africa. Holness praised the proposal in general terms and cautiously sought to speak for the Baptist Union in general. He thought the denomination would not identify itself with the statements that "conscription to military service is not in accord with Christian teaching" and that "it is the church's duty to persevere in determination to bring compulsory conscription to military service to

an end in South Africa". No stranger to teleological ethics, Holness explained that the Baptist Union did not categorically reject conscription but that it had consistently opposed "the failure of the present legislation to provide for all objectors of conscience, especially in the light of the South African situation". He also thought it unrealistic to dispense wholesale with any means of testing the sincerity of professed objectors' convictions, fearing that in the absence of any assessment "the Alternative Service Programme will lack credibility and become strongly confrontational". In effect reiterating his rejection of unnecessary confrontation as ultimately counterproductive, Holness concluded his evaluation of the proposal by cautioning its drafters that before the Baptist Union would become associated with it members would have "to be convinced that the Alternative Service Programme had first made every effort to persuade the government to change". By this he meant that "the authorities should be approached and urged once again to accommodate all objections of conscience".⁹⁴

The vision of a more liberal policy of alternative service apparently remained strong within the Christian Citizenship Committee, and the misunderstanding in 1987 over possible reform in that direction did not deter the committee from proposing that the government modify the Defence Act along the lines which Holness had mentioned. In June 1988, therefore, members of the committee discussed the general question of alternative service in unspecified "religious organisations". Not everyone in the leadership of the Baptist Union agreed with this, however. General Secretary Trevor Swart expressed his opposition to it in a letter to Minister of Defence Magnus Malan. The Christian Citizenship Committee, on the other hand, which was responsible to the annual assembly, *i.e.* the denomination as a whole as opposed to any one official of its executive, explicitly distanced itself from Swart on this matter.⁹⁵ The denomination was thus unable to address the matter on a united front.

As the decade drew to its close and South Africa found itself in another phase of its cycle of violent history, *Baptists Today* again gave the question of conscientious objection considerable attention. Much of the coverage consisted of a "short series" of essays which Holness contributed to the journal. Their purpose, he emphasised, was

not to dictate to young men how to respond to the threat of conscription hanging above their heads, for that would itself violate the venerable Baptist principle of freedom of conscience. Instead, Holness sought "to help our young conscript - together with his pastor, parents and other interested parties - to think his way through this complex issue". In the first article, published in July 1989, he began by underscoring the dilemma which prospective conscripts faced, as only four options seemed available to them, namely compliance with military service, emigration, imprisonment resulting from a refusal to serve, and application for recognition as a religious objector to conscription. Holness then mentioned three publications to which readers could turn for detailed information about these alternatives, namely *Questions Being Asked in Connection with Objection to Military Service*, a five-page brochure which his Christian Citizenship Committee had recently published, *Conscientious Objection: A Counsellor's Resource Manual*, which the SACC had prepared and which Holness described as "an invaluable reference book", and the SADF's own annually updated *National Service*, which focused not on avoidance of military service but rather on submissive preparation for it.⁹⁶

In fairness to Holness, it should be stressed that in this introductory essay he took pains to present an objective and balanced view of both the limited options which prospective conscripts had and the reasons with which both advocates and opponents of compulsory military service undergirded their cases. Beyond spelling out in broad terms the likely consequences of each of the four alternatives, he pointed out, for example, not only that "most South Africans of colour would object to military service on the grounds that they are denied equal political rights" and that in the views of many people "service in the SADF involves the individual in an intolerable identification with, and support of, an unjust and oppressive political structure", but also that "advocates of the present system of conscription - who are by no means confined to government supporters - maintain that any other method would be impracticable for military and economic reasons". In several respects, however, Holness tipped his hand enough to reveal his dissatisfaction with the existing scheme. He found it objectionable that the law excused only universal religious pacifists

from military service and did not make any provision for those who resisted on ethical, philosophical, or political grounds. Holness also pointed out that selective conscientious objection, such as that of Peter Moll, had no legal status in South Africa and found it ironic that while the government frequently invoked the "just war" theory in support of its military activities it did not allow men who found those actions essentially unjust to refuse to participate in or support them. He declared explicitly that "the Christian Citizenship Committee believes that all genuine conscientious objectors should be recognised by the law to render community service". He concluded this first article by stating four principles which he believed should "guide" young South Africans facing conscription. All were relevant to a Christian moral consideration of the matter, and all potentially militated against unquestioning obedience to orders to report for induction. When quoted *verbatim* they illustrate Holness' openness to approaches which departed from mere compliance with the letter of the law and his unwillingness to place either himself or his readers squarely into any one meta-ethical camp:

- (a) The South African situation is complex, and simplistic approaches must be avoided.
- (b) Freedom of personal consciences for the Christian is an important Baptist principle.
- (c) The issue should be carefully studied from a biblical, theological, legal and political perspective.
- (d) The ultimate question is: What does the Bible teach? The crucial passages are Rom 13:1-7, Acts 5:29 and Mark 12:17.⁹⁷

All of this is arguably pertinent to serious consideration of conscription and allowed for the freedom of conscience which Holness and many other South African Baptists who were engaged in this debate touted as a cardinal principle. The obvious restriction which he unwittingly placed on that liberty was his selection of only three New Testament texts as "the crucial passages" in this matter. Few would disagree that these were among the *loci classici* and that some of them, most notably Romans 13:1-7, had done service both in support of and against arguments for conscientious objection of various kinds. The

question which immediately arises is whether many other passages can also provide valuable insight to people facing conscription.

A month later *Baptists Today* carried Holness' second essay in this series, "The Christian And War: To Fight Or Not To Fight?" Probably seeking to counter simplistic assumptions which had prevailed in the Baptist Union, he set a tone of ambiguity. Children, Holness observed, tended to classify people as either "goodies" or "baddies" while overlooking shades of grey. In adult life, however, and especially when grappling with the issue of conscientious objection, there were "no easy answers". Making the present question all the more difficult to answer incisively, Holness insisted that it was part of the larger question of whether Christians should take up arms at all. He cautioned readers that believers had grappled with this problem for nearly 2 000 years and averred that "there has probably been no subject more controversial than the Christian's participation in war". Holness devoted most of the remainder of this essay to delineating what he perceived as the four most common answers to the question. On the surface, at least, he again sought to be somewhat detached and to present these positions fairly. Pacifism Holness described briefly as being based on Matthew 5:38-48 and other Biblical texts. He pointed out that Christianity appears to have been a pacifistic religion during its first three centuries, *i.e.* before it gained official recognition as a tolerated religion in the Roman Empire. At the same time, however, Holness balanced his treatment of pacifism by mentioning that in the Old Testament God condoned many wars and that neither Jesus Christ nor any New Testament writer condemned the military profession; indeed, on four occasions Roman centurions were praised in the New Testament. As a "modified version of pacifism", Holness described "Biblical non-resistance" as the view that "in a sinful world Christians may participate indirectly in the war effort but not take up arms themselves". He conceded that this position was "less consistent" than categorical pacifism and that "it is difficult to distinguish convincingly between an indirect and a direct participation in war". On the other hand, Holness thought it at least arguable that the adherent of "Biblical non-resistance" "takes his social responsibility more seriously than the idealistic pacifist" but did not explain why this was the case. Holness similarly gave "agonised participation" in war lukewarm

endorsement as a realistic choice of the lesser of two evils. He found its assumption that war was a "moral ambiguity" realistic but tempered his praise by noting that "this view appears to be constructed on a pragmatic rather than a biblical basis", a cautious assertion with which some of its adherents would disagree. Finally, Holness broached the "just war" theory, which he acknowledged was fraught with difficulties. The two most obvious were that it did not appear to be compatible with Jesus' absolutist ethic of the Sermon on the Mount and that it could be prohibitively difficult for individuals with limited facts at their disposal to judge whether specific, contemporary wars qualified as "just". Holness mused that "equally devout Christians" sometimes arrived at diametrically opposed conclusions when assaying wars in this regard. "Is the 'Just War' theory anything more than a commonsense philosophy?" he asked tellingly.⁹⁸

As had been the case in his initial article in this series, Holness' piece on Christianity and the question of whether to wield the sword posed a mild challenge to the South African mode of conscription merely because it posed possible alternatives to the two which the Defence Act allowed, namely unqualified compliance and universal pacifism. The same could be said of his brief treatment of Biblical and denominational principles concerning the general matter of participation in war. He stressed the venerable Baptist principle of freedom of conscience, declaring that "it is important to respect the right of a fellow Christian who, after studying scripture carefully, comes to a different conclusion from my own", words which could just as well have been directed at the SADF and the South African government as at fellow Baptists. Holness then commented very briefly on various Biblical passages, concluding that the New Testament "neither clearly condemns nor does it commend a Christian's participation in war". His own conclusion was similarly ambiguous. Holness listed eight principles which he regarded as fundamental in determining whether an individual Christian should engage in military activity. By and large they pointed in a direction of resistance to conscription much more clearly than to unquestioning submission to it. He emphasised that war is a consequence of sin and that it should never be glorified. Moreover, Holness declared that "patriotism must always take second place to God's commandments, and militarism must

be avoided". Violence predictably fared poorly under his pen, for it "contradicts the teaching of Jesus" and was part of a *circulus vitiosus* which "leads to further violence". Yet Holness was not prepared to place all his principles on the side of conscientious objection. He emphasised his convictions that "the Christian must be a responsible citizen", that "war will always remain a tragic reality in a sinful world", and, finally, that "war may be the lesser of two evils".⁹⁹

Conclusion

In the history of South Africa, militarism and ethnic domination have gone hand-in-hand since the seventeenth century. Europeans and their descendants have used guns as their most explicit means of controlling the indigenous population, and the threat of armed intervention has also served to keep other non-white elements of the general population in positions of social and economic subordination. In the third, fourth, and fifth chapters of the present study, we saw how white South African Baptists tended to accept and at times openly supported the subjugation and control of the majority of the people in their midst, but in Chapter VI, dealing with the 1980s, increasing numbers of Baptists questioned, albeit generally ineffectively, the politics of racism. This, as we have seen, was a partial release of their Christian faith and ethics from the cultural captivity in which it had long lived. It is striking how similar the course of Baptist responses to aspects of the militarisation of the country, especially conscription into the SADF, was to this. Initially, with regard to the legislation of 1912, there was some protest, but by and large Baptists accommodated this law and most of the subsequent statutes and amendments pertaining to service in the armed forces. Not until the late 1970s did resistance to the *status quo* become discernible, and it never became great. At no time could conservatives convincingly portray the handful of Baptist and other conscientious objectors as a real threat to the security of the country or the privileged status of the white minority in South Africa. In this respect religio-political nonconformity differed from such phenomena as the memorandum which the 1985 annual assembly of the Baptist Union sent to P.W. Botha and which elicited a

storm of protest, coming as it did during the most violently chaotic periods of recent South African history. A second significant difference was that the venerable Baptist principle of freedom of conscience, played a more visible and largely unchallenged role for the conscientious objectors than for those who protested against the racial oppression of apartheid. A few conservatives, of course, subordinated this to other concerns, not least the perceived threat of communism, in their responses to conscientious objection, especially that of the selective sort. But most found it undeniable that individual resisters who willingly risked their freedom by defying the law were in fact following the dictates of their consciences, as they stated so clearly and cogently in their public statements. By the end of the 1980s, the CCC and other influential elements within the Baptist Union had belatedly thrown their weight more fully behind the principle than they had done at any previous time. Again, however, without impugning the sincerity of the Baptists who adopted this position, it can perhaps be partly explained as being in harmony with changing public opinion in South Africa.

Endnotes

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CHAPTER VIII

BAPTIST LEADERSHIP OF RIGHT-WING ORGANISATIONS

Introduction

During the 1970s and 1980s, as the white domination of South African society came under mounting domestic and foreign challenges and it became increasingly clear to many whites that the days of their racial supremacy might be numbered, several Baptists either founded or assumed positions of considerable importance in religious or quasi-religious organisations which had as one of their principal purposes what they portrayed as the defence of their country and the churches in it from Marxist challenges and incursions. In these activities they have never acted on behalf of the Baptist Union, which the congregational polity of that denomination would have made virtually impossible. The fact that the South African media have on occasion quoted such individuals as representatives of the Baptist Union has caused chagrin in some quarters of the denomination. Such alleged representation is doubly misleading, because in some instances the nominal denominational identity of the conservatives being quoted does not appear to have played a seminal role in their participation in these organisations. One suspects that they would have pursued similar paths even if they had severed completely their denominational ties. Nevertheless, these activities collectively form part of a significant chapter in the religious history of South Africa, and they are a colourful if hardly brilliant chip, or cluster of chips, in the ever-changing kaleidoscope of Christian responses to public issues in that country.

Until very recently, theologians, historians, and other observers of Christianity in South Africa had paid very scant attention to the history and rhetoric of these organisations. So-called "right-wing Christian organisations" had thereby in effect been relegated to a peripheral place on the religious landscape of the country where, if their official membership statistics were the only criterion, they would justifiably belong. Even John W. de Gruchy ignored them in his masterful synthesis, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*. Not until

the latter half of the 1980s did they begin to receive considerable scholarly attention, especially in a group research project at the University of Cape Town but also at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg and other institutions. Their significance, however, arguably extends beyond themselves in any consideration of Christian social ethics in South Africa, particularly because they reflect a powerful sector of conservative white opinion which has raised loud voices in many denominations against social reforms during the fourth quarter of the twentieth century. As will be seen in the present chapter, dominant themes in the propaganda of right-wing Christian organisations mesh well with some of those which have been evident in the periodicals of the Baptist Union.

As individuals, the Baptists who have become involved in these organisations are therefore relevant to our general topic merely by the fact that they did so. Yet their importance is not merely external to their denomination. Again and again they have sought to influence opinion in the Baptist Union as a whole, partly through its periodicals. That fact further necessitates consideration of this facet of the larger question. Baptist participation in and, in some cases, leadership of right-wing Christian organisations has not been merely a matter of coincidence, but one of noteworthy intersection.

It should be pointed out at the outset that some of these individuals reject the label "right-wing", because they regard it as basically a political term and insist that their organisations are essentially missionary or otherwise religious. Their primary purposes, as they perceive them and as they make great efforts to have others believe, are to promote evangelisation, especially in the countries immediately to the north of South Africa, and to counter the influence of Marxist or quasi-Marxist ideas in Christian theology in South Africa. Furthermore, some of the Baptists in question claim that they are not particularly interested in politics and that they do not necessarily support the Conservative Party or other reactionary political bodies in South Africa. Nevertheless, we feel justified in using the internationally current if admittedly imprecise term "right-wing" when describing these organisations, because their leaders clearly regard them as virtually diametrically opposite bodies to those which they and many other people commonly label "leftist" or "left-wing", and because

much of the theology and many of the unabashedly political viewpoints which they espouse bear an unmistakable affinity to the ethos, tenets, and activities of some avowedly right-wing parties and movements. It is hardly straying beyond the pale of reason and the available evidence, moreover, to conclude that some of the work of these religious or quasi-religious organisations aids and abets that of those secular rightist groups.

In the present chapter we shall focus on Baptist leadership of and other participation in what appear to be the most influential organisations. Our examination of the topic will begin with certain interdenominational bodies in the 1970s, especially the Christian League, then proceed to Peter Hammond's Frontline Fellowship and Edward Cain's umbrella organisation, United Christian Action, both of which began in the 1980s. Thematically, we shall consider theological and secular factors which have shaped these Baptists' thinking, analyse their ethical aspects of their most important writings, and seek to locate their place in the larger stream of South African Baptist thought and activity concerning social ethics. The general theme of this chapter is a broad one which would merit separate and comprehensive treatment in one or more volumes. For our purposes we must limit it to a relatively brief consideration of those just listed, but they are fairly representative of right-wing Baptist voices and involve both ordained clergymen and active laymen, all, it should be noted, Anglophone whites.

The Christian League of Southern Africa

The Christian League of Southern Africa was never an official or unofficial Baptist organisation, and no Baptist ever served as its chief officer. Nevertheless, it serves as an appropriate starting point for our discussion of Baptist leadership of right-wing organisations for at least two reasons. First, members of the Baptist Union played very important roles in its brief history, particularly in the publishing programme which formed the backbone of its activities, and through them there is a line of continuity with subsequent organisations. Secondly, The Christian League, though short-lived, served as a model

for some of those later bodies. Its history and Baptist participation in it thus merit brief consideration here.

The Christian League came into being in 1975 and spent half a decade vociferously defending the policies of the South African government before succumbing in the wake of the "Muldergate" scandal which rocked the country near the end of the 1970s. By the account of its own leaders, it was founded as a reaction to the influence of the World Council of Churches, which by 1974 had become very outspoken in its criticism of apartheid and was beginning to gain support in some denominations for its campaign against it. The most visible incident was the visit of German theologian Dr Lukas Vischer of the World Council of Churches early in 1974 and his speeches which called for greater ecclesiastical involvement towards social reform, especially in the realm of race relations. Fred Shaw, a Methodist minister in the eastern Transvaal, reacted strongly against Vischer and the influence of the World Council of Churches on the SACC by speaking out for what he regarded as orthodox Christian theology. His own approach emphasised individual piety, not what is often caricatured as the "Social Gospel". He and other whites from several denominations thus formed the Christian League. They appealed explicitly to fellow South Africans who disagreed with the national and international ecumenical bodies in this respect. In the words of one of its first statements about itself, the Christian League lamented the alleged downgrading of theological orthodoxy: "We are persuaded that this shift of emphasis from an Evangelical to a Social concern in these bodies does not really reflect the beliefs and opinions of the members of those churches which make up the WCC and the SACC". This, it should be stressed, was written only a few months after the highly publicised and controversial Hammanskraal Resolution in which the SACC called for a critical examination of military conscription. Accentuating the individualistic theme in their understanding of salvation, which resonated well with what had long been central in the Baptist Union, they further stated awkwardly: "We are convinced from the Bible that man must be reconciled to God before ever he can be reconciled to his brother, man's *heart* must be changed by the regenerating power of God's Spirit before man's society can be improved". The founders of the Christian League professed that they

did not have a programme for improving race relations through legislation or economic reform. Instead, "we simply reply, in the words of the Scripture, 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for all are one in *Jesus Christ*'".¹ In other words, no more than the government of B.J. Vorster did the Christian League propose to transform utterly divided South African society into the harmonious ideal which Paul described in Galatians 3:28. To any readers on whom the defensively conservative political implications of this may have been lost, the Christian League simultaneously recommended the staunchly conservative Rhodesia Christian Group of the Anglican priest Father Arthur Lewis, which had been formed in 1972 *inter alia* to counteract ecclesiastical support for the liberation of the black majority of that country from white domination.²

Almost immediately the Christian League began to publish direct attacks on liberation movements in southern Africa, liberation theology, the Christian Institute, black theology, and other developments which challenged the *status quo*. Indeed, the second issue of the organisation's monthly periodical, *Encounter*, carried a lengthy article which summed up the central concern of the Christian League and shed considerable light on the mentality of its leaders: "There exists a worldwide conspiracy whose aim is to bring about the collapse of the western world. Important targets today are South Africa and Rhodesia. If these two countries should fall, then the entire continent of Africa will be lost to western influence and will in fact become a sphere of communist manipulation".³ Much of what subsequently appeared in *Encounter* was essentially a series of footnotes to this article until the Christian League collapsed in the turbulent wake of disclosures that it had received more than one million rand in public funds from the Department of Information.⁴ Christian language remained strong in *Encounter*, and the Christian League continued to present itself as an "evangelical" body whose primary task was to defend orthodoxy against the inroads of political activism in the church. Yet in doing so the leadership of this organisation in effect politicised it from the outset. The essential difference was that at times tacitly and at other times quite actively the Christian League defended the white-dominated social and political structures which the alleged

conspirators near and far sought to undermine. The World Council of Churches, the SACC, and others found in the Bible and the Christian tradition a large arsenal of verbal weapons to employ in their attack; the Christian League responded with its own employment of Scriptural and traditional missiles in the defence of the remnants of the bastion of white control in southern Africa. There is no reason to doubt the existence of considerable sincerity in both camps. Both Christians of liberationist and conservative political bent may well have believed that their motivation sprang primarily from spiritual sources and that the political implications of their beliefs were secondary consequences rather than primary determinants. For either side simply to accuse the other of exploiting the Christian tradition for political ends was a case of the pot calling the kettle black - and instances of such recrimination were legion.

In the following we cannot explore the ramifications of this exploitation in a comprehensive way, for that massive task necessarily belongs in a separate study of the Christian League. Our concern is with the role of Baptists in this endeavour which, as we shall see, was both a continuation of themes which had played prominent parts in the voice of the Baptist Union on public issues for decades and set the stage for subsequent Baptist participation in right-wing Christian groups during the 1980s.

The first prominent Baptist to become heavily involved in the Christian League was Francis Grim, a layman from Kempton Park who headed Hospital Christian Fellowship and who had begun to wage an ongoing campaign against what he believed was the collapse of morality in South Africa. Grim serves as an almost ideal model of the pietistic type of amateur ethicist whose concerns and biases were quite representative of much of the membership of the Baptist Union and which have been equally conspicuous in the present study. On the one hand, he was clearly preoccupied with personal ethics and evidently regarded this, as opposed to social ethics, as the primary focal point of Christian discipleship. It is conceivable that Grim, whose writings do not indicate a sophisticated understanding of the inescapable linkage of secular ideologies to meta-ethics, did not really grasp the social and political implications of what he presented as the natural consequences of his intended focus on personal ethics. On the other

hand, while professing detachment from Christian political activism, his voice soon became a political one with more volume than most of those of his fellow Baptists.

This conceivably unintentional linkage became explicit in an essay which Grim contributed to *Encounter* only a few weeks before the Soweto riots of June 1976 helped to usher in a new era in South African political consciousness. "We have no time left to prepare further defence positions. Our only hope lies in attack", he began, employing the militant language so characteristic of the Christian right in South Africa. Grim's article is actually about the proliferation of pornography, and, as we shall see in the immediately following section, this was unquestionably one of his perennial concerns. He urged readers to flood their political and spiritual leaders with thousands of letters urging stricter control of sexually explicit materials. What is equally obvious, however, is how Grim placed his protest against pornography into an international political context and relied on the global conspiracy theory on which the Christian League had rested and made its appeal from the outset. "Why do we Christians look on listlessly while our national heritage and traditional culture is [*sic*] corroded and corrupted?" he asked. "Undoubtedly these conditions play right into the hands of of [*sic*] our Communist foes". The linkage between the perceived domestic crisis in sexual morality and the fate of South Africa as a bastion of white capitalist domination then became even more explicit. No geographer, Grim asked, "At a time when our country is totally surrounded by a ruthless enemy, are we prepared to allow and support pornography, stripping, blue films, dissolute theatre, Satanism [*sic*] and immoral Pop Festivals - which have been banned even in liberal France?" He underscored both the gravity of the predicament and the link he believed existed between pornography and the national crisis by warning readers that "soon, on the borders and within them, we may be fighting a battle to the death. Our backs are already against the wall".⁵

In another article also published in 1976 Grim tackled communism even more directly and explicitly in religious terms, this time linking it not to sex but to Satan. "Communism and Satanism are intimate allies. The older member gave birth to and continues to animate, imbue and inflame the younger partner - Communism", he declared. Grim then

swashbuckled through a catalogue of lands which had Marxist economies and governments, ending his list on the borders of Angola, which he predicted would be "the next victim". In all these countries, he generalised, "the death-knell of the Christian Church is sounded". Having sought to establish the essential identity of communism and Satanism as two sides of the same poisonous coin, Grim revealed that his understanding of religious freedom departed from that of his denominational tradition. "It seems rather incongruous that while we vigorously and militantly oppose Communism in South Africa, we give free rein to Satanism", he reasoned. Perhaps temporarily forgetting the subject of his own essay, this agitated writer declared that "articles on Satanism in magazines and newspapers indirectly promote Communism and should be forbidden by law". Grim also stated that bookstores which unnamed communists operated in Johannesburg had sections featuring titles on occult topics and satanism. If Marxism was to be halted in South Africa, he wrote, worship of Satan had to be combatted first.⁶ Nowhere did Grim suggest that much of the appeal of communism lay in the fact that white Christians had created socio-economic structures which violated Christian ethics; nowhere did he address the many arguments which Christians across much of the denominational spectrum had by then published explaining that in considerable detail; and nowhere did he propose means of dealing with these roots of the nation's tribulation.

Not all of the Baptists who became prominently involved in the Christian League were as unsophisticated as Grim or cast their writings in the same sensationalistic mould that he used to form his rhetoric. David Kingdon, a British Baptist who had experience as both a minister and teacher at a theological college in Ireland, served as the pastor of a quite conservative white Anglophone Baptist congregation in a suburb of Pretoria during the 1970s. Like most other white Baptists of his generation in South Africa, this then relatively young man viewed the Gospel essentially in traditional religious and individualistic terms and consequently relegated social ethics to a place of secondary importance. It therefore agitated him when in 1978 the Methodist Church in South Africa began to discuss "a confessional basis of faith in relation to the apartheid policies of the South African Government". In an article which he contributed to *Encounter*, Kingdon

regretted what he described as an "attempt to define heresy today in political, not doctrinal terms". He carefully conceded that "the Gospel has political implications" but made no effort to say what they were in South Africa at that time or to deal with the fact that for decades Christian advocates of apartheid had used Christian doctrine to bolster their case. Instead, Kingdon focused his case against the Methodism critique of racial separation on the fact that throughout most of the history of the church heresy had been defined in conventional doctrinal terms without regard to social ethical consequences of doctrines. He also pointed out that "error in the New Testament concerns either the Person of Christ, or the way of salvation or behaviour in the life of the Church of [sic] the individual believer". Kingdon reasoned that the writers of the New Testament had ample opportunity to condemn repressive policies of the Roman Empire as heretical but did not, and that therefore it was questionable for twentieth-century Christians to take a different approach by challenging the theological defensibility of public policies. Thirdly, this concerned Baptist wondered why Methodists had singled out apartheid for criticism while supposedly ignoring Marxism and other movements which did not mesh well with most traditional Christian theology.⁷

Missing from Kingdon's argument is any indication of appreciation of the apocalyptic expectations of the apostolic church which rendered such social criticism irrelevant. Moreover, possibly owing to an inadequate grasp of South African doctrinal history, including that of the various Dutch Reformed denominations, he failed to consider that part of the core of the argument against the theology of apartheid which increasing numbers of Christians found untenable. It is conceivable that Kingdon, like many other Christians at that time, was not even aware of the existence of a theology of apartheid, as much of the public attention given it followed the suspension of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk and the Hervormde Kerk from the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in 1982. Part of the misunderstanding may have lain in the unfortunate tendency in some quarters to succumb to the natural tendency to abbreviate and use the phrase "apartheid is a heresy" in lieu of the more cumbersome "the theological underpinnings of apartheid are heretical" or something to

that effect. As mentioned earlier, Kingdon paid lip service to the "political implications" of the Gospel but did nothing with them and evinced no appreciation of the ultimate inseparability of social ethics from the Gospel which in the eyes of many Christians, especially those who are victims of enormous social injustice, makes the latter appear so truncated when considered or proclaimed apart from the former. Kingdon did not broach the conspiracy theory so evident in many articles which appeared in *Encounter*, and in fairness to him his contributions to that periodical were free of most of the sensationalism and illogic which characterises the writings of some of the other contributors. Yet one searches in vain for more than the most fleeting reference to the grave socio-economic and political problems which faced Christians and everyone else in South Africa. In this neglect, it is difficult not to conclude that he was no less captive to his environment than most others who have written about social ethics there. That Kingdon would continue to find a cordial reception among the white readers of *Encounter* is thus fully comprehensible. How any South African blacks who read his articles reacted to them can only be guessed.

The same captivity is equally evident in one of the other pieces which Kingdon contributed to this periodical in 1979. The article is an attack on the World Council of Church's Programme to Combat Racism. Kingdon seeks to explain why, as he believed was the case, "the man in the pew is revolting against the leadership of these churches which have supported, directly or indirectly, the PCR". His article is arguably a well-intended effort to explain one of the reasons why that programme found widespread international resistance. Yet it contains numerous problems of logic and again reveals the cultural captivity of its author. Even apart from the sexist language of the question which Kingdon poses, there is an telling and inescapable flaw in his inductive method. Quantitatively, his sample of churches which had either cut their ties with the World Council of Churches or protested against its Programme to Combat Racism was much too small to warrant the unqualified generalisations which he made about "the man in the pew". Qualitatively, it is hardly representative, consisting of Presbyterian and Methodist denominations in Ireland, the Methodist Missionary Society, the Salvation Army, and the Lutheran Evangelical Church of

Schaumburg-Lippe in the Federal Republic of Germany. Where, one must wonder, were the many South African and other churches whose victims were the victims of the racism which the World Council of Churches sought to counter? Without mention of these denominations, or even of most of their sister churches in Europe and North America, Kingdon's argument is essentially that of a white writing about white churches for a conservative white audience. Even apart from that crucial deficiency, he reveals typical white South African fear of drastic change which might find theological support. Christian advocacy of liberation movements designed to restructure society, he warned, "must inevitably mean the Gospel is used to sanction a most ruthless struggle to wrest power from the hands of those who are regarded as the oppressors".⁸ Why Biblically inspired social reform, including that done on a large scale, must result in "a most ruthless struggle", however, is unclear. Kingdon sheds virtually no light on this question, nor does he indicate why, if such is the case, his pneumatology does not allow for the Holy Spirit to prompt revolutions without such violence.

Kingdon continued to contribute to *Encounter* until 1980. That year he wrote a lamentation in which he made the dubious claim that "Western theology today is dominated by the theme of freedom". The piece was a reactive challenge to liberation theology in general and revealed much about its author's understanding of the Bible and the Word of God. No stranger to strongly stated if weakly supported generalisations, Kingdon declared plaintively that "it is obvious . . . that freedom in Western theology is understood largely in political, social and economic terms". He allowed that freedom as such could be understood with regard to those categories but in another supposedly self-evident postulate that "the Bible certainly lends no support to the idea that freedom is to be understood in this fashion". Kingdon then sought to erect a defensive rhetorical wall around his assertions by resorting to a series of *ad hominem* slurs about anyone who might challenge them: "To say this is likely to bring the collective wrath of political clerics, liberal humanists and confused do-gooders raging around me like a tropical storm". These alleged foes of the real Gospel, he continued with the same school of red herrings, "are quite prepared to entertain the idea that our Lord may have been a

homosexual but they react most forcibly when you suggest that there is nothing in the Gospel itself which indicates that, for example, one man, one vote, expresses the will of God for every society for all time". Kingdon insisted that he was not indifferent to political, social, and economic issues, although no more in this article than in his previous essays in *Encounter* did he give any hint as to how his theology might inform reforms in South Africa. Instead, his point was the obvious one that twentieth-century concepts of freedom were foreign to the world of the Bible. From this, and apparently relying on the notion widespread in the Baptist Union that the text of the Bible corresponded perfectly to the static Word of God and that the message of salvation need not be translated to make it meaningful in different cultural contexts, he could reason that because in the first century there was no explicitly political message in the Gospel, there are no implications of worldly freedom in it applicable today. Kingdon found support for his position in the fact that slaves existed in the apostolic church and that there is no call in the Bible for them to seek their emancipation. "Had Paul been a liberation theologian he must have suggested that they were not free and that they ought therefore to become freedom fighters!" To Kingdon, it thus follows that in the New Testament Christian freedom is exclusively "inward and spiritual" and includes *inter alia* Pauline freedom from Jewish legalism and Christ's emphasis on freedom from entrapment in sin, as in John 8:34-36. Influenced heavily by the pietistic mindset of the white Baptist environment, Kingdon apparently perceived this as referring exclusively to personal sins and gives no reason to believe that he believes that the concept can apply both to them and to social or structural sin.⁹

Despite Kingdon's occasional fleeting references to such contemporary theologians as Moltmann and Bonino, his grasp of recent developments in Christian ethics is evidently so weak that it is tempting merely to dismiss his attempt to deal with those whom he labels "theologians of revolution" as the rantings of one who is far out of his depth. One wonders whether Kingdon ever bothered to read more than a smattering of the liberation theology which he felt himself competent to judge in print. Indeed, after reading his articles in *Encounter*, one must wonder whether he actually had any noteworthy

concept of Christian social ethics or, like many other Christians, including many in the Baptist Union of South Africa, either tacitly or explicitly dismissed social ethics as irrelevant to the Gospel. That in itself, of course, would be pertinent to our treatment of Baptist participation in right-wing Christian groups and provides another compelling reason for dealing with this article. Much could be said about the theological myopia and incompleteness of his understanding of the Bible, the Kingdom of God, the Word of God, and sin. Part of it would be unnecessary repetition of points we have already made in considering his earlier contributions to *Encounter*. What must be stressed here, however, is Kingdon's woeful shortsightedness about the pervasive nature of sin in humankind and the comprehensive way in which Christ addresses and condemns it. Even to someone like this transplanted British Baptist, who evidently believed that he kept his vision fixed on the Bible, this should have been evident, although his reading of the New Testament reveals something of the limits of how he perceived the fundamental message of the Kingdom of God in both the gospel and epistle texts. Obviously, the apocalyptic expectations of the apostolic church militated against social reform, which would have been virtually meaningless in a world which was expected to expire imminently. Again and again in the gospels, however, Jesus proclaims the good news of the Kingdom of God is addressed specifically to individuals in their particular situations. In some cases this involves personal sins of the sort on which Christians of pietistic bent dwell, e.g. the adulteress in John 8:3-11, the prostitute of Luke 7:37ff, the dishonesty and desecratory behaviour of the money-changers and merchants in the Temple in John 2:13-16. In other instances Jesus brought both the good news and works of salvation to the sick, the blind, the hungry, and the poor, many of whose tribulations are attributed to sin in New Testament theology, giving them health, sight, food, courage, and release from the spiritual and material captivity in which they had found themselves. In pericopae particularly relevant to contemporary South Africa, he also challenged those who were socially privileged but whose sins involved self-righteousness, preoccupation with wealth, and greed. Much the same could obviously be said of many teachings included in the Sermon on the Mount. Of these aspects of sin, which have far-reaching

implications for social ethics, Kingdon makes no mention; for him, sin appears to relate exclusively to the "inward and spiritual" dimension of the individual's life and does not have social, economic, or political consequences. Nor does he seem to understand that sin pervades not merely individual people but also people collectively and the organisations and other structures in which they relate to one another, often in ways which clearly manifest sins which he would probably recognise if they were isolated in individuals. This central tenet of social ethics, accepted by theologians across much of the doctrinal spectrum for generations, Kingdon does not even broach, let alone use or seek to refute. In harmony with a recurrent though not universal theme in the rhetoric of right-wing Christian groups, he leaves readers wondering whether his understanding of Christianity gave him any specific guidance when confronted by the major issues which were then facing everyone in South Africa and what he actually advocated in terms of sorely needed social reforms.

Francis Grim and Early Concern about Moral Upheaval

Turning from Baptist participation in the Christian League to Baptist leadership of subsequent right-wing religious organisations, we can appropriately begin our survey with the work of Francis Grim, whose significant role in both serves as a convenient transition and point of overlapping and whose responses to public issues antedated those of most of his younger counterparts. Grim is an almost ideal *terminus a qua* in this regard, partly because during the 1960s and 1970s his political and ethical views do not appear to have been far from the mainstream of white South African Baptists, whereas some of the subsequent figures whom we shall consider departed more markedly from it. Indeed, to a greater extent than most of the other Baptists considered in the present chapter Grim sought to influence both public opinion both through his para-church organisation and that of the Baptist Union through its periodicals. Most of his early career need not concern us. Grim's leadership of Hospital Fellowship, an interdenominational evangelistic organisation based in the Transvaal, gave him wide publicity in Baptist and other Christian

circles and provided him with a platform from which to broadcast his views as South Africa underwent continuing transitions during the 1960s and 1970s. We shall limit our treatment of Grim here to a consideration of central themes in his own publications and one of the illustrative controversies in which he became embroiled within the Baptist Union.

Grim laid part of the foundation for his subsequent campaign in a booklet published in the early 1970s. In it he merged two unoriginal themes. The first was national eschatology, which in South African history can readily be traced back at least as far as Afrikaner nationalism of the nineteenth century. On the testimony of "three men of international stature", whom Grim did not identify but merely described as "an eminent American publisher, the other a famous Dutch evangelist and the third a leading South African churchman", he declared that "this country has an important role to play in the final destiny of earth's nations". Grim then linked this to the equally threadbare theory of a global communist conspiracy, warning that "sinister forces are at work in the country to prevent the fulfilment of this destiny". The strategy which the foes of South Africa - and of God - was employing was not in the first instance an overt, military one, but the erosion of public decency. Hence the title of this booklet, *Revolution by Stealth*. "Their plot for the West is, first permissiveness, second violence and third anarchy", Grim explained. Yet he saw grounds for hope that the nation was not yet lost: "The women of South Africa have become angry over the manner in which the female body is being exhibited and exploited by shameless editors and advertisers". Apparently his concept of women did not extend beyond his own race, as he added that "schoolgirls and non-whites have joined them in this protest". Grim announced that "the time has come to protest against the culpable injustice foisted upon our youth by unscrupulous money-makers", leading one to wonder whether this warrior was summoning South Africans to take up the cudgels against anonymous communists or against the capitalist publishers and distributors of objectionable literature if they were to ally with him to "withstand the smut-mongers who right now are fighting to gain a foothold in South Africa".¹⁰

Grim pursued the same theme in a booklet published in 1974 under the even more lurid title *Attempted Rape of South Africa*. In it he sought to demonstrate that communist influences had pervaded the arts, fashions, and other aspects of South African life but merely flailed about without proving anything and committed numerous errors of logic in doing so. The film *Last Tango in Paris*, starring Marlin Brando, was one of Grim's targets, as it supposedly depicted "all forms of normal and abnormal sex, and also language that would make a sailor blush". What this "most bestial, brutal and obscene" film had to do with either South Africa or communism, however, he did not explain. The same could be said of Grim's criticism of "pop festivals", or concerts of modern music, which he lambasted because there were reports of sexual intercourse among those in attendance at an unspecified one somewhere in the Transvaal. The sheer numbers of such events - reportedly thirty-five on one day in South Africa - overwhelmed Grim, who saw in them further evidence of a Marxist conspiracy. "This was obviously a planned effort by someone strangely interested in the morals of our youth. It would be worthwhile finding out who this person is", he declared without apparently considering whether there could have been more than one individual arranging the concerts and whether these functions might have been part of a capitalist business enterprise. Readers of *Attempted Rape of South Africa* might wonder whether Grim had some kind of fixation on sex, one which was intimately related to unveiled racism. He railed at the use of the butterfly in designs on contemporary women's clothing, for example, declaring that "simply stated, the butterfly represents the female body in a particular position. It also implies moral looseness, for the butterfly flits from flower to flower irrespective of colour, seeking for nectar". Grim then turned his fertile imagination on "unisex" fashions, which supposedly have debilitating psychological effects on children because "the 'father' image and 'mother image' is [*sic*] so effectively obscured". Through unisex fashions, "the seeds are planted for a sodomised and lesbianised world". "Sensitivity Training" also drew Grim's wrath. He called this development a "Trojan horse" and warned readers that "the political forces promoting Sensitivity Training plan to have 4700 agents in this country ere long" and that some unspecified denominations were welcoming it. As icing on the

rhetorical cake, Grim resorted to a variant of a reliable ploy by stating that the World Council of Churches "strongly advocated" sensitivity training. Another target was the fad of wearing military emblems on civilian clothing, which Grim interpreted as "an attempt . . . to ridicule military rank, thus destroying its differentiating value and breaking down the officer-soldier relationship".¹¹

Attempted Rape of South Africa contains virtually nothing of substance. Grim stated that he wrote it for "the ordinary 'man in the street'", but that hardly excuses his failure to elevate his argument from the level of the street by providing any evidence of who actually made the decisions which he found so objectionable in terms of school policies, the entertainment and clothing industries, or personal tastes in the arts.¹² Even if Grim sincerely believed that South Africa was a target of international communism, one wonders whether he had any notion of ways in which the severe economic and racial injustices which have plagued that country and its antecedents for more than a century might be ameliorated as part of its defence and thus make radical revolutions less appealing. From the perspective of Christian ethics, one must further wonder why Grim did not mention anything about national or personal repentance if the country and its individual citizens and other residents were living in a state of moral peril. All of these things are conspicuously absent. One finds little more than scapegoating by an obviously frustrated man who evinced no understanding of or concern about most of the grave moral and social maladies deeply rooted in South Africa itself, some of them springing from policies which nationalistic white Christians had formulated and vociferously defended. The woes of the nation, in Grim's eyes, were all imported goods.

In 1978 Grim published *An Ideology for South Africa*, a book in which he did not describe a specific political ideology but dwelt on the theme of the communist threat to South Africa, by which he meant the white capitalist domination of the country. In the wake of the end of Portuguese rule in Angola and Moçambique, the falling of South Viet Nam to the combined forces of the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese, and other changes in the geopolitical map of the world, the termination of the *status quo* and its replacement by a black-dominated Marxist government in South Africa appeared plausible. Indeed, Grim still

perceived and portrayed communism as a united movement which was creeping steadily towards its goal of global hegemony. The bulwark against its incursions seemed to consist of two parts. First, Grim called for a general revival of Christian zeal in South Africa and suggested that God would launch one when believers in Christ became more obedient to the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19-20. As one step towards rectifying what he believed was widespread neglect of that command, he announced the creation of the South African Action for World Evangelization. Secondly, he believed that South Africans had to reverse what he termed "the rapidly deteriorating moral state of our country". In his catalogue of prevalent sins, Grim again fixated on sexual practices, mentioning sodomy, lesbianism, homosexual marriages, orgies, and contraceptive dispensing machines on university campuses. In harmony with his well-established notion of sin as exclusively individualistic, and reflecting his captivity to his own racial and economic status, he broached nothing about social ills in South Africa. Grim offered no specifically Christian or other guidance pertaining to social ethics.¹³ Indeed, he gave no reason to believe that he believed the Christian faith is relevant to public life.

When Grim broadcast his simplistic message of sexual looseness as the greatest sin in South Africa and, concomitantly, the primary breach in its defences against the international Marxist conspiracy, to his fellow members of the Baptist Union through a series of articles in *The South African Baptist* in 1981, he found both support and resistance among its readers. No more than in his previous published works did Grim's contributions to that periodical reveal any command of logic. "South African morals took a long step downwards when Government authorities recently declared certain books *not undesirable*, which two years ago were considered too foul for sale on the bookstands of our country. '*Not undesirable*' - to use the official term - must mean that this type of literature is now *desirable*", he reasoned. Grim added that "some of the language and illustrated pictures [*sic*] freely obtainable in our bookstores today would make a prostitute blush!", an assertion which may have caused cynical readers to wonder aloud how this author was in a position to gauge the reactions of those who were engaged in the world's oldest profession. Grim did not doubt that Marxists stood behind this liberalisation. "A

major strategy used by the Communists in their preparatory moves to overthrow a country, is to infuse inner moral rot", he explained. Grim did not trouble himself with the burden of proving that such revolutionaries had brought about the alleged moral decline in South Africa or clarify what roles of the governments of Vorster and P.W. Botha may have played in the process. It apparently seemed rhetorically sufficient for him to postulate that "the communists" were virtually omnipotent. From Grim's unenlightened perspective, such was a self-evident truth: "No one in touch with world affairs can deny that *their* policy is producing remarkable results as they conquer country after country". The defence of South Africa, he concluded, was contingent on *inter alia* the elimination of sex education from the curricula of the public schools, stricter censorship of printed matter and the cinema, and the condemnation of homosexuality. Grim also marshalled his conspiracy theory in connection with this, indiscriminately flailing at the South African press for ostensibly collaborating with the communists to enervate the country. "Why is our Press so selective regarding what should be emphasised and what should be played down? Why is it that South Africa's image is so odiously presented in the world Press?" he asked naively, apparently not realising that part of the answer to these questions lay squarely in the country's domestic racist policies and in the political captivity of many of South Africa's major daily newspapers.¹⁴

Grim's articles in *The South African Baptist* were a blast of hot air at sexually explicit materials and sexual education in public schools, but they contained virtually nothing about Christian ethics. Almost every sentence in them could have flowed from the pen of a non-Christian. What caused a furore in amongst readers, however, was not the absence of a specifically Christian dimension in his rhetoric but rather the lack of relevance to the deeper crisis in the country. D.A. Cameron of Hammanskraal responded sharply in a letter to *The South African Baptist*, pointing out that Grim's "reasoning is blatantly illogical and full of biased propaganda. He states personal opinions as if these were proven facts. His 'statistics' are unsubstantiated". The most serious charge which Cameron levelled at Grim, however, was that "he completely bypasses the real problems facing South Africa and endangering her security". Cameron took issue with Grim's

interpretation of historical causation in southern Africa, declaring in words which revealed something of his own white bias, that "Angola, Mocambique and Rhodesia did not fall because of pornography and sex education in schools". In one of the clearest exceptions to the prevailing pattern of cultural captivity of white Baptists who voiced their opinions on public policies during this period, he accused his adversary of gross ignorance of the living conditions in South Africa which fostered revolution and suggested that he open his eyes to them:

Instead of looking only at the threat beyond our borders, let us look at the situation within our country. Does Mr Grim know of the daily hardships of the majority of our population? Does he live in a tiny two-roomed township "matchbox" house? Does he have to get up at 4 a.m. to catch an overcrowded train to get to work where he is called a "boy" and paid a pittance? Is he in danger of being mugged when he returns home at night? Is he prevented from staying with his legal wife because of laws of our so called Christian country? Do his children go to overcrowded, ill-equipped schools? Has he suffered the indignity of being stopped in the street by a policeman demanding to see his "pass"? Communism has great appeal to those who suffer discrimination and social **injustice**.

Instead of seeing a Communist behind every bush, let us wake up to the *real* problems facing South Africa. The biggest danger facing South Africa to-day is the indifference and insensitivity of the majority of privileged whites in our country.¹⁵

Developments during the 1980s proved that Cameron's position was solid and gained respect amongst many of his fellow white Baptists across much of the ideological spectrum. Even some of the arch-conservatives considered in the present chapter would eventually concede that indigenous South Africans had legitimate economic and social grievances which could have dire consequences for the general well-being of the country.

Cameron did not base his response to Grim's articles on an explicitly Biblical foundation, but a second critic, M. Walker of Durbanville, did so in another response which *The South African Baptist* also carried promptly. While not denying that pornography posed a moral problem in South Africa, she believed that Grim had an indefensibly narrow concept of "moral rot". Another kind of it which Walker found pervading the country lay in the area of what she termed "basic human rights". Walker did not provide a definition of this in her relatively brief letter or seek to distinguish it from Christian ethics, but she argued that South African legislation which undermined due process of law violated New Testament prescription. The detention without trial of Methodist layman and subsequent member of parliament Alex Boraine served as one of her principal examples. The presumption of guilt without proof, Walker believed, contradicted John 7:51: "Does our law condemn a man without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?" That case was not only an indictment of the South African government, but also of the general public, which by and large had passively condoned the punishment of Boraine. Walker also illustrated a violation of human rights which contravened a commandment of Christ by describing the forced removals of large numbers of African squatters near Cape Town who were seeking to live what she called "a normal family life". South African migratory labour policies and the brutal expulsions of those who violated the enabling laws seemed to violate the Christian commandment regarding the inviolability of marriage as stated in Matthew 19:6: "Therefore what God has joined together, let no man separate". Walker did not prescribe a plan of denominational action to rectify these matters and probably thought it impractical to do so because she believed, perhaps incorrectly, that "Baptists, on the whole, carefully avoid political matters". Yet she suggested that when governmental policy breached Scriptural principles Baptists were obliged to raise prophetic voices against it.¹⁶

The widely respected Grim also had his defenders within the Baptist Union. Ben Adamson Jr of Alberton sought to come to his rescue in a letter to *The South African Baptist*. Describing himself as one who had "worked for over 20 years in the specialised field of *Communist Penetration Science*", he announced that Grim's assessment

of South Africa's predicament was "correct". Adamson defended the country's racial policies as a bulwark against Marxism and threats to white domination: "If every trace of ugly apartheid vanished tonight, by tomorrow night the Communists would have another pretext for the overthrow of the white man in southern Africa". He did not deny that severe economic inequalities existed but suggested that Cameron should view the matter egotistically by remembering "that those 'privileged whites' provide for his security and a good night's rest". Adamson also cast logic aside and broached the threadbare argument that black labourers in South Africa received higher wages than elsewhere on the continent. He did not indicate that the country needed any social reforms whatsoever but declared that "the problem is SIN!" without explaining what kind of sin he meant. Nor did Adamson elaborate when he abruptly concluded his defensive letter with the cryptic assertion that "the answer starts with a genuine saving experience of Christ".¹⁷

The war of words which Grim had ignited continued to rage in the pages of *The South African Baptist*. Another of his defenders, R.W. Vivian of Johannesburg, took Cameron to task in December 1981 for ostensibly presenting his own opinions as self-evident truths but proceeded to do precisely that as well as incorrectly ascribing statements to him which he had not made and committing various other errors of logic in denying them. To cite but a few examples, Vivian claimed that "Cameron states that most black people get up at 4 am to go to work" (in fact no such assertion exists in Cameron's letter) but refused to believe this on the tenuous grounds that "it is doubtful if anyone would design a system just to keep anyone out of their [*sic*] sleep". He also asserted that patterns of the consumption of electricity did not validate the claim that blacks had to rise so early, leading one to wonder whether he failed to realise that at that time large numbers of black townships did not even have electrical current. No less naively, Vivian sought to counter Cameron's alleged claim that "the majority of black men are called *boy* at work". Vivian did not state where he was employed, but incredibly he wrote, "I cannot remember when last I have heard this; it may have been a custom 20 years ago, but has long since fallen into disuse". He dismissed Cameron's indictment of white exploitation of South African blacks as a principal

cause of the nation's tribulations as "meaningless conjecture" but failed to substantiate this pronouncement in any way. Instead, Vivian resorted to sweeping generalisations about the rest of the continent to justify the *status quo* in South Africa, arguing ungrammatically and without regard to either historical facts or international economic realities that "it is clear that the present anarchy, starvation, complete absence of any form of democracy, poverty, etc, which exists [sic] in the rest of Africa, exists [sic] without any assistance from whites".¹⁸ Vivian made no effort to present his defence of Grim in Christian terms, and nothing in it suggests any awareness of Christian social ethics.

Two months later Baptist pastor Brian Harris and his wife Rosemary of Port Elizabeth attempted to administer the *coup de grâce* to what had degenerated into obtuse recrimination over Grim's essays in the Baptist monthly periodical. "The articles were bad enough, the resultant correspondence of Mr Grim, even worse!" they lamented. The Harrises were particularly concerned about Grim's failure to deal with the major racial problems facing South Africa and consequently declared that "his articles are so one-sided that they are an insult to one's intelligence". They criticised Vivian's ignorance of the continuing misuse of the word "boy" in a racist context and noted that they had recently heard a former president of the Baptist Union employ it in that sense during a sermon and could multiply examples *ad nauseam*. The Harrises were also incensed at Baptist apologies for the practice of detaining people without trial and stated that two of their friends had been victims of it. These concerned Baptists concluded their letter by recommending that readers of *The South African Baptist* become familiar with the annual *Survey of Race Relations in South Africa*, published by the South African Institute of Race Relations, and such "excellent" books by the North American Mennonite theologian and ethicist Ron Sider as *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* and *Cry Justice*. "If more people were acquainted with these books, we could talk more from a Biblical and factual perspective, than from an emotive one", they declared, obviously disgusted with the mediocrity and absence of ethical dimension which had characterised much of the debate over moral theology in the Baptist Union.¹⁹ As we have seen in the immediately preceding chapter, the level of discussion within the

Baptist Union rose somewhat during the 1980s, and consciousness of social ethical matters became more widespread. Nevertheless, people like Grim continued to write in largely the same vein, and letters to the editors of *The South African Baptist* suggest that within the denomination the greater ethical emphasis remained squarely on individual sexual morality. Meanwhile, a younger generation of arch-conservatives came to the fore, although these foes of many reforms operated primarily outside the Baptist Union, preferring instead to propagate their views to wider readerships which could be reached only through other kinds of organisations.

Edward Cain and United Christian Action

Among the earliest of the "new breed" of intensely conservative Baptists who have played leading roles in nondenominational organisations which militate against liberal reform in South Africa is Edward Cain. His case is particularly relevant to the subject at hand *inter alia* because it illuminates the impact of revolutionary politics in southern Africa on the intersection of theological and political beliefs and, in turn, social ethics. In some respects Cain's background made his part in this almost predictable. Born in Johannesburg in 1935, he was educated in Boksburg, where he underwent a conversion experience and felt called to become a missionary. Cain consequently went to Scotland to study briefly at a missionary training school in Glasgow. Although raised in a Baptist family, he regards himself as always having been interdenominationally oriented. It was therefore not inappropriate for him to become affiliated with the nonsectarian Worldwide Evangelisation Crusade, which sent him initially to Portugal to gain the rudiments of what eventually became fluency in Portuguese and in 1965 to Moçambique, then known as Portuguese East Africa, where he spent much of the next decade administering in Lourenço Marques that largely Roman Catholic country's first Protestant book shop. In this capacity he sent Christian literature throughout Moçambique, particularly to mission stations of many denominations. The last few years of his tenure there were particularly vexing for Cain. Anticolonial movements, particularly the eventually successful

Frelimo, which the World Council of Churches aided during the early 1970s, did not favour Protestant missions, and many foreign missionaries were compelled to leave Moçambique when their visas were not renewed. For that reason Cain believed it was necessary for him to avoid becoming involved in political activity. His perception of Frelimo, at least as he described it in retrospect more than a decade and a half later, was that that organisation was "totally negative", i.e. against colonialism and capitalism but not for anything. Yet it was not his direct opposition to it, but rather the cancerous condition of his wife Alice, which compelled the couple and their two children to leave Moçambique on the eve of its independence and return to South Africa carrying six suitcases but none of their other worldly possessions.²⁰

Cain emphasises that his experience in Moçambique and the subsequent history of that country made a major impact on his thinking with regard to Christian ethics. It particularly disturbed him that in the middle and late 1970s he heard "concepts" in South African churches which reminded him of the liberationist rhetoric popular in Moçambique, where persecution of the Protestant churches continued and indeed intensified after the end of Portuguese rule. Cain interpreted these early vestiges of liberation theology as a deliberate effort to "infiltrate" the Christian faith in South Africa with Marxism. He vowed to devote much of his attention to publicising what he believed were the contrasts between Biblical Christianity and liberation theology, seeking, in his words, to warn Christians that their faith was in danger of becoming essentially Marxism with a religious veneer. This has been largely through what Cain describes as his "writing ministry", one early phase of which involved editing the periodical of the Christian League from 1979 until 1981. He then founded *Signposts*, which he was continuing to edit in the early 1990s. In 1984 Cain became the founding director of United Christian Action, an umbrella organisation comprising fourteen autonomous but partly interlocking bodies, one of which, as we shall see shortly, is Peter Hammond's Frontline Fellowship. There are also individual personal members. A central purpose of United Christian Action, according to Cain, has been to counter "the distorted view of South Africa which is being propagated overseas". It has sought to do this by "presenting another view of the reality of the South African situation to foreign countries",

not least the Federal Republic of Germany. *Signposts* is the principal mouthpiece in this regard, with one of its primary intentions being to spotlight differences between Biblical Christianity and liberation theology. While engaging in this work, Cain attempted without apparent success to gain some measure of academic credibility by acquiring an external doctorate from an American institution, Covington Theological Seminary in Rossville, Georgia, an institution which the standard agency for the accreditation of theological colleges in North America cannot recognise because its academic standards do not approach required standards. Cain satisfied the undemanding requirements at Covington by submitting a thesis criticising liberation theology. Entirely contrary to the standards which prevail at respected theological seminaries, he was excused from first doing an undergraduate degree because of his many years of missionary experience.²¹

Like many other commentators of similar mind, Cain prefers not to be placed on any political spectrum. "*Signposts* rejects the label 'right wing Christianity' because it has strong political overtones", he explained in one issue of his magazine. Cain also asserted that *Signposts* has never supported the status quo" but went on to declare vaguely that "many of South Africa's founders were Bible-believing Christians who sought to create a society in which they could live lives pleasing to God". Precisely which "founders" and which South Africa Cain meant he did not specify. Nor did he choose to identify the moral tenets he thought had lain in its foundation when he insisted without adducing any evidence that these pioneers "built many Biblical principles into society".²² Finally, it does not seem to have occurred to this self-declared *defensor fidei* that however pious his anonymous forebears may have been, as sinners they may have constructed an imperfect society, some of whose principles were in need of Christian reform from its outset.

The meta-ethical and other factors underlying Cain's quantitatively relatively great output do not submit to facile systematisation but can be described in general terms. By his own admission, his studies in Glasgow were largely practical rather than theoretical. He was never required to learn any Hebrew and only "touched on New Testament Greek". Cain stresses that his experiences in southern Africa have

influenced his thinking more than the works of theologians have. He nevertheless attributes considerable influence to the works of Professor Peter Beyerhaus, a missiologist at the University of Tübingen who had previously served as a Lutheran missionary and seminary teacher in South Africa and who was by the late 1970s had become something of a *bête noir* in international Lutheran circles because he was perceived as a supporter of the South African government's racial policies. A second conservative whose influence on him Cain acknowledges is Edward Norman of the University of Cambridge. Thirdly, in recent years Cain, like many other politically and economically conservative Christians in South Africa, has evinced an apparent indebtedness to the philosophy of the Christian Reconstruction Movement as expounded by the Armenian-American theologian and educational philosopher Rousas John Rushdoony. We shall look more closely at this phenomenon in our consideration of Peter Hammond and Frontline Fellowship. Cain is reluctant to acknowledge more than a minor direct influence of Rushdoony and admits that he has not read many of his works but nevertheless declares that "the Reconstructionists are asking the right questions". He seems particularly impressed by the efforts of Reconstructionists to apply their interpretation of Biblical principles to many aspects of life. Cain does not appear to have a sophisticated knowledge of meta-ethics, but when pressed he states that his basic approach is more Biblical prescriptive ethics than imitation of Christ ethics. He regards the Bible as God's inerrant Word through which God speaks and rejects as essentially heterodox any suggestions that either the Old or the New Testament is culturally determined or requires extensive translation to make it comprehensible to the twentieth-century western mind. As we shall see, his perception of the Bible is essentially an immutable revelation literally corresponding to the Word of God. Cain prefers not to be easily classified in terms of his eschatological perspective. He cautiously states that Jesus Christ will return bodily to inaugurate an eternal order and concedes that some observers probably regard him as a premillenarian, but he insists that eschatology is "not a major issue" to him.²³ This has not prevented him, however, from repeatedly interpreting recent world events as the literal fulfilment of Biblical prophecies. To cite but one example of this

facile identification of late twentieth-century events with apocalyptic language, Cain quoted in a 1990 issue of *Signposts* part of Revelation 13:7 ("Power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations") and informed readers that this was a reference to Mikhail Gorbachev, the reform-minded president of the Soviet Union who was already at that time facing enormous political opposition in both the Russian Republic and several of the smaller republics seeking independence from the USSR. Apparently striving for rhetorical effect, Cain described the beleaguered Soviet president as an unchallenged figure before whom "the whole world is bending over backwards to ensure that nothing is done to weaken his position in any way".²⁴

Cain's vision of what would constitute a satisfactory political order from his own perspective is not easy to discern, let alone state succinctly. One difficulty in ascertaining of this avowedly apolitical man is his guarded and probably correct assertion that he does not have a well-defined ideology. Cain devotes much more time to writing about what he opposes than what he favours in the political arena, although he has also touched on the latter. In any event, he declares that he has "no problem" with the Westminster model of democracy which to some extent, namely that which whites determined, was normative in South Africa until the mid-1980s. As we shall see shortly, this places him at odds with his comrade-in-arms Peter Hammond, who openly publicises his rejection of democracy as an unchristian form of social governance. Cain decries, however, what he perceives as tendencies towards democratic centralisation, *i.e.* the concentration of power in central institutions and wielded in disproportionate degrees by certain groups, which he believes has its origins in Marxism. With regard to the future of South Africa, Cain insists privately that he would find it tolerable to bring the indigenous African population into some kind of political power-sharing but declines to elaborate on whether such an arrangement should be defined along racial lines or whether he would find a black majority voice in the government acceptable.²⁵

Before considering Cain's writings as such, it is significant to keep in mind the kind of people at whom he directs his material, especially in South Africa. Cain emphasises that United Christian Action encompasses a very eclectic membership with varying views of

baptism, eucharistic theology, gifts of the Holy Spirit, ecclesiastical polity, and other matters, and that while most of its members are Protestants there are also Roman Catholics in its ranks. He states that the membership is interracial but declines to give even an estimate of the percentage of South Africa members who are not of European ancestry. He also states that his organisation appeals especially to South Africans who are dissatisfied with how their churches have changed since their childhood and who believe that their ecclesiastical hierarchies do not represent the Gospel and the beliefs of the general membership. This is a significant key for understanding the level at which Cain writes, which includes but is not restricted to anxieties about the future of South Africa and insecurity about status. In other words, as our brief examination of some of his writings will illustrate, readers of *Signposts* share the widespread assumption, one which cuts across theological and ideological lines, that their Christian faith should be intimately bound up with their culture, not in tension with it. When Cain refers to widespread dissatisfaction with the churches, he apparently means *inter alia* the increasing tendency of some clergymen, especially in those Anglophone denominations which are affiliated with the SACC, to raise prophetic voices against social injustices which violate nearly any internationally recognised norms of Christian social ethics. Notwithstanding the inherently conservative mode of his writings, Cain adamantly rejects all political labels and notes that he has never belonged to a political party or attended a political meeting.²⁶ Whether his emphatic disavowal of ideological classification is a rhetorical ploy, a sincere confession, or perhaps both is impossible to ascertain. In any case, it hardly meshes with the blatantly conservative political implications which cry out from nearly every page of *Signposts*.

With these determinants in mind, we can examine some of the principal themes and concerns in Cain's writings about public issues in South Africa, paying particular attention to his works closest to our *terminus ad quem*, as they most vividly illustrate his thinking when a Copernican revolution in the nation's social and political order seemed imminent. Such symbolic events as the release of Nelson Mandela and the promised ending of apartheid prompted an immense editorial

outpouring in South Africa, and people like Cain realised that they stood at a critical juncture in their nation's history.

It is significant that these South African history reached these milestones only a few months after the Berlin Wall came tumbling down and at virtually the same time when communist regimes were deposed in much of eastern Europe. Many conservatives like Cain, however, remained unconvinced that communism was dead or even dying and that the Cold War was over. Presumably underlying their conviction was the lingering fear of a black takeover in South Africa and the spectre of Marxism there. "Is Communism Really Dead?" asked Cain in the first issue of *Signposts* he published in 1990. He ridiculed the contention of the American scholar Francis Fukuyama in a journal of the allegedly "conspiratorial" Council for Foreign Relations that "the Cold War is over and we have won". Cain pointed out that January that Marxists still controlled most governments in eastern Europe, apart from that of the erstwhile Czech dissident littérateur Vaclav Havel, whom he curiously identified as the president of Hungary. Moreover, Cain thought it self-evident that the Socialist Unity Party, which had ruled the German Democratic Republic since 1949, would emerge from that country's elections to be held in May 1990 still in power, and he noted that President Mikhail Gorbachev of the Soviet Union had promised not to interfere with the political evolution of that country's satellites in eastern Europe provided they did not attempt to secede from the Warsaw Pact. "So who's fooling who [*sic*]?" he asked ungrammatically.²⁷ In retrospect, of course, it soon became evident that Cain himself had been fooled. During the next year and a half communist parties lost control of nearly every government in eastern Europe, and even in the Soviet Union itself communist rule underwent very serious challenges. the Socialist Unity Party fared poorly in the elections of the German Democratic Republic and soon disappeared from the political landscape, as did that country, which became absorbed into the Federal Republic of Germany. The Warsaw Pact dissolved, as did Comecon, the international body which had sought to co-ordinate the economies of its member states.

Of more immediate relevance to Cain than events in faraway Europe, however, were those in southern Africa, which reinforced his conviction that Marxism remained a viable threat to what he believed

was a Christian order. He declared categorically that "there is no sign that the enthusiasm for Marxism by South African revolutionaries is in any diminishing" but did not present evidence to prove this assertion. Instead, Cain merely referred obliquely to a statement allegedly made by Professor Mike Hough of the Institute for Strategic Studies that the Soviet Union was continuing to assist the African National Congress (ignoring the fact that the ANC also received extensive aid from non-Marxist sources) and asserted that in Zimbabwe "Robert Mugabe also sees no need to alter his party's commitment to implement the full Marxist programme" but remained silent about the large and thriving capitalist sector in the Zimbabwean economy. Cain concluded the illogic of this section of his argument by quoting without evincing any sense of history or the internal transformation of the Soviet Union the Russian communist ideologue Dimitri Manuilski, who in the 1930s declared that while communism was not yet strong enough to mount a direct attack on the capitalist world, it would be so in thirty or forty years: "The bourgeoisie will have to be put to sleep. So we shall begin by launching the most spectacular peace movement on record. There will be electrifying overtures and unheard of concessions. The capitalist countries, stupid and decadent, will rejoice to cooperate in their own destruction".²⁸ There is no theological content in Cain's treatment of the state of communism generally or particularly in southern Africa and little to distinguish it from conventional political propaganda of an entirely transparent sort.

In two other pieces published in the same issue of *Signposts*, one an editorial and the other an article relying heavily and uncritically on Gary DeMar's *Rulers of the Nations*, Cain blended political and Biblical commentary to provide a small measure of indirect insight into what he believes would constitute an acceptable system of government, although again he declined to give much specificity with regard to what kind of civil governance he favours. In a variant of what in some varieties of Reformation theology are called "orders of creation", Cain stated that "God has given us unchanging laws as the basis for all levels of government", that these are summed up in the Ten Commandments, and that they pertain to four realms, namely control of the self, the family, the church, and the social order. His emphasis on immutable divine commandments (and concomitant neglect of the

gospels) as opposed to a dynamic Word of God harmonises well with his professed commitment to prescriptive ethics and facilitates an understanding of his view of the legitimate parameters of the state. Cain takes this from the Old Testament and refuses to allow for an evolution in the role of government. The state thus has little more than military and police powers and remains in tension with the governed: "God expects lawfully constituted civil governments to restrain public evil. His wrath will come upon any society that allows it to go on with opposition from the State". Cain's notion of governmental prerogative particularly excludes anything that smacks of the welfare state and also runs counter to what have nearly universally been accepted in the twentieth century as legitimate civil functions, such as providing general education and overseeing public health - especially because those tasks generally require taxation. He quotes DeMar approvingly: "There are those who are convinced that a better society can be created and maintained by turning over nearly all authority, power and jurisdiction to benevolent caretakers of our souls . . . [but the state] does not have Biblical authority to educate or to confiscate income to fulfill some ill-conceived social agenda".²⁹ Cain frequently accuses advocates of what he inclusively labels "liberation theology", amongst whom he is quick to place virtually any theologian who favours social reform in South Africa, of selectively using Biblical texts to justify political positions. Yet his and DeMar's decontextualised exploitation of a handful of Old and New Testament verses to bolster their own defensive, conservative agenda suggests that such allegations are at most examples of the pot calling the kettle black. They are further evidence of the cultural captivity of the Christian right flank within its own interests and mind-set, where tension with the Word of God is virtually unknown. An awareness of this deeply ingrained and determinative defensiveness is essential for comprehending Cain's reactions to other developments in South Africa which threaten to overturn, or at least modify, the *status quo* with the privileged position of white Christendom.

Nothing revealed this more vividly than the events of early 1990, especially the release of Nelson Mandela, the unbanning of the African National Congress, and the government's promises to dismantle much of what remained of apartheid, developments which prompted dancing

in the streets of black townships and, at the other end of South Africa's social spectrum, threw the Conservative Party into a paroxysm of anger. Cain did not leave readers of *Signposts* in doubt as to where his own sympathies lay and what his early reactions to these events were. "Those who served long prison sentences for treason are being released and are saying and doing the same things for which they were convicted", he observed with unveiled alarm. "Those imprisoned for acts of terror are urging those attending crowded public meetings to join the armed wing of their party". Equally revealing was Cain's anxiety that "the economy reels in reaction to plans for widespread nationalisation and a redistribution of wealth". On the level of threatened cultural identity, he quoted Beyers Naudé of the SACC and the African National Congress as predicting the deposing of Afrikaans as an official language in the new South Africa. As usual, Cain made no reference to such Biblical themes as justice and poverty, which would have been relevant to the vast majority of his countrymen at that crucial juncture of South African history. Instead, he tipped his hand by explaining why "thinking Christians" were "apprehensive, confused and fearful" about their future. "Will they lose their homes and businesses through arson or nationalisation? Will they be able to maintain their quality of life? . . . Will their children suffer as a result of falling educational standards?"³⁰

Should any readers nevertheless have failed to appreciate Cain's view of the dawning new age in South Africa early in 1990, he erased any cause for misunderstanding by publishing an open letter to State President F.W. de Klerk in a special issue of *Signposts* printed that April. The African National Congress, he declared, was a threat to such "moderate" black leaders as President Louis Mangope of Bophuthatswana and Chief Minister Mangosutho Buthelezi of Kwa Zulu (two prominent "homeland" politicians who had many loyal followers as well as many severe critics who dismissed them, especially the former, as little more than puppets of the regime in Pretoria) and, in turn, to "the majority of South Africans". Consequently, Cain insisted that de Klerk "must therefore reimpose a ban on the African National Congress, the South African Communist Party and on their supporters on the grounds that they are determined to seize power through violence".³¹ When asked about this eleven months later, Cain was

reluctant to acknowledge having written it until confronted with the evidence.³²

The final dimension of our consideration of Cain's defensiveness will be a brief treatment of his reactions to critiques of right-wing Christianity itself in southern Africa. Nowhere are these more explicit than in his issue of *Signposts* published in response to a conference on the subject convened in Harare in August 1989 under the auspices of the Ecumenical Documentary and Information Centre for East and Southern Africa. Several papers delivered there subsequently appeared in a special thematic issue of the *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, a quarterly which the SACC launched in the 1960s but which for many years has been closely affiliated with the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Cape Town.³³ That periodical has published articles by a relatively broad spectrum of South African and foreign theologians and other scholars, though to be sure a preponderance of them appear to have some measure of sympathy for liberation theology. Most of the authors of the articles about right-wing Christianity were clearly hostile to the subjects about which they were writing, and in both theological and editorial respects their quality varied widely. Some of their analyses of right-wing Christianity arguably tell us at least as much about their authors' prejudices and the tenor of the tumultuous times in which they wrote than they do about the topics which they addressed.

Much the same could be said of Cain's reactions to those generally hostile pieces. He declared that the previously mentioned conference in Harare "bitterly attacked the faith of Bible-believing Christians" and told his readers that "this issue of *Signposts* analyses the attack on the basic beliefs of the Christian faith as reflected in the *Journal [of Theology for Southern Africa]*". The dispute was not merely an academic debate but a religious battle, Cain emphasised. He cautioned his readers that opponents of right-wing Christianity were continuing to conduct research on their subjects, especially at the Institute of Contextual Theology and the University of Cape Town, "so more salvos can be expected in the future". Furthermore, despite his explicit rejection of the term, Cain emphasised that what some called "right-wing Christianity" was not "some erroneous sect" but the mainstream of the genuine, uncompromised faith once delivered to the saints.³⁴

Debilitating Cain's response to this symposium is a characteristic tendency to oversimplify in various respects. This begins with his curious homogenising of the contributors to the *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*. Rather than seeking to examine their individual works, he refers to all of them collectively as "JTSA" and without scholarly nuance proceeds to commit one logical *faux pas* after another in defensively ascribing various heresies and errors of fact to that journal, not to the contributors in question, usually without adducing any evidence at all or merely lifting a sentence or two out of context. A few examples will illustrate the point. "JTSA places all religions on the same level. None are God-given. They are merely human institutions". "Is the Bible the channel through which God reveals Himself to us? No, says JTSA!" "JTSA clearly believes that the canon of Scripture is not fixed". "JTSA maintains that you cannot establish doctrine from the Bible!" "JTSA implies that only Western imperialism oppresses people".³⁵ Underlying most of these accusations is Cain's apparent failure to grasp a theme on which many of the writers focused, namely that whatever the divine origins of Christianity may have been, it has often become encapsulated in human institutions which are under the control of conservative social and political forces which have used religion to legitimise their existence and dominant position in society. His own unacknowledged cultural and political captivity negligence and lack of an adequate conceptual framework for understanding many of both the secular and theological implications of his own writing make this misunderstanding entirely plausible.

The Influence of the Christian Reconstruction Movement

One of the strongest and potentially most consequential developments in the interplay of religion and politics in Christendom to become internationally conspicuous during the 1980s was the Christian Reconstruction Movement. This neo-Calvinist crusade, whose origins lay in the United States of America during the 1960s, began to win adherents in South Africa within a decade of its emergence but had received scant scholarly attention there by the early 1990s. For that matter, not even in North America has the movement been given

its due. Without some awareness of the basic premises of Christian Reconstruction, however, it is difficult to understand either the mentality or the agendas of certain Baptists who have become important voices on the Christian right wing in South Africa.

Etiologically, Christian Reconstruction is inseparable from the curious name of Rousas John Rushdoony, its acknowledged high priest and principal source of intellectual inspiration. Born in New York City of Armenian immigrant parents in 1916, he eventually received a doctorate in educational philosophy at little-known Valley Christian University in Clovis, California, and wrote as his massive *magnum opus* a two-volume work titled *The Institutes of Biblical Law*. The title of this ponderous dyad obviously reflects Rushdoony's acknowledged debt to John Calvin, whom he, like most other Christian Reconstructionists, regards as a principal source of inspiration and theological guidance. Rushdoony has also written more than thirty other books, dealing chiefly with educational and legal issues. His primary God-given task, he believes, is to apply divine law to the modern world. Rushdoony established the Chalcedon Foundation, with its headquarters in Vallecito, California, as an institutional vehicle for the promotion of that goal. Other prominent Christian Reconstructionists include such men as his son-in-law, economist Gary North, and philosopher Greg Bahnsen, both of whom also hold earned doctorates and both of whom are at odds with Rushdoony. They, together with the prolific Reconstructionist writer David Chilton, are associated with a rival organisation, the Institute for Christian Economics in Tyler, Texas.³⁶

As this schism in the ranks of the movement suggests, Christian Reconstructionists do not agree on all points of their agendas. Nevertheless, there are several common threads running through their overall crusade which are important to a consideration of its significance to adherents amongst Baptists in South Africa. These include *inter alia* what they term "presuppositional apologetics", a postulate which they learnt from the arch-conservative theologian Cornelius Van Til of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. According to the school of Christian thought which this tenet has spawned, personal faith in ultimate truth is not subject to empirical investigation. The believer approaches ultimate reality with a

presupposed assumption of the totally encompassing span of its implications for truth. Ultimately, both "religious" and "secular" truth arise from the same source. To Christians, according to this view, the Bible is that postulated source of revelation, and it is blasphemous even to attempt to prove its truth through any means. From this starting point, it is not difficult for Reconstructionists to link all knowledge of the sort which most other people regard as "worldly" or "secular" to the Bible, without which, Reconstructionists assert, there simply cannot be any understanding of anything. As Rushdoony has expressed it succinctly, "Without the Bible every fact from atoms to man is unrelated to all others" and there is "no knowledge at all - only chance and universal death". Reconstructionists consequently do not believe that "secular" disciplines are invalid, but they insist that they must be studied in the context of the Bible. This means, as one might by now assume, the postulating of Reconstructionist hermeneutics, which include an inerrantist view of Scripture and a categorical rejection of what is widely known as "higher criticism", which would be utterly incompatible with the underlying tenets of men like Rushdoony.

The Christian Reconstruction Movement has long had a programme for the application of its adherents principles to the world. Through it, they believe, God's plan for the ordering of Creation can eventually be realised. Rushdoony and most of his fellows think in the long term in this respect; they do not believe that their version of the Kingdom of God will evolve soon, although they are convinced that it is already in the works. Utterly fundamental to the developing order is the general validity of the Old Testament Law. This they label "theonomy", although they use that term in a way which differs radically from that to which theologians accustomed to the Tillichian rendering of it have long been conditioned. Reconstructionists do not believe that the Law was merely God's instrument in a pre-Christian dispensation, but relevant in minutial detail to our own era. As Bahnsen explained in his massive *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, "Every single stroke of the law must be seen by the Christian as applicable to *this* very age between the advents of Christ". This is, among other things, a development of Calvin's teaching of the three-fold use of the law carried to an extreme, with emphasis on the *usus politicus legis* and the *didacticus*

usus legis. Yet according to Reconstructionist theonomy (and in obvious contrast to the Lutheran understanding of the separation of powers into two realms), the political use of the law will eventually be exclusively in the hands of Christians. Theocracy will be universal. Democracy, which most Reconstructionists dismiss as a heathen product of ancient Greece and the Enlightenment, will fade into history. Sin, of course, will continue, but the Christians who wield power will apply the divine dictates of the Bible, especially those of the Old Testament, in dealing with it. Judgment will consequently be severe; such post-Biblical developments as attempts to reform criminals through rehabilitative programmes will go the way of democracy. Capital punishment will be invoked for such offences as Sabbath breaking, witchcraft, sodomy, unchastity, bestiality, sacrificing to false gods, kidnapping, incest, adultery, murder, and rape of a betrothed virgin. Chronically incorrigible children will also be put to death.

Opponents of Christian Reconstruction, and even some people generally sympathetic to the movement, have long focused much of their criticism of it on the advocacy of capital punishment for crimes which many no longer believe merit penalties of that severity. Strict Reconstructionists unyieldingly point to their Old Testaments and suggest that their critics should accept the revealed will of God in this as well as in other matters. They also emphasise that they by no means advocate the implementation of totalitarianism. On the contrary, Reconstructionists consistently criticise what they term "statism", or the intervention of the state into areas of life which they believe do not fall within the Biblical understanding of the limited scope of governments. Two of these to which they give great attention are education and the economy. Reconstructionists have no time for anything which smacks of socialism, and they believe that education should be a family and otherwise private matter in which the *pater familias*, not the mother of the children to be taught or other women, should play an almost exclusive pedagogical role.³⁷

By all accounts, the Christian Reconstruction Movement gained considerable influence in the United States during the 1980s, after getting off to a glacial start in the 1960s and 1970s. Commentators often cite frustration with increasing rates of violence and other crimes as factors which have prompted many Christians to seek

harsher endeavours to cope with the vicissitudes of their times as a principal factor in accounting for its appeal. Moreover, the movement strikes a chord with dissatisfaction with public school systems and the failure of many government-sponsored economic recovery programmes to live up to expectations. The renewed strength of so-called "evangelicalism" in North America, with its emphasis on Biblical inerrancy and the willingness of many of its advocates to challenge both the moral permissiveness of the times and various governmental policies has also lent at least superficial credibility to Christian Reconstructionism. On the other hand, it should be emphasised that large numbers of "evangelicals" are quite at odds with much of the Christian Reconstruction programme and disagree with it on at least two points. First, many dismiss as utopian the vision of a genuinely Christian society in which divine law will prevail and in which Christians will supposedly be sufficiently just to administer it in accordance with God's intentions. In this respect, they contend, the agenda smacks of Christian perfectionism. Secondly, Christian Reconstructionists necessarily advocate postmillennialism; they believe that Christ will not return until after the implementation of the divinely governed global society which they envisage. This clashes diametrically with the premillennialism of most evangelicals and has led to bitter arguments between prominent Reconstructionists and such millenarian authors as Hal Lindsay, whose *The Late Great Planet Earth* achieved enormous popularity during the 1970s but which is anathema to the Christian Reconstruction Movement.

Peter Hammond and Frontline Fellowship

One of Cain's closest Baptist allies and an increasingly devoted advocate of Christian Reconstructionism is Peter Hammond, a Capetonian who is not merely a publicist for the Christian right in South Africa but also an active missionary. The latter's two-fold role is crucial for understanding his significance to this dimension of contemporary Christian ethics, as are both the theological and socio-political tenets from which he operates. They have been overlooked however, resulting in a fundamental misunderstanding in the

professional literature. One contributor to the issue of the *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* which Cain castigated, journalist Steve Askin of Harare, depicted Hammond and his Frontline Fellowship organisation as little more than mercenaries for right-wing politics and imperialists in southern Africa. In his article titled "Mission to RENAMO: The Militarisation of the Religious Right", Askin asserted that "Hammond represented the clearest case, among Shekinah's 'mission partners', of soldier operating in the guise of missionary".³⁸ Extensive evidence suggests, however, that Askin, who does not appear to have spoken with Hammond, investigated his biography, or read many of his numerous publications, misclassified this young Baptist whom he obviously dislikes and regards with extreme suspicion, and that his accusation is at least partly unfounded.

Part of Hammond's background lends itself to such a misunderstanding, but other aspects of it render the accusation implausible and deprive it of whatever cogency it might otherwise have. Both of his parents were immigrants, his mother from Berlin and his father from Canada by way of Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). Peter was born in Cape Town in 1960 but left that city at the age of three years because his family resided briefly in Durban before relocating in Bulawayo, Rhodesia, where he attended Milton High School. As a teenager Hammond left that civil war-torn country to return to Cape Town, where he completed his high school studies in 1977. On Easter of that year he underwent a conversion experience which prompted him to become a member of nearby Pinelands Baptist Church, with which he was still affiliated in 1991. Hammond insists that while he now operates on an interdenominational basis, he is thoroughly Baptist in his theology and notes that while studying at the theological college in Athlone in 1984 he received an award recognising his allegiance to the principles of the Baptist Union. He further regards himself as standing close to the Reformed Baptist movement within the denomination but adds without elaboration that his understanding of the roots and traditions of the Baptist Union is "not narrow". During the late 1970s Hammond participated in Scripture Union, worked in one of that organisation's holiday camps, and taught Sunday school at Pinelands Baptist Church. He was also employed as a proofreader and assistant to the sales manager at Oxford University Press in Cape

Town in 1979. During this period Hammond worked for South African Action for World Evangelization for approximately six months and states that through it he came strongly under the influence of Francis Grim. Politically, Hammond relates that he came under the liberal influence of his father, who severely criticised Hendrik Verwoerd and the National Party in general, and that his German-born mother chided him and his brother for referring to African men as "boys". Like many other South Africans of his generation, however, Hammond displays considerable inconsistency on matters of race. On the one hand, he insists that his shyness prevented him from having many white friends in Rhodesia but that he had several black ones there and that he chose to study at the Baptist theological college in Athlone because it is "multiracial". On the other hand, Hammond states that the general question of race relations in South Africa has "never been a big problem for me and that for many years he was favourably disposed towards the avowedly segregationist National Party, a loyalty which he eventually ended, ostensibly because of the de Klerk government's leniency towards convicted black activists in the early 1990s. His perception of himself is that he is not a racist, and with characteristic emphasis declares that racism is "totally stupid". Hammond supports his belief by stating that the blacks with whom he works dismiss as "absurd" accusations that he is a racist.³⁹ A central question in this, however, is what he means by "racism"; another is how the positions he takes on larger national issues relate to the undergirding of racial subjugation and exploitation in South Africa, matters with which he does not deal in any explicit way in his many written works.

From 1979 until 1981 Hammond served in the South African army. This in itself represented a turning point in his life, because for two years after his conversion experience he had been a pacifist and claims to have written unpublished articles on pacifism during this period, a time when he was, by his own description, "a more or less charismatic Baptist". Unlike Richard Steele, however, Hammond reported for conscription, but on his first day in the army he informed a chaplain of his pacifist convictions. The young recruit compromised enough to participate in all forms of military training except that with a bayonet. Upon being sent to the "operational area" in South West Africa (subsequently Namibia), however, he witnessed

the destruction of villages and subsequently changed his views about pacifism. When interviewed in 1991, Hammond declared that he respects "sincere pacifists" and agrees with South African legislation exempting them from military service but that he disdains "political or selective pacifists". In retrospect, he calls his military stint "a major development in my Christian walk", because it opened to him new opportunities for pursuing his lay ministry and because "my understanding of Scripture matured". His principal spiritual activity during his two years of active duty was conducting Bible study sessions for fellow soldiers regularly. Hammond also arranged what has questionably been called "the first ever full scale evangelistic campaign in an army camp" at that time.⁴⁰

Hammond emerged from the army in July 1981 armed with a vision of creating what he established later that year as "Motorbike Mission". "We got laughed off", he relates, when he and his colleagues approached various organisations for financial support of their plans to evangelise remote northern border areas using motorcycles as convenient means of transport. In November 1981 Hammond finally got his first such vehicle and was able to open in East London an office which he soon moved to Kempton Park near Johannesburg. His former employer, Francis Grim, accepted Motorbike Mission as an auxiliary of SAAWE. The new organisation conducted its first major outreach campaign in Swaziland in 1982, showing "The Jesus Film", produced by the American mission Campus Crusade, in many locales. Later that year Hammond's organisation initially entered Mozambique. It is from that time that Hammond dates the origin of Motorbike Mission, which was renamed Frontline Fellowship in 1983, as an effective evangelistic outreach body.⁴¹

At that point, however, Hammond heeded the advice of a senior Baptist pastor, I.E. "Doc" Watson, who served as the head of the board of Frontline Fellowship, to undertake formal theological studies. He consequently enrolled at the Baptist college in Athlone in 1983 and remained until 1985, when he received the "Diploma in Christian Missions". By his own account, these were not years of scholarly bliss. Some people in his Pinelands congregation disliked his self-assured demeanour and shows of enthusiasm, allegedly calling him a "bush Baptist". Nevertheless, Hammond received his college diploma *cum laude*

despite accepting eighty-four preaching assignments, supporting himself through employment in a fire brigade, and carrying a full course load.⁴² In the then somewhat politicised atmosphere of the college in Athlone he did not get on harmoniously with all of his fellow students. One lecturer remembers him as a brash and argumentative young man always willing to cross verbal swords with more liberal colleagues.⁴³ This was a clear portent of things to come.

Like that of many other conservative, Anglophone South Africans, Hammond's thinking about social ethics has been influenced by many domestic and foreign factors. He holds strong views about the theological education he received in the Baptist Union and non-Baptist theologians, although he freely admits that he has not read theoretical literature in ethics. Hammond believes that he is heavily indebted to John Calvin, whom he describes as "very outstanding", although it is difficult to demonstrate distinct lines of influence from the Genevan reformer's social ethics to those of Hammond. The twentieth-century Christian apologist Francis Schaeffer is also among his heroes. Hammond further states that he is impressed with Christian Reconstruction writers Rousas John Rushdoony and David Chilton, whose works, as we shall see, clearly have left their mark on this South African, but dismisses Helmut Thielicke and Reinhold Niebuhr as "too liberal" without specifying what he finds unacceptable in their ethics. Hammond insists that the course in Christian ethics which he took at the Baptist theological college was helpful, partly because it included lively discussions about such issues as capital punishment and abortion, and because the man who taught it, Peter Holness (whom Hammond would subsequently subject to severe public criticism) was an "outstanding lecturer". He adds, however, that he did not arrive at his positions on social ethics while a student in Athlone. Hammond states that he "respects" Holness and Theodore Pass of the Baptist Union but predictably calls them "too liberal". Interestingly enough, he regards Fritz Haus, who taught courses in Old Testament and who is not known as a defender of political or ethical conservatism in the Baptist Union, as his favourite college lecturer.⁴⁴ Part of the significance of this may lie in the fact that Hammond, like most other Reconstructionists, places great emphasis on Old Testament Law and seeks to apply sections of it to modern society. He regards the Old

Testament as equally applicable to twentieth-century Christian discipleship as the New. Hammond's overall view of Scripture is what many would view as conservative, in that he tends to interpret and apply texts literally, although like many other Christians across the ideological spectrum and of varying theological traditions he uses his Bible selectively in support of positions which he is propagating through his writings.

Hammond's ethics cannot be well understood apart from his eschatological thinking. He differs from many other conservative Protestants in rejecting as "escapism" the premillennial tradition stemming from John Nelson Darby and thus has no room for the "rapture" and other dimensions of that school of eschatology. Hammond faults premillennialists with passively accepting the proliferation of pornography and other developments which he regards as symptoms of moral decadence as "signs of the times" which are not to be overcome (an accusation with which many would disagree strongly) rather than as foes to be defeated. Instead, Hammond declares himself to be "more postmillennial" because, like Rushdoony and the Christian Reconstruction Movement in general, he expects the church universal to be triumphant in subduing the world before the return of Christ.⁴⁵ This is vital to an understanding of his interlocking attitudes towards Christian ethics and socio-political developments in southern Africa.

Before considering Hammond's positions on various public issues, it is necessary to look briefly at a final determinant, namely his concept of the limited role of government, as this is a *sine qua non* for comprehending many of his written works. Government, Hammond asserts, is one of the biggest problems in the world today". He denies that Rushdoony is a source of his inspiration in this regard. Instead, Hammond cites his observations in Moçambique, Angola, and eastern Europe as recent determinants and also states that his reading of Christian Reconstructionist David Chilton's *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt Manipulation*, which is essentially an intensely capitalist attack on the social ethics of the North American Mennonite ethicist Ron Sider, influenced his thinking. Furthermore, Hammond affirms that the Bible teaches the essential undesirability of extensive government. Like Cain, he believes that the functions of civil government should not go beyond what are mentioned in the Bible, and in this regard he

means primarily the Old Testament. Hammond does not, for example, believe in public schools; education should be in the hands of parents and the church. He favours privatisation of the South Africa postal system, public transport, and other sectors of the economy in which the state is at least a partial owner. Hammond adduces Great Britain under the guidance of Margaret Thatcher and the Conservative Party during the 1980s as proof that privatisation works and points to the strength of the British pound as further evidence of this. His logic is questionable. Indeed, by 1991 sterling was much firmer against the South African rand than it had been when Thatcher became prime minister in 1979, but in relation to the German mark and certain other European currencies with which meaningful comparisons can be made the pound had not fared well during Thatcher's years at 10 Downing Street.

These are the principal building blocks from which Hammond has constructed a crassly dualistic view of world history, one in which there are no ambiguities or shades of grey. Everything is placed into one of two streams, labelled respectively as flowing from "The Word of God" or "The Philosophy of Man" on a chart which Hammond has distributed. The former runs from God through the Bible to God-centred Christianity, and the history of the church is traced sequentially through the Reformation, the Great Awakenings, and "great missionary movements" to produce "Bible-based communities" and Christ-centred communities". These, in turn, have promoted "home education", "moral education", a belief in Creation, commitment to the Ten Commandments, "Christian values", and "family values". Precisely when that took place is impossible to ascertain, because in Hammond's chart this list of results has given rise to a pantheon of Christian heroes, including Protestants, Pilgrims, Boers, Reformers, Puritans, Covenanters, and Huguenots, in his view the true bearers of "God-centred Christianity". These Protestant groups gave rise to "Free Enterprise", and it to "Freedom of Worship", "Freedom of Conscience", "Private Ownership", "Freedom of Thought", "Freedom of Association", and "Freedom of Movement". Flowing from those half-dozen freedoms have been the undefined "pro-life", "pro-family", and "pro-freedom" movements, which in turn have led to the "Republican Form of Government, an attitude of "Less Government - More Responsibility",

and an alliance of family, church, and state, "All to the Glory of God". The other hemisphere in Hammond's reductionist cosmology, "The Philosophy of Man", is virtually the antithesis of all this. It is essentially anthropocentric; everything flows from man by way of philosophy to "man-centred humanism". This led not to the Reformation but to the Renaissance and not to revivals but to the French Revolution. These somehow brought forth situation ethics and secular humanism, which gave rise to "state education" in lieu of home education, secular education instead of moral education, a commitment to Darwinian evolution in lieu of Creation, moral permissiveness in lieu of obedience to the Ten Commandments, humanism in general in lieu of Christian values, and "alternative lifestyles" in lieu of family values". The guilty perpetrators of this baneful legacy in modern times are a motley crew encompassing a broad spectrum of Hammond's opponents: revolutionaries, communards, democrats, ecumenicals, the Khmer Rouge, liberation theologians, Marxists, Leninists, statist, liberals, and socialists. An overarching twentieth-century product is what Hammond inclusively calls "socialism", a catch-all which he divides into two categories labelled "East" and "West". The former features totalitarianism, dictatorships, massacres, terrorism, and concentration camps, while the latter is characterised by permissiveness, democracies, abortion, pornography, and perversion. The common ground which the two geographical streams share includes centralised state control, an alliance of welfare, bureaucracy, and inflation, an attitude of "more government - less freedom", and more taxes coupled with more crime. Hammond concludes his chart with one of his magisterial, reductionist generalisations: "Either the State will exercise the wrath of God against sin, or it will exercise the wrath of man against God and His people".⁴⁶

In a subsequent issue of *Frontline Fellowship News* Hammond compared what he believes are two archetypical representatives of the respective lines of development, namely "the South Africans" and "the Soviets". The former group, he generalised, "want to live and let live", "never have tried to export or impose Apartheid anywhere else", have a "trustworthy track record", are "free to emigrate anytime", favour "Free enterprise, (capitalism)", are a "dependable friend", "seeks [sic] commerce", and are "dedicated Christian [sic]". By contrast, the

dastardly citizens of the Soviet Union are "determined to dominate the world" and "committed to spreading their unworkable ideology world-wide", have a "track record of treachery", "no freedom to emigrate", and a "socialist economy, (communism), are an "implacable foe", "seeks [sic] conquest", and are "determined atheist [sic]".⁴⁷ These series of unqualified generalisations concretely illustrate the larger dualistic pattern of Hammond's thought.

So far out of touch with both historical realities and generally accepted tenets of Christian theology is this dualistic framework that one must wonder whether Hammond was writing sincerely, which would probably necessitate postulating a massive degree of ignorance and self-deceit on his part, or formulated it primarily for rhetorical effect without regard to facts and logical soundness. Limits of space prevent anything approaching a full-scale critique of Hammond's two-fold perception of the course of history and the church, but a few examples will illustrate its most fundamental weaknesses. Historically it contains numerous errors. Among the most obvious which are pertinent either to the general history of Christendom or its story in South Africa would be the neglect of the world's largest Christian denomination, namely the Roman Catholic Church, from the framework of modern church history. Another is the attribution of "state education" (as opposed to "home education") to the Reformation and its aftermath; in fact, northern European Protestantism, particularly following the waves of pietism which washed across it, were of seminal importance in the genesis and development of comprehensive systems of public schools. What Hammond euphemistically calls "Free Enterprise", more commonly known as capitalism, has repeatedly been shown to have had multiple roots which lie just as much in the anthropocentric line through the Renaissance as through "Word of God" line and the Reformation, *i.e.* in such locations as Italy. Moreover, versions of the same existed long before the sixteenth century in both nominally Christian areas and countries where Christianity had made little or no impact. "Great missionary movements" were by no means exclusively within the Protestant orbit, despite the strong impulse which pietism provided beginning late in the eighteenth century; Roman Catholics can point to a long and rich history of the propagation of the Gospel which in fact antedates the Reformation. Dictatorships, moreover, have

often cut across ideological and denominational lines, existing - and often going hand-in-hand with - nominally Protestant governments, as such historical realities as the age of absolutism in the officially Lutheran Scandinavian countries proves. Similarly, totalitarianism, massacres, and concentration camps in the twentieth century have not been exclusively in the domain of the socialist East, as anyone with a rudimentary cognizance of the history and functioning of Hitler's Third Reich will realise. Moreover, how one can attribute the rise of democracies in the West to socialism is incomprehensible.

Turning briefly to South Africa, conspicuously absent from Hammond's historical conceptualisation are imperialism and racism in general, which - at times richly blessed with Christian rhetoric - has determined much of the history of the country. It is absurd to ascribe a cause and effect relationship to the cluster of Protestants including the "Boers" such ideals as "freedom of movement" and "private ownership" or "pro-family" and "pro-freedom" living, unless, of course, one ignores the historical plight of the vast majority of South Africa's inhabitants, as Hammond appears to have chosen to do. Again, rhetorical effect appears to have been the determining factor in the formulation of his propagated understanding of history.

No less seriously, this dualistic perception runs roughshod over basic tenets of Christian theology, including those prescribed to by the Reformation theology to which Hammond professes loyalty. This chart does not convey clearly his understanding of human nature. There is no evidence that he regards humanity, even the redeemed Christians whom he believes are the bearers of "God-centred Christianity" and the moulders of the freedoms and other **positive** attributes of the modern world, as essentially sinful and thus entirely capable of engaging in the transgressions, indeed the outrages, against their fellow humans which he ascribes exclusively to the Khmer Rouge, "ecumenicals", Leninists, and other villains in his catalogue of non-Christians. One wonders whether Hammond has postulated his conceptual framework partly on an assumption of *non posse peccare*, a kind of overarching Christian perfectionism which is heretical in the Reformation theology which he believes he represents. This seems entirely possible, because nothing in his work gives one reason to believe that Hammond has any appreciation of the ambiguities of human

nature and the dilemmas in which Christians are constantly compelled to make moral decisions. His is an utterly simplistic, **black and white** world.

During the latter half of the 1980s and in the early 1990s Hammond championed several causes, none of them more vigorously or consistently than anti-communism in both South Africa and the cordon of states immediately north of its borders. In this and, concomitantly, the campaign against liberation theology, he shares common ground with Edward Cain and others on the right flank of the religio-political scene, and it is therefore not surprising that Hammond's Frontline Fellowship is affiliated with United Christian Action. At the same time, however, it should be emphasised that Hammond's concerns range across a considerably wider front which merit subsequent consideration. Yet lurking behind every corner is the spectre of communism. This, Hammond believes, is the constant and greatest threat to what he obliquely labels "South Africa". Few things incense him more than what he perceives as defeatist compromises made in the face of its encroachment, or what others might view as concessions that critiques of the *status quo* in South Africa might have some validity and that reforms quite different from those which he advocates are necessary. "We have for so long endured such a wave of fanatical hysteria and such a barrage of left-wing, hate-filled, biased, immoral, unChristian and radical propaganda that many South Africans, even Christians, have all but given up and lapsed into an apathetic stupor - watching escapist videos", Hammond declares in one of his characteristically intemperate lamentations. Part of the responsibility for this he lays on the doorstep of "the artificially cranked up propaganda war waged by our negative anti-South African press". Owing to this unspecified baneful journalistic influence, "we have been brainwashed that morals only slide downwards, that the forces of revolution, anarchy and destruction are irreversible, that things will always get worse. What rubbish! What defeatist propaganda! What a lot of pacifist lies!" Yet Hammond lives in his own kind of hope for the future of the country. Noting that seemingly invincible foes of Christendom have been beaten back through the centuries, he finds consolation in his questionable belief that "South Africa has been in worse situations before too" and emerged from them intact. This line

of reasoning reveals much about the cultural captivity of Hammond's perception of history, one of the factors which informs his ethical thought. It is emphatically the viewpoint of the conquering minority in South Africa:

"Like after Piet Retief and his seventy defenceless and trusting followers were murdered after the 'successful negotiations' with Dingane. Read of the dark days of despair after the massacres of Bloukrans and Bushmans River. Think how much worse it was in 1902 after the Anglo-Boer War, with half the country devastated and crippled under Kitchener's and Milner's scorched earth and concentration camp policy".⁴⁸

Conspicuously absent from his fleeting survey of the valleys in South Africa's history are such major events and historical phenomena as the British defeat and annexation of Zululand, the dispossession of Xhosa and other lands in the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope, the virtual extermination of the Khoisan peoples, the economic exploitation of cheap African labour generation after generation, the breakdown of family life as a consequence of this subjugation, and the effect of both multiracial population growth and various government policies on the environment in general. The consequences of all of these were still apparent to perceptive observers while Hammond wrote. It is hardly wild speculation to assume that to many millions of impoverished and unenfranchised South Africans, their country, mired in perennial violence and suffering from escalating rates of unemployment, may never have seemed to have been in more dire straits.

Nothing confirms Hammond's belief that communism is nearly the ultimate enemy of Christendom than the plight of the countries immediately to the north of South Africa. In issue after issue of his *Frontline Fellowship News* he has for years dwelt on military conflict in those lands, invariably ascribing the perennial bloodshed in them to Marxist elements, either those in power or those struggling to attain it. In accordance with his dualistic view of history, such factions bear all the blame for perpetrating violence, creating poverty, and persecuting the churches. Concomitantly, there is no room in his scheme for right-wing terror, whether it be on the part of the Renamo

forces fighting to oust the Marxist government which has controlled Moçambique since the 1970s or the SADF and its allies which for well over a decade sought unsuccessfully to curb the independence movement led by the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) in what is now Namibia. Indirectly, the resulting chaos in the so-called frontline states has thereby served as an argument against reform in South Africa. The implied but never explicitly stated case, resonating with a belief widespread amongst white South Africans, is that such organisations as the United Democratic Front and the African National Congress, which advocate radical changes in the governance and economic system of South Africa, ideologically and spiritually have much in common with more openly Marxist movements north of the border and therefore, if they gain control in South Africa, that country will devolve into an instable, impoverished state similar to Moçambique or Namibia. Factors which distinguish South Africa from its northern neighbours are not mentioned in this argument. A corollary to this scenario is that the South African churches will have to cope not only with various tribulations but also with direct persecution.

Hammond has adopted an "I told you so" attitude towards the young history of Namibia, believing that its growing pains vindicate his earlier warnings. Not long after it was announced late in 1988 that South Africa was giving up its long struggle to retain direct control of that protectorate, the Namibian precarious rock formation called the "Finger of God" or "Mukurob" finally fell and shattered. He subsequently exploited this natural event in his *Frontline Fellowship News*, claiming that "many saw the fall of 'the Finger of God' as a warning of judgement from God".⁴⁹ When asked two years later whether he included himself among the "many" who subscribed to this interpretation, Hammond declares that the collapse of the rock "most probably" was an expression of God's will. While conceding that the event was a natural phenomenon, the timing was miraculous, an act of the "sovereign God". At the same time, however, he stated without elaboration that South Africa acted correctly in terminating its military presence in and political control of Namibia.⁵⁰

Hammond toured that neophyte country not long after "the handover of the country to the Marxist terror group SWAPO on

21 March 1990" on behalf of Frontline Fellowship and reported his findings in highly critical and at times almost derogatory terms. "Nothing has changed, except the faces of the leaders", he asserted categorically. Hammond then contradicted himself by describing changes and developments in Namibia, most of which he used to support his contention that under SWAPO the country had soon become a quagmire of corruption and economic stagnation whose generally dissatisfied citizens had not gained any noteworthy freedoms. "Many Namibians", he averred, "complained that the new SWAPO Government was squandering the country's limited resources recklessly" while its pampered and well-adorned leaders rode through Windhoek in chauffeur-driven Mercedes Benzes. "What are you free to do now that you could not do last year?" he had asked people in that city. "Without exception everyone replied that increasing unemployment, crime, the rampant spread of AIDS and the economic decline were the only noticeable changes", he reported without noting that every one of these conditions also characterised South Africa or the fact that the Namibian economy was largely capitalist and controlled to an appreciable degree by South African business interests. Hammond squared the circle, however, by naming numerous changes which had taken place. The country had attained a fairly high degree of freedom of the press, he conceded, adding that the SWAPO publication *Namibia Today* "reaches new depths in one dimensional, unimaginative, stereotyped, inaccurate, sloppy propaganda 'journalism'", a depiction which might amuse critical readers of his own *Frontline Fellowship News*. Furthermore, Hammond wrote that there a "large number of building projects under construction - new office blocks, shopping centres and an elaborate pedestrian mall". He also reported "widespread optimism in Windhoek" and that "many previously nervous and fearful residents have relaxed and are cautiously optimistic for the future". Hammond's overall reaction was one of cynicism, however, and in his report of Namibian television he revealed his *Schadenfreude* over the amateurish and propagandistic nature of its newscasts. "It was so blatantly bad and absurd that I was regularly in stitches with tears pouring down my cheeks in uncontrollable laughter", he confessed without drawing any comparisons with corresponding

transmissions by the state-controlled South African Broadcasting Corporation.⁵¹

That Hammond fears South Africa will follow a disruptive path similar to what he perceives the countries on its northern borders have followed seems beyond dispute. Nearly anything which appears to point in that direction therefore draws his ire. Hammond states that he voted affirmatively in the advisory referendum of 1983 when South African whites were allowed to express their opinions on the P.W. Botha government's plan to create two additional houses of Parliament for the Coloured and Asian segments of the population but none for the black Africans. Yet his notions of how South Africa should be governed are not fully clear. As mentioned earlier in our consideration of Edward Cain's attitude towards politics and Hammond's dualistic framework of world history, Hammond rejects democracy as "a pagan Greek concept". He declares unflinchingly that he opposes what he terms "theology of democracy", yet he also concedes that a "constitutional republic" could be compatible with his understanding of Christianity, provided that the "Law is king". Hammond leaves room for civil disobedience in exceptional cases, ostensibly because civil law is not always a mirror image of God's Law and therefore conflicts can arise for Christians when they attempt to adhere to the latter. Hammond emphasises repeatedly that of primary importance in this regard is the rule of law based on Biblical prescription. He claims to believe in due process of law and states that detention without trial is both "unacceptable" and a "travesty of justice". Indeed, in response to this writer's query, he stated that he would like South Africa to have "some kind of bill of rights" but that he nevertheless remains sceptical of such documents because he believes that which the French Revolution conceived "directly led to the Reign of Terror" - another of the ahistorical oversimplifications which punctuate his writings and conversations and appear to have determinative influence on his thought. Curiously enough, Hammond also claims to be an advocate of what he calls without elaboration "self-determination", but what he means by this term remains unexplained. How the vast majority of South Africans to whom anything commonly understood as self-determination in an international constitutional sense should benefit from his notion is unintelligible. Despite Hammond's professed

rejection of apartheid, he at times appears to favour some kind of racial separation and, alluding to a well-known epithet by the late American poet Robert Frost, says that "good fences make good neighbours". Yet early in 1991 he stated that the Group Areas Act, which had been one of several cornerstones of territorial separation of the races in South Africa for more than forty years, should be abrogated, a position which many other whites (though emphatically not the Conservative Party) also claimed to support by that time and which in fact was fulfilled later in 1991 when that statute was removed from the books. The Population Registration Act, one of the most important pillars of apartheid, however, had Hammond's support as a "wise" measure, not least because identifying people by race made it easier for the police to apprehend people. He characterises opposition to that statute as part of the liberal "hysteria" in South African political life.⁵² Despite a few hints of openness to reform, Hammond's position remains essentially conservative and defensive.

Hammond's reactions to political developments in South Africa during the early 1990s underscore his underlying conservatism and captivity to the existing order of white capitalist domination. The release of the "unrepentant criminal" Nelson Mandela in 1991 angered him. Hammond believes that had Mandela been tried in Britain and not in South Africa in 1964 he would have been sentenced to death and probably executed. He observes that since the freeing of Mandela violence has escalated in South Africa but does not mention that the rate of violent crime in the country had also been rising during the years immediately before that event. When interviewed in 1991, Hammond said that he did not have a firm position on the fundamental question of land tenure and its reform, particularly the proposed abrogation of the Native Lands Act of 1913. He noted, however, that land reforms in China, Nicaragua, and other countries had been "dangerous", "failures", and "disaster cases". Moreover, Hammond declared his opposition to the nationalisation of privately held property other than in cases in which people voluntarily surrendered it. "Should the USA give its land back to the Indians?" he asked. "Should the Xhosa be kicked out of the Cape? Should all Australians leave and give their land back to the aborigines? Where does it end?"⁵³ These reactions suggest that notwithstanding his profession to the

contrary, in reality Hammond had either arrived at or was very close to a fairly definite position on the issue of land tenure reform, namely rejection of it.

Like Cain and the Christian right in general, Hammond has a gallery of villains which includes many prominent South African churchmen who seem to be collaborating with the secular liberal enemies of the existing order in their efforts to bring about social justice. The eminent missiologist Professor David Bosch of the University of South Africa, known *inter alia* for his leading role in the creation and leadership of the National Initiative for Reconciliation, he dismisses as "very liberal" and "very ecumenical in a negative sense". Bosch, in Hammond's view, "has adopted the leftist political agenda" and therefore often offers more Marxism than missionary scholarship. Somewhat less odious is Michael Cassidy, the internationally known head of the evangelistic organisation Africa Enterprise and also a prime mover of the National Initiative for Reconciliation. "My friends call him a Trojan horse", says Hammond, "because he brings leftism into the evangelical camp". He finds it particularly offensive that while preaching evangelical Christianity Cassidy has embraced Frank Chikane, Caesar Molebatse, and other liberation theologians. Beyers Naudé, the once-banned and perennially outspoken former head of the Christian Institute and the SACC who left the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk and joined the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa, Hammond predictably detests as a "liberation theologian" who "makes excuses for terrorists" and is a "very devious and dangerous man" who supports the "socialist terror" of the African National Congress. Slightly less repugnant to Hammond is Nico Smith, who also left the largest of the white Dutch Reformed denominations in order to serve the black Dutch Reformed church in the township of Mamelodi near Pretoria, a move which gained international attention in the mid-1980s. He is a "good man who has been thoroughly manipulated and twisted into an extremely dangerous liberation theologian" who "says the ANC is the government in exile". Hammond agrees with the mayor of Mamelodi who called Smith a "liar" because he does allegedly not really live in that township. Hammond resents the opposition which Smith afforded him during the 1991 conference at Rustenburg, where the latter was supposedly "one of the most vicious speakers from the

floor". Hammond shows some respect for Professor Willi Jonker of the University of Stellenbosch, who gained both considerable attention both in South Africa and abroad for his show of repentance at the Rustenburg assembly. The confession of this "sincere and dedicated evangelical" was "very valid" but "exploited" and "hijacked" by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who supposedly "manipulated it to apply to all whites" and consequently "cashed in on the publicity" which it received. That Anglican cleric is one of Hammond's demons, a man whom he regards as a false Christian who is unwilling to profess that he has been born again, deviates from Christian orthodoxy on such matters as the Virgin Birth of Christ, thinks the Holy Spirit shone through the career of Mohandas K. Gandhi, "supports the ANC to the hilt", and is "on a fame and fortune kick". Given Hammond's hostility to many South African churchmen who advocate liberal social, economic, and political reform, it is hardly surprising that he has great though not unlimited praise for Dr Andries Treurnicht, the former Dutch Reformed minister who broke with the National Party to form the Conservative Party in 1982 and has been one of the most strident foes of the abolition of apartheid. Hammond says that he regards this reactionary politician as a real Christian and that he has no reason to question the authenticity of his faith. Hammond further respects what he perceives as "consistency" on the part of Treurnicht who, unlike many other politically active South African churchmen, is "not a chameleon". On the other hand, Hammond expresses his wish that Treurnicht would adhere more closely to unspecified "Christian principles" and less to racial ones. "He comes across as more or less a racist", laments Hammond with no mean understatement.⁵⁴

Given Hammond's general defensiveness about white-dominated South African society, his deeply ingrained fear of it falling victim to Marxist foes from within and without, and his tendency to rely heavily on both Old Testament prescriptive ethics and models, it is hardly surprising that he has become embroiled in the debate over conscientious objection which has affected both the Baptist Union and the white political and judicial scene in general. In 1988 he published a twenty-three page booklet titled *The Christian at War* in which he outlined his argument against pacifism. As indicated earlier, Hammond states privately that he respects universal pacifists and agrees with

the provisions which exist for them to perform alternative service in South Africa. In *The Christian at War*, however, this self-styled "Bible-reading, Bible-believing Christian" presented with considerable overkill his case against pacifism without attempting to give reasonable treatment to the various Biblical and other arguments which Christians have advanced in favour of it for centuries. The booklet, in short, is a crude, incomplete, and highly biased oversimplification of a major issue which does not begin to rise to the level of discussion which its seriousness and currency in South Africa call for. Nevertheless, *The Christian at War* merits our consideration here because it so vividly sheds light on Hammond's thought and sympathies, which in this case are quite representative of much of the Christian right in South Africa and which many other Baptists there share.

Hammond set out in this booklet to deal with four questions, the formulation of at least the first and fourth of which itself indicates something of his way of thinking: "What is the Christian response to war? Should a Christian be involved in the active military defence of his country? Is it ever permissible to take the life of another? Is pacifism the answer to violence?"⁵⁵ In his efforts to provide answers, however, which do not follow these questions in any logical sequence, he gives readers a generous measure of illogic, unsubstantiated generalisations, eisegesis and decontextualisation in his use of Biblical texts, and other errors which render *The Christian at War* virtually useless as anything but pro-military propaganda and a key to understanding Hammond and like-minded people who have dealt with the issue. We shall limit our discussion of these revealing weaknesses to a few of the most obvious ones.

Hammond gets off to a poor start in his description of what he terms "The Pacifist Position", in which he does not allow a single pacifist to speak for himself. Instead, he generalises that "pacifists claim that non-resistance and passive inactivity will break the cycle of violence. They say that refusal to defend oneself will prevent war and that nonviolence will result in peace", allegations with which many would disagree as themselves unrealistic. Hammond describes "consistent pacifists" more fairly, if too hastily, in two sentences, before turning his wrath upon "selective pacifists". Many of the latter, he declares, are "politically motivated", without adducing a single

example to bolster his statement. Moreover, they are allegedly hypocrites, as "selective pacifists actually support violent revolutionary movements", another in the series of accusations which Hammond leaves unproven. Finally, "most are motivated by selfish desired to avoid discomfort, discipline, danger or being separated from their girlfriend, mother or home comforts", another allegation which he repeats in various forms.⁵⁶

Not content to libel pacifists in general, Hammond subjects their anthropology and doctrine of God to his caricaturing pen. The former, he declares, "finds its roots in HUMANISM. Despite some impressive but superficial Christian pretension, pacifism is humanism". Why? "It sees man as basically good. To the pacifist all people are just too good to kill. Neither rapists, murderers nor terrorists deserve to be stopped, in the view of the pacifist". On what Hammond bases this sweeping assertion he does not state. Instead, he merely concludes his brief section on pacifists' ostensibly naive perception of human nature by announcing that they "often display more concern for the aggressor than for the defender, more sympathy for the criminal than for his victim" without providing readers any insight into the basis for this comparison.⁵⁷

"Pacifism also has a false idea of God", Hammond continues. Presumably in contrast to the mind of this marginally educated amateur theologian, "the pacifist seems to fail to understand the nature of God". He adds ungrammatically, "They must see God as a pleasant, amoral softie - either too blind to see sinful man for what he is or too gentle to punish evil". The fact that many pacifists have arrived at their views partly precisely because they regard God as morally stringent seems to have been lost on Hammond. Instead of considering the writings of a single Christian pacifist, however, he asks for transparent rhetorical effect, "Do we really believe that God does not require us to stop murder - whether by abortion or arson, whether by muggers or Marxists?" Means of countering killing by means other than killing play no apparent role in Hammond's scheme of things as outlined in *The Christian at War*. Nor, for that matter, does the eventuality that not only Marxists but also capitalists have contributed mightily to the violence of the twentieth century fit his simplistic dual perception of reality with its absence of ethical

ambiguities. Hammond seeks to convince readers that God is entirely foreign to the notion of pacifism by appealing to decontextualised Biblical passages. Nearly all of these he has plucked from the Old Testament, the sole exception being his interpretation of the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5, and even there he engages in a bit of eisegesis. Hammond insists that "God killed Ananias and Sapphira" even though the text does not say that.⁵⁸ Nowhere does Hammond evince any appreciation of the fact that the New Testament understanding of God differs notably from that of the Old Testament or, for that matter, that in both Testaments the nature of God is vastly more complex than he presents in support of his case against pacifism. Hammond's God thus remains little more than a one-dimensional deity whose work is largely disciplinary. The consistency of this with Hammond's overall understanding of legalistic Christianity hardly requires comment.

No less simplistic is Hammond's characterisation of the nature and worldly ministry of Jesus Christ. "Our Lord Jesus may have been meek but He was never mild!" he declares. In another typical *non sequitur*, Hammond continues, "His teaching was powerful, dynamic, direct and uncompromising". In seeking to substantiate his militant Christology, Hammond necessarily avoids the Sermon on the Mount and reminds readers that Jesus endured forty days in the wilderness, "could walk hundreds of kilometres in the blazing heat of Palestine's inhospitable terrain" and drove the money changers from the temple in Jerusalem.⁵⁹ The gaping hole in Hammond's portrayal of Jesus is his teachings in general, which in effect Hammond subordinates to the wrathful, legalistic deity of the Old Testament. Most conspicuously absent are such texts as Matthew 5:38-39 and 5:43-45 and I Corinthians 12:17 which diametrically counter the ethic of retribution on which Hammond bases part of his argument. Hammond repeatedly accuses pacifists, like liberation theologians, of having what he self-righteously calls "an inadequate understanding of the Bible" and quoting their Bibles selectively, but it is impossible not to conclude that this indictment applies just as aptly to himself.

One of the most blatant theological gaffes in *The Christian at War* in Hammond's frontal attack on the notion of peace itself. This concept, central to both the Old and New Testaments, he ridicules as "the

modern equivalent of Baal worship", ostensibly because "there is an irrational deifying of peace" in our "selfish, materialistic age" which "as made an idol out of peace". Throwing logic overboard, Hammond asks: "Have we become so soft, decadent and self-seeking that we are no longer willing to risk our lives for anything? Is nothing worth fighting for? . . . Are we so engrossed in watching videos, in 'wine, women and song' that we can no longer tell the difference between right and wrong?" Moreover, Hammond insists that "often peace is worse" than war, but the argument he marshals to support this odd assertion collapses immediately. His only example is the reign of terror under the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, which, as he correctly points out, cost millions of people their lives. How this tenuous induction proves his assertion that "often" conditions of what Hammond irresponsibly labels "peace" is difficult to discern. Moreover, he is operating with a false dichotomy. Hammond claims quite explicitly to be dealing with Biblical understanding of peace, but in fact both the Hebraic concept of *shalom* and the New Testament use of *eirene* in all of the canonical gospels, several of the Pauline and other epistles, and elsewhere in the New Testament exclude, to say the least, massive violence such as that which took place in the killing fields of Cambodia during the 1970s. The argument is thus self-contradictory. Rather than considering these Biblical usages, however, Hammond leaves behind his self-professed commitment to prescriptive ethics and argues very briefly on the basis of contemporary realism. His discussion does not approach the theological niveau which such earlier Christian realists as Reinhold Niebuhr set, however. Instead, Hammond is content merely to assert that "pacifism also has an unrealistic view of society" and set up another straw man to knock over by stating that "idealistic fantasies about a world of peace and Utopia without war are cruelly false and dangerously deceptive". Nowhere does he cite a single Christian pacifist who believes that Utopia can actually be achieved. Finally, and no less damaging, absent from his truncated argument is any consideration of criteria for distinguishing right from wrong when making ethical decisions involving military involvement. Even when viewed through the prism of Hammond's mindset, ethical decisions are painted in black and white; either warfare is good (i.e. primarily for

the defence of the white capitalist domination of southern Africa) or bad.⁶⁰

Such oversimplification also characterises much of Hammond's understanding of the Bible. Rarely does he evince any appreciation of the metaphoric nature of much religious language, including that of the New Testament. His dismissal of Matthew 5:39 is an obvious case in point: "Jesus said, 'If someone slaps you on the right cheek, let him slap your left cheek too.'" Matthew 5:39. Let us not say more than what Jesus said. What He did NOT say was, 'if someone stabs you in the one cheek let him stab you in the heart too.'" Even when at first glance Hammond appears to have some sense of awareness of symbolic language, he abuses texts, at times counterproductively. He quotes II Timothy 2:3-4, for instance, in a string of decontextualised Old and New Testament passages intended to convince readers that it is the will of God (or "our commanding officer") that they must participate in military endeavours. He overlooks the central point that this text has nothing to do with militarism; it is one of several metaphors, along with those of the farmer and the athlete, which the author of II Timothy used to underscore the necessity of persevering in Christian discipleship at a time when some early converts had turned away from their faith. There is no indication in *The Christian at War* that Hammond is cognizant of the fact that for approximately three centuries the early church withstood criticism for opposing service in the army of the Roman Empire.⁶¹

A final cluster of mistakes in logic and theological inconsistencies occur in Hammond's one-page treatment of "A Christian Response to War", in which he seeks to marshall a bit of historical evidence and again belittle what he is convinced are the real motives behind pacifists' behaviour. "The Christian response can never be appeasement and compromise with tyranny", he generalises without defining these crucial terms. "Whether Piet Retief with Dingaan in 1838 or Chamberlain with Hitler in 1938, appeasement always leads to treachery and war". Again, Hammond argues on what he apparently regards as grounds of realism while virtually ignoring Biblical prescription. He then shifts gears and presents a homogenised view of the human mind in castigating pacifists' motives. "Those encouraging pacifism and promoting an end to conscription have the easy task.

They have human nature on their side". Hammond does not paint an explicit portrait of essential humanity, but elsewhere in this paragraph he leaves little doubt about what he regards constitutes it: "The end-conscription campaign appeals to the cowardice, laziness and selfishness that lurks in each one of us". Other attributes which anthropologists have found to be nearly universal and which would seem especially relevant in a discussion of human behaviour in South Africa, such as tendencies towards unnecessary materialism, greed and conformity, violence when exposed to threats, racial prejudice, and the international willingness of military recruitment officers to exploit as part of their appeal when seeking to lure young men into the ranks of the world's armies, he does not mention. Hammond's skewed picture of human nature thus allows him to make the unsubstantiated accusation that "the conscientious objectors are often objecting to cold showers, strenuous training, being shouted at at 5 am and being separated from their teddy bears". He then asserts that "adversity, suffering and hardship builds character, faith and courage" and implies that such tribulations occur only in the lives of soldiers, not of civilians. Having postulated that, Hammond makes categorical generalisation and locates disciples of Christ in the ranks of the warriors by professing that "never has pacifism produced such admirable qualities in its adherents as military service has produced in some Christians".⁶²

Conclusion

It is with caution that one must draw conclusions about the larger significance of the roles which men like Cain, Grim, Kingdon, and Hammond have played in right-wing Christian organisations in South Africa and the relationship of this phenomenon to the Baptist Union in general. The congregational polity of the denomination militates against sweeping generalisations based on this relatively small sampling of religio-political opinion within it. Admittedly, this caveat would also apply to many denominations with episcopal or other hierarchical forms of ecclesiastical governance. Within the Baptist Union, however, it is

immediately relevant, as the controversy over Francis Grim's articles in 1981 demonstrated.

With these words of caution in mind, it is nevertheless possible to place the phenomenon of Baptist participation in and leadership of right-wing organisations into the broader context of South African Baptist social ethics in a meaningful way. As we have seen in several previous chapters, the history of white Baptists in South Africa has been largely one of accommodating rather than challenging both the racial politics of successive white governments and the militarism which has undergirded systems of white control of indigenous Africans and other peoples in the region, notwithstanding the dissenting voices of people like Joseph and C.M. Doke. We have also seen that despite the general denominational attitude of loyalty to Biblical prescriptive ethics, South African Baptists have repeatedly expressed opinions on public issues without apparent regard to Biblical or other theological arguments. Against this general backdrop, the right-wing voices which we have examined in the present chapter do not seem anomalous but merely a natural if arguably extreme variant of prevailing white Baptist views and attitudes towards social ethics. Again and again while I was conducting research for this study, reform-minded Baptists expressed abhorrence at the opinions and behaviour of their rigidly defensive denominational fellows. Placed into the broader context in which we are operating, however, the right-wing material suggests that the matter is actually symptomatic of less apparent but nevertheless prevailing patterns which run deeply into the Baptist Union, not merely along its periphery.

Several lines of characterisation which we have traced through preceding chapters find one pole in positions which recur in the right-wing organisations which we have considered. One obvious one is the general limitation of perspective to that of defensive, middle-class whites. Early roots of this lay in the foundational viewpoints of nineteenth-century Baptist settlers in the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope and, near the end of the century, in Natal and the Transvaal. These people were, after all, not theologians who considered moral problems from the security of the ivory tower but colonists and immigrants who shared with other whites in southern Africa the perennial fears of black challenges to their hegemony of the region.

One can trace a fairly consistent thread from the insecurity of the pioneer period to the defensiveness of the arch-conservatives featured in the present chapter. Superimposed on the blatant racial aspect of this is the spectre of communism, whose international dimension has only intensified the perceived danger. Intimately related to this is the partial isolation from much though certainly not all Christian opinion in other parts of the world. As we have seen, until about the 1960s Anglophone Baptists in South Africa cultivated close ties with their British heritage and denominational cousins in the British Isles, but the Baptist Union of South Africa nevertheless tended to part company with that influence as apartheid became an accommodated way of life. It is thus hardly surprising that the little input which right-wing Baptists in South Africa have allowed to influence them has been that which has reinforced their prejudices and defensive concerns. To be sure, there are exceptions to this generalisation, such as David Kingdon.

Against this kind of partially isolated and defensive white background, it is not surprising that theology tended to play a modest role, if any at all, when Baptists took positions on public issues. As we have seen, the right-wingers continued this tradition. In the denomination as a whole, carefully defined ethical stances became somewhat more common after the 1970s as the educational level of the white Baptist clergy rose, but this improvement did not leave a perceptible mark on the people considered in the present chapter, most of whom have quite undistinguished theological training. When they did adduce Biblical arguments in support of their positions, the tendentious eisegesis and selectivity in their use of Scripture are often apparent, as they had been for many decades.

This emphasis on continuities between dominant themes in the Baptist Union in general and the rhetoric of right-wing Christian organisations is not meant to suggest that a historic necessity has been at work. Again, the heterogeneity of the denomination militates against such facile cause and effect relationships. Furthermore, it should be emphasised that during the 1970s and 1980s, while people like Grim, Cain, and Hammond were gaining increasingly greater followings, calls for liberal social and political reform became significantly louder and more persistent within the Baptist Union,

although as we have seen it is impossible to trace a neat crescendo in this. If the right-wingers were in several respects a natural outcropping of the historic white Baptist milieu, during the past decade or so their behaviour can be seen as *inter alia* a reaction against a partial liberalisation of it.

How about discontinuities separating Baptists who have played prominent roles in right-wing organisations from the mainstream of opinion in their denomination? In the interests of both accuracy and fairness these must also be mentioned. Some of these, to be sure, are matters of degree rather than of diametrical opposition. Perhaps most obviously, the fixation on communism is a relatively new phenomenon hardly characteristic of South African Baptist social commentary. It is true that at times the denomination as a whole and prominent individuals within it commented negatively on perceived or real Marxist movements as the supposed bane of the land, and there is no reason to doubt that large numbers of white Baptists shared the general attitude towards global communism which South African governments have propagated for decades. In the rhetoric of the right-wing organisations, however, this is elevated to a position of supremacy as the virtual source of all evil. Secondly, there is a difference which can be expressed in terms of fixity and flexibility. As has been stressed both implicitly and explicitly in the present study, when one examines the history of Baptist positions on matters of social ethics, one finds an appreciable ability to change amongst many clergymen and lay members of the denomination. That hardly characterises the right-wing element, however. Its prominent figures have clung rigidly to a fixed agenda which has undergone few adaptations through the years. This is not to say that the arch-conservatives are the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Some have, to cite one obvious example of their mutability, adopted part of the programme of the Christian Reconstruction Movement. In an overarching sense, however, the stability of right-wing Baptists is the more conspicuous attribute. Thirdly, these Baptists are much more prone than those in the mainstream to advocate the use of military power as means of achieving their desired ends. Again, this willingness to resort to force is by no means a unique characteristic, but the emphasis on it is apparent on the right flank. Finally, there is far more bluster

rhetoric amongst the right-wing Baptists than amongst the moderates, though again they by no means hold a monopoly on it.

Endnotes

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2. "... and the Rhodesia Christian Group?" *Encounter*, I, no. 1 (March 1975), p. 4.
3. "The Worldwide Conspiracy", *Encounter*, I, no. 2 (April 1975), p. 4.
4. Roger A. Arendse, "The Gospel Defense League: A Critical Analysis of a Right Wing Christian Group in South Africa", *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, no. 69 (December 1989), p. 97.
5. Francis Grim, "Defend or attack?", *Encounter*, II, no. 2 (June 1976), p. 8.
6. Francis Grim, "Communism's Chief Ally", *Encounter*, I, no. 12 (February-March 1976), p. 10.
7. D.P. Kingdon, "A New Concept of Heresy", *Encounter*, III, no. 11 (September 1978), p. 6.
8. Dave Kingdon, "Why the Man in the Pew Rejects the WCC", *Encounter*, IV, no. 3 (January-February 1978), p. 7.
9. Dave Kingdon, "Freedom - Political or Spiritual?", *Encounter*, V, no. 3 (February 1980), p. 7.
10. Francis Grim, *Revolution by Stealth* (Monument Park: The Association for the Preservation of Moral Norms, ca 1972), pp. 9, 15.
11. Francis Grim, *Attempted Rape of South Africa* (Kempton Park: Heart Publishers, 1974), pp. 26, 30, 34-35, 43.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
13. Francis Grim, *An Ideology for South Africa* (Roodepoort: Roodepoort Mission Press, ca 1978), pp. 3-15.
14. Francis Grim, "The Writing on the Walls of South Africa", *The South African Baptist*, July 1981, pp. 6-9, and August 1981, pp. 13-14.
15. D.A.Cameron (Hamanskraal) to *The South African Baptist*, undated, in *The South African Baptist*, September 1981, pp. 9-10.
16. M. Walker (Durbanville) to *The South African Baptist*, undated, in *The South African Baptist*, October 1981, p. 6.
17. Dr Ben Adamson Jr (Alberton) to *The South African Baptist*, undated, in *The South African Baptist*, November 1981, p. 21.

18. R.W. Vivian (Johannesburg) to *The South African Baptist*, undated, in *The South African Baptist*, December 1981, p. 10.
19. Brian and Rosemary Harris (Port Elizabeth) to *The South African Baptist*, undated, in *The South African Baptist*, February 1982, p. 14.
20. Interview with Edward Cain, Pretoria, 25 March 1991.
21. *Ibid.*
22. Edward Cain, "Beliefs Lead to Action", *Signposts*, IX, no. 6 (1990), p. 7.
23. *Ibid.*
24. Edward Cain, "Are World Events Lining up with the Bible?", *Signposts*, IX, no. 5 (1990), p. 8.
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*
27. Edward Cain, "Is Communism Really Dead?", *Signposts*, IX, no. 1 (1990), pp. 1-3.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
29. Edward Cain, "'The Government Shall Be upon His Shoulder'", and "God's Plan Or Man's Design", *Signposts*, IX, no. 1 (1990), pp. 4-6.
30. Edward Cain, "'Fear Not . . . !'", *Signposts*, IX, no. 3 (1990), p. 1.
31. Edward P. Cain (Pretoria) to F.W. de Klerk, 12 April 1990, in *Signposts*, special issue dated 17 April 1990, p. 6.
32. Interview with Edward Cain, Pretoria, 25 March 1991.
33. The special issue devoted to right-wing Christianity is no. 69, dated December 1989.
34. Edward Cain, "The Battle for the Christian Faith", *Signposts*, IX, no. 6 (1990), pp. 1-2.
35. Edward Cain, "'Yea, Hath God Said . . .?'", "Attacking the Fundamentals of the Faith", and "'Thy Word Is Truth'", *Signposts*, IX, no. 6 (1990), pp. 2-4.
36. Rodney Clapp, "The Armenian Connection", *Christianity Today*, XXXI, no. 3 (20 February 1987), p. 22, and "The Men and Movements Behind Reconstruction", *Christianity Today*, XXXI, no. 3 (20 February 1987), p. 18.
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- which cover its basic tenets, though invariably in critical fashion, are Rodney Clapp, "Democracy as Heresy", *Christianity Today*, XXXI, no. 3 (20 February 1987), pp. 17-23; Anson Shupe, "The Reconstruction Movement on the New Christian Right", *The Christian Century*, CVI, no. 28 (4 October 1989), pp. 880-882; Rob Boston, "Thy Kingdom Come", *Church and State*, XLI, no. 8 (8 September 1988), pp. 6-12; and Thomas D. Ice, "'An Evaluation of Theonomic Neopostmillennialism'", *Bibliotheca Sacra*, CXLV, no. 579 (July-September 1988), pp. 281-300.
38. Steve Askin, "Mission to RENAMO: The Militarisation of the Religious Right", *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, no. 69 (December 1989), p. 113. The reference is to Shekinah Ministries of Chipenge, Zimbabwe, which Askin describes as a "small and obscure" organisation involved in intercontinental right-wing religious-political activities.
 39. Interview with Peter Hammond, Athlone, 19 February 1991.
 40. *Ibid.*; I.E. "Doc" Watson, "Foreword to *Faith in Action*, in Peter Hammond, *Faith in Action* (Newlands: Frontline Fellowship, 1989), p. 6.
 41. *Ibid.*
 42. *Ibid.*
 43. Interview with Peter Holness, Athlone, 19 February 1991.
 44. Interview with Peter Hammond, Athlone, 19 February 1991.
 45. *Ibid.*
 46. Peter Hammond, "A New South Africa", included with unpaginated announcement of a seminar held by the Conference for Christian Action in Constantia, 5 January 1991.
 47. Peter Hammond, "Double Standards Strike Again", *Frontline Fellowship News* no. 3 (1989), unpaginated.
 48. Peter Hammond, "Snap out of It, South Africans!", *Frontline Fellowship News* (November 1986), [p. 1].
 49. Peter Hammond, "'The Hand of God?'"', *Frontline Fellowship News*, 1989, no. 4, unpaginated.
 50. Interview with Peter Hammond, Athlone, 19 February 1991.
 51. Peter Hammond, "The 'New Namibia'", *Frontline Fellowship News*, no. 5, 1990, unpaginated.
 52. Interview with Peter Hammond, Athlone, 19 February 1991.
 53. *Ibid.*
 54. *Ibid.*

55. Peter Hammond, *The Christian at War* (Newlands: Frontline Fellowship, 1988), p. 1.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
58. *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
60. *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.
61. *Ibid.*, pp. 12, 20.
62. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Summary

Our lengthy consideration of the history of the social ethics of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa would be little more than what in German scholarship is sometimes ridiculed as a *Faktenhaufen* if we did not place it into some kind of interpretive framework. To some extent, of course, that has been the purpose of the concluding segments of most of the chapters in this study. In the present chapter, however, it is our purpose to tie together some of the principal themes already considered individually and attempt to make the general subject more meaningful by placing it into a larger national and interdenominational context. Part of this will involve comparisons with the aspects of the social ethics of the dominant Dutch Reformed tradition and a consistently apolitical denomination, the Church of England in South Africa.

We shall begin, however, with a summary of the main historical contours of the subject. Before the creation of the Baptist Union in 1877, English and German Baptists had brought to the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope both the legacy of denominational nonconformity and defensive attitudes of European cultural superiority. Amongst the settlers who had come from Victorian Britain, moreover, pride in the perceived achievements of the British Empire is apparent. To the limited degree that they left written records of their relations with the indigenous peoples of southernmost Africa, such chauvinistic attitudes played a discernible role. Whether these colonists participated directly in the dispossession of Xhosa lands is unproven, but during the 1890s there was strong editorial support in *The South African Baptist* for the imperialist annexation of Matabeleland (subsequently Rhodesia, eventually Zimbabwe). At virtually the same time, the denomination founded its South African Baptist Missionary Society. At times early South African Baptists like George W. Cross expressed concern about the plight of the "heathen" Africans in their midst, not least their exposure to exploitative liquor merchants. The action of the Baptist

Union in passing a resolution protesting against the "wholesale flogging" of Africans who contravened the law by walking on the pavements in Johannesburg gave subsequent historians of the denomination a documentable anecdote to place into their chronicles of Baptist concern about race relations, but the Baptist Union did not speak out about the ongoing economic exploitation of the growing masses of urbanised black labourers or the horrendous conditions under which most of them lived. During the Second Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902, when Baptists in Britain were divided on the moral defensibility of what many regarded as little more than a war of imperialist aggrandisement, English Baptists in southern Africa threw in their lot with it, both on the editorial page of *The South African Baptist* and, indirectly, at the annual assemblies of the denomination. During the first decade of the twentieth century, the prominent Baptist minister J.J. Doke of Johannesburg became a vocal supporter of Mohandas K. Gandhi's campaign against the registration of Indians in the Transvaal, but there is no evidence that this represented broadly based Baptist attitudes towards Asians in the region.

The first few decades of the Union of South Africa's history witnessed continuing urbanisation and various kinds of racial tensions. The Baptist Union did not distinguish itself in any way in its response to the ongoing crises which these problems caused. In a move which did not set a precedent for future Baptist attitudes towards the militarisation of South Africa, the denomination opposed the provision for conscription in the Defence Bill of 1912. Occasionally members of the Baptist Union debated in *The South African Baptist* the appropriateness of their participation in politics and commented on the role of the Christian in political life, but at no time did the denomination adopt a well-developed or consistent position on this matter. This is hardly surprising, for neither the denominational periodical nor the reports of its annual assemblies reveal much interest in such public issues as the ongoing political and economic subjugation of blacks or the travail of black labour as the industrialisation of South Africa unfolded. In terms of resolutions and editorial comment, gambling, regulation of the cinema, and the campaign against alcohol received much more attention. One exception to this pattern of neglect of many consequential social issues was the

Baptist Union's outspoken opposition to "job reservation" legislation in the 1930s. Another exception was a personal one, namely Clement Martyn Doke, a layman and African linguist who edited *The South African Baptist* for more than twenty years. His belief in the imminent return of Jesus Christ did not prevent him from advocating social reforms and attacking racism. Doke spoke out against the widespread misunderstanding of the "curse of Ham" in Genesis 9 as divine disapproval of black Africans, opposed using Basutoland (subsequently Lesotho) as a "dumping place for millions of segregated natives", protested against racial bias in the South African judicial system, and warned readers about the dangers of the "apartheid" rhetoric of the National Party in 1948.

The Copernican revolution in South African politics that year which catapulted the National Party into power drew a moderately critical reaction from white Baptists. Some, drawing on their British heritage and possibly thereby reflecting well-worn anti-Afrikaner prejudices, castigated the accession to power of this avowedly segregationist element. Like various other "English-speaking" denominations, the Baptist Union remained very moderately critical of the implementation of apartheid for a few years but eventually accepted it. One target of its wrath was Verwoerd's nationalisation of mission schools, which the South African Baptist Missionary Society was not in a position to support without conventional public subsidies. As the decade of the 1950s wore on, the strength of the criticism generally subsided. By and large, the Baptist Union, like many other denominations, did little more than to protest against what some regarded as the "excesses" of apartheid rather than against apartheid itself. Only when the government threatened to segregate worship in 1957 through the "church clause" of the Native Laws Amendment Bill did the denomination respond in strong terms.

Decolonisation throughout central Africa in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and the political instability, some of it linked to Marxism, in the new states of that region, contributed to a stifling of reform movements in South Africa as well-worn anti-communist rhetoric gained new currency. During the 1970s, Angola and Moçambique emerged as Marxist states in southern Africa, and the South West Africa People's Organisation, or SWAPO, pressed for independence from the control of

South Africa in what eventually became Namibia. Meanwhile, the World Council of Churches had promoted its Programme to Combat Racism, which lent cogency to the fears of many white South Africans that ecclesiastical support of liberation movements was essentially illegitimate. These attitudes appear to have affected the Baptist Union no less than some other denominations. In the meantime, the SACC had promulgated its *Message to the People of South Africa*, which condemned apartheid. The Baptist Union, unlike most other Anglophone denominations, had rejected that document, a move which further strained its relations with the SACC and contributed to its decision to drop its full membership in the ecumenical body in favour of observer status. In letters to the editor of *The South African Baptist*, the attitude that reform of the racist South African state was inseparable from Marxism became virtually a *Leitmotiv*. This, too, militated against the raising of an effective prophetic voice in the Baptist Union.

It was in this attitudinal climate and as the ruling National Party increased the length of compulsory military service for white males that a small number of Baptists began in the late 1970s to announce that they would not report for conscription. When in 1974 the SACC had passed a moderately worded resolution suggesting that people consider this possibility, in 1974, the Baptist Union, like many other denominations, had rejected it. By the end of the decade, however, with the Soweto riots of 1976 having convinced some whites that the country was on the verge of a domestic catastrophe and in dire need of reform, the Baptist Union had passed its own resolution and approved of conscientious objection on the foundation of the denomination's venerable principle of the freedom of the individual conscience. Nevertheless, Baptists who chose to resist conscription, either as universal pacifists or as selective objectors because they could not justify fighting to preserve what they regarded as an unjust *status quo*, long received little real support from their denominational fellows. By the end of the 1980s, after several years of seemingly endless strife in black townships and armed revolt in Namibia which the government of P.W. Botha seemed powerless to terminate, conscientious objection gained somewhat more respect, but it never became the norm for Baptists or most other Christians in South Africa.

Other Baptists responded quite differently to the national crisis as Marxist states appeared in southern Africa and domestic turmoil threatened white hegemony in the Republic of South Africa. During the 1970s and, increasingly during the 1980s, other Baptists responded to the national crisis by joining or initiating right-wing religio-political movements. Their rhetoric in this regard reflects the tradition of anticommunism deeply entrenched in the denomination and white South African society in general as well as an indebtedness to ultraconservative movements in the United States of America. Their warnings about Marxism invading the churches and leftists there co-operating with communists on the borders of South Africa to bring chaos to the country resonated well with the rhetoric which the National Party government had propagated for decades. The political tribulations which Angola and Moçambique endured under Marxist regimes after gaining liberation also lent cogency to such right-wing movements. The Baptist Union as such, however, never embraced them, and indeed by the end of the 1980s prominent Baptists had begun to comment critically on the influence which the Christian Reconstruction Movement was gaining in South Africa.

The turbulent decade of the 1980s also brought about more critical attitudes amongst white South African Baptists. For a variety of reasons discussed in Chapter VI, more pastors and lay people became sensitised to the injustices which blacks were suffering and changed their political views and ethical positions accordingly. The number with at least moderately liberal political views appears to have grown as the calls for national political reform became louder, and this faction of the denomination became correspondingly more vocal. The Coloured component of the Baptist Union grew in numbers and power, while the blacks withdrew from it. Owing largely to the demands of the Coloureds, the denomination broke new ground by sending a letter to P.W. Botha in 1985 asking him to dismantle apartheid and end the State of Emergency. During the latter half of the decade the Baptist Union did not raise similar demands, but its Christian Citizenship Committee worked quietly behind the scenes towards the realisation of what its members believed would be a more just society in closer accord with Christian social ethics. At the same time, there was a belated reconsideration of relations between church and state in the light of

the historic Baptist principle of separation and tradition of raising a prophetic voice on public issues. Few white Baptists expressed support for *The Kairos Document* or any other manifestation of liberation theology, but there was a noteworthy degree of sympathy for the statement *Evangelical Witness in South Africa*. The teaching of Christian ethics at the denomination's theological colleges was eventually geared to some extent to current issues in South Africa, but the framework of the ethics courses was still decidedly traditional and Eurocentric with little room for indigenous approaches to the subject. As the decade of the 1990s and with it a new era in the history of South Africa dawned, the Baptist Union was increasingly divided in terms of moral theology.

Biblical Prescription or Cultural Captivity?

It is difficult to overemphasise the fact that few South African Baptists, even those who are theologically educated, have even a rudimentary grounding in meta-ethics. Despite a wealth of articles and letters to the editors of the denominational magazines about matters involving social ethics, published comments about meta-ethics have always been rare. The serial articles about relations between church and state and *The Kairos Document* which Ellis André and Peter Holness contributed to *The South African Baptist* during the mid-1980s were quite exceptional in this regard. Since that time, there have been a few other commentaries, but not enough to negate the generalisation of neglect. Nevertheless, to the extent that one can find the scarlet thread of a meta-ethical presumption running through white Baptist arguments and assertions pertaining to moral issues involving race relations, the position of the church and individual Christians *vis-à-vis* the state, and other matters considered in the present study, it has been an unarticulated postulate that Biblical prescription is the foundation of Christian ethics. To be sure, Baptists have differed greatly on their interpretation of the rules they find in the Bible and on such questions as the role of the Old Testament Law, but these differences have in themselves reflected a commitment to prescriptive ethics. Only secondarily, and often in tandem with this underlying

commitment, have they explicitly based their moral decisions on an imitation of Christ ethic. In rare instances, Baptists have argued on the basis of teleological, or situation, ethics, but those people have comprised a small and practically insignificant minority of the theologically educated component of the denomination.

It is widely believed in both Baptist and non-Baptist circles that prescriptive ethics allows less opportunity for subjective manipulation of moral principles than does teleological ethics. The Bible, according to this view, provides both positive revelation which the faithful shall follow and an objective standard against which their moral decisions can be gauged. Situation or other teleological ethics, by contrast, opens a wide door through which self-interest can slither into the decision-making process. Moreover, the latter tends towards vagueness, according to this interpretation, by postulating such broad and difficult to apply notions as the primacy of *agape* as the cornerstone and touchstone of the enterprise. Advocates of Biblical prescription have had little difficulty in lancing the works of situationists like the late Joseph Fletcher and pointing to the changeability of moral decisions made in the name of teleological ethics, which, they argue, is often not only bound by self-interest but is also culturally captive.

It lies outside the parameters of the present study to compare the potential of these kinds of meta-ethical presuppositions for manipulation. Such a comparison would be largely irrelevant to our larger subject, since there has been very little teleological ethics amongst South African Baptists. The question is whether their reliance on Biblical prescription has been purely that and, if not, how it has fallen short of that ideal.

If one postulates that Biblical revelation offers an objective standard for ethics and that believers operating in good faith would adhere to it, then without demanding perfection it is reasonable to expect a great degree of consistency in their moral decisions. Highly conspicuous in our historical consideration of white South African Baptist social ethics, however, have been at least two kinds of inconsistencies. First, there is a wide divergence of emphasis separating conventional pietists from their fellow Baptists whose concerns are now partly in the area of social justice. The former, to

the extent that they are concerned about social ethics, have stressed such matters which also involve personal ethics, such as liquor control, censorship of the cinema and printed matter, and gambling. The legacy of individual salvation and sanctification in the history of pietism is not difficult to discern in this general emphasis. Baptists of this sort, and there have been many in South Africa, as elsewhere, have directly or indirectly taken their cues from both the Old Testament and the New and cited numerous Scriptural verses in support of their moral crusades. On the other hand, and increasingly in recent years as the national racial crisis in South Africa has intensified, Baptists - some of whom have also engaged in temperance movements and the like - have thrown their weight behind at least moderate political and social reform movements. They, too, have found part of their inspiration in the Bible. They frequently cite the Prophets, the Pentateuchal literature pertaining to Creation, the Sermon on the Mount, certain Pauline texts, and other passages to legitimise their positions. Both they and the conventional pietists, as we have seen repeatedly in the present study, however, have often made their cases without citing a single verse of Scripture.

Intimately related to this is a second kind of inconsistency, one involving the selection of Biblical texts which serve as prescriptions. An obvious example is found in the ongoing debate about the proper relationship of the Christian to his or her civil government. For decades politically conservative Baptists cited Romans 13:1-7 in defence of their acquiescence before racial and other forms of civil injustice. For some, this remains a *locus classicus*. In recent years, however, there has been a marked tendency to find revelation and guidance in other texts when seeking to make decisions pertaining to relations between church and state and individual Christian and the state. Baptists critical of governmental policy have looked to the Old Testament prophets' denunciations of corruption and other offences in high places, Acts 5:29, and other passages for guidance and precedents in calling secular authorities to order and disobeying them if they believed that worldly laws conflicted with those of God. That this has coincided with a growing tendency to reject the government's long-standing, though eventually abandoned, policy of apartheid is, to say the least, conspicuous.

At times even the verbal combatants in internal debates were conscious of the problem of selectivity. Perhaps there is no more lucid example of this than the brief debate which John Poorter and R.S.W. Ford waged in 1966 over the issue of protesting against unjust conduct by governments. Poorter, who then edited *The South African Baptist* and opposed civil disobedience, explicitly urged readers to examine I Peter in this regard. In that text they would find words to encourage them to persevere despite their suffering.¹ Ford, by contrast, acknowledged that Christians would do well to read I Peter but implored readers to complement this by studying Romans 1-2 as well, because there they would find much about the wrath of God. "I think the Christian is a man of straw if he knows not how, likewise, to be righteously indignant and downright immovable when confronted with wrong, however dressed up in legality it may be", he declared.² Neither man revealed any concern for the *Sitz im Leben* of the text to which he appealed, but at least there was some realisation of the problem of selectivity in referring to Scripture in support of one's case.

Specific instances of culture-bound eisegesis are not difficult to find. One of the most blatant and clearly illustrative which we have described involves the account of Noah's sons in Genesis 9. As noted in Chapter V, in 1947 Clement Martyn Doke, then editor of *The South African Baptist*, found it necessary to cross verbal swords with fellow believers and others who had interpreted the "curse of Ham" account as a damnation of black Africans. Uncritical acceptance of that classic blunder in Old Testament interpretation is not, of course, limited to South African Baptists or other citizens of South Africa; it has appealed to racist sentiments across denominational lines and national borders as a convenient justification for unequal treatment of Africans. That in itself is instructive. In this particular case the dispute arose in the heat of the rhetorical prologue to the election of 1948 when the National Party emphasised the perceived threat of black urbanisation and resulting political instability, economic decline, and social chaos while many leaders of the Dutch Reformed Church lent theological support to that party's plans to dissect South Africa even further along racial lines.

At times Baptists interviewed in connection with the research for this study commented disparagingly on the superficiality of the Biblicism in the denomination, especially as represented in debates about social ethics. Their negative attitude is entirely understandable in the light of considerable evidence. On occasion, Baptists had recorded their disillusionment with precisely the misuse of Scripture and the corresponding shallowness of positions which their denominational fellows had taken on public issues. Nicky Grieshaber, for example, a lecturer in Afrikaans at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg, appears to have expressed a fairly widespread sentiment in 1983 when, disgusted at blind appeals to Romans 13 as an argument against conscientious objection, he wrote to *The South African Baptist* and suggested that "articles on these particular questions be invited from competent theologians in our denomination, so that there may be real help to the young men, their families and their pastors".³

The Role of Millenarianism

Studies of millenarianism in the history of Christianity undertaken during the latter half of the twentieth century have shed new light on such topics as Christians' attitudes towards social reform movements and political structures, the interplay of theology and ideology, nationalism, Christian support of Zionism, and the rise of sectarian movements. Theologians, historians, and other scholars have found a bewildering array of consequences of intense expectations of the imminent return of Jesus Christ, and on many matters involving both phenomena and interpretation of the same there is no consensus in the pertinent scholarly literature. In general, however, anticipation of the end of world history in one's own lifetime has been regarded as a constraint on social reform. Why, it has been argued, would Christians take pains to improve a world which is on the verge of its demise? This general school of eschatology has thus been cited as an impediment to reform from the New Testament era to the twentieth century. Since the end of the Second World War, the "Cold War" has often been placed into a dualistic millenarian framework, with

communism playing the role of the Antichrist or otherwise serving as a negative harbinger of cosmic events to come. This has become a tenet in the interpretation of right-wing religio-political movements, many of which tend to preach anti-communism while proclaiming the imminent return of Christ.

Has this been the case amongst white South African Baptists? The question is particularly relevant because there has been a noteworthy if unquantifiable measure of millenarianism in the denomination (although the Baptist Union has never had an official eschatological doctrine) and Baptists have tended to be at least moderately conservative in terms of political and social reform. Is there a cause and effect relationship in this?

As is the case with many other questions one can ask of South African Baptists, this one is difficult to answer in an incisive way. This is partly because of the high degree of individualism and local autonomy in the denomination, whose clergymen and lay members have differed widely in their eschatological outlooks. Generalisations are consequently difficult to draw on this matter. Secondly, the extensive printed sources on which the present study is based do not yield a rich harvest of millenarian comments. Passing references to the awaited return of Christ are fairly numerous, but rarely are they well developed in Baptist periodicals, the reports of the annual assemblies, and the like. There is virtually nothing specifically linking millenarianism to either advocacy of or opposition to proposed reforms.

In the absence of such evidence, it would be imprudent to ascribe much significance to millenarianism. Beyond this general scholarly note of caution, it should be emphasised that the historic resistance of many white South African Baptists to major social reforms can be explained in other terms. The readily documentable determinants have been such factors as pietistic stress on individual sanctification and, as a consequence of this, personal rather than social ethics, a desire to maintain white privilege and position in South Africa, an unarticulated commitment to Biblical prescription and, in tandem with this, selectivity in the use of the Bible, and fear of international Marxism. There is no compelling reason, in other words, to believe that even if the recrudescence of millenarianism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had never occurred, Baptists in South Africa would

have acted differently. Facile attributions of Baptist social and political conservatism to expectations of the imminent return of Christ, it would seem, would be illustrative of the *post hoc ergo propter hoc* fallacy.

Two additional comments can be made which challenge hasty generalisations about the significance of millenarianism in this regard. First, as mentioned earlier, one of the most outspoken Baptist millenarians in South Africa, Clement Martyn Doke, was politically a moderate liberal and, in the context of his time, a champion of reform. Secondly, at or very close to the opposite pole of white political opinion, such reactionaries as Edward Cain and Peter Hammond do not appear to have not found their inspiration in millenarianism, insofar as that term applies to premillennialism. Their eschatology, at least in the late 1980s and early 1990s, has been postmillennial, in accordance with their indebtedness to the Christian Reconstruction Movement.

Parallelling the Dutch Reformed Model?

At first glance, it may seem virtually meaningless to draw a comparison between the social ethics of the Baptist Union and that of the Dutch Reformed Church in South African history. The former denomination, after all, has always been relatively small in terms of membership, and despite its efforts to influence legislation pertaining to such matters as gambling and the proliferation of alcoholic beverages, it has never wielded significant political clout. The denomination's heritage in British Nonconformity long influenced its perception of the proper relationship between church and state. Few individual Baptists have become politicians above the municipal level in South Africa. The Dutch Reformed Church, on the other hand, has always been numerically large and socially powerful there; its members have included several prime ministers and innumerable other political figures. Notwithstanding these and other dissimilarities, however, a case can be made for comparing the two. In the history of the social ethics of the Dutch Reformed Church, certain tendencies stand in bold relief and have been the object of scholarly analysis. These show clearly the cultural captivity of that denomination's moral theology as the Afrikaans people established their identity *vis-à-vis* British

hegemony on the one hand and the subjugation of black Africans on the other. White Baptists have also struggled to stake out their social claim in southern Africa, but as a relatively small group largely within the British colonial fold they were obviously not at odds with the power of the British Empire. Like most other Europeans in the African sub-continent, they were entangled in the overall cultural clash and fight for political control. Yet the Baptist role in this was inconspicuous; the denomination long regarded its engagement in the public arena as largely an extension of its concerns about such personal ethical matters as the restriction of alcoholic beverages and gambling. A general historical comparison will illuminate numerous parallels in the behaviour of the two denominations as well as reveal certain dissimilarities.

In both the Dutch Reformed Church and the Baptist Union ethnicity became linked to religious belief. That such was the case in the former denomination is too well documented to require detailed explanation here. As early as the middle of the nineteenth century, there was a religious component in the development of Afrikaner nationalism, perhaps almost inevitably so, given the fact that most Afrikaners were members of the Dutch Reformed Church, which would eventually undergo schisms but nevertheless remain a partly unifying religious and cultural force amongst the majority of Afrikaners. The myth of the "New Israel", which developed especially during the latter half of the nineteenth century as part of this ethnic self-identity, tended to lend an aura of divine approval to the group's behaviour in the history of the African sub-continent. Less obvious on the surface, but equally documentable, as was shown in Chapter III of the present study, is the *de facto* relationship between the Baptist Union and British cultural and even political hegemony in the region, a matter to which reference was made in the Summary earlier in the present chapter. That these relationships should exist does not require theological explanation; the mere fact that the members of the two denominations in question were also consciously members of European minorities in a potentially explosive milieu of ethnic and political pluralism goes far to clarify why their secular identities influenced their religious lives. Equally understandable, if theologically less excusable, was the tendency of the Dutch Reformed Church to shape

its hermeneutics to fit the myth of divine sanctioning of European colonialism in southern Africa, especially as manifested in its statements on apartheid prior to 1986. As a denomination, the Baptist Union never went as far as the Dutch Reformed Church in this regard, but, as we have seen in several chapters, on the individual level many Baptists used both the Old Testament and the New in superficial and selective ways to legitimise the imposition of European hegemony on black Africans.

Manifestations of this general tendency became a virtual *Leitmotiv* amongst both the Dutch Reformed and white Baptists, whose denominational moves often paralleled one another. Both denominations were once affiliated with the Christian Council, the forerunner of the SACC. The Dutch Reformed Church withdrew from the former organisation and from the World Council of Churches in the wake of the Cottesloe Consultation of 1960. The Baptist Union was never a member of the World Council of Churches and eventually terminated its membership in the SACC after that organisation became deeply involved in the crusade against racism in South Africa. In 1968 both denominations rejected the SACC's *Message to the People of South Africa*, which declared that apartheid was incompatible with Christianity. In 1974, moreover, the Baptist Union, like many other denominations, severely criticised the SACC's resolution pertaining to conscientious objection. The Dutch Reformed Church, which was no longer a member of the SACC, did not adopt an official position on that statement, but within that denomination opinion against it ran very strong and made itself clear on the editorial pages of its official periodical, *Die Kerkbode*. As one point of divergence, well before the end of the 1970s the Baptist Union passed a resolution sanctioning conscientious objection on the grounds of the freedom of the individual conscience. The Dutch Reformed Church, undoubtedly reflecting its much closer personal and institutional links to the defensive government and military structure of South Africa, lagged far behind in this respect. These partially divergent positions did not prevent either denomination from becoming deeply involved in the military chaplaincy and or some individuals in both churches from defending that institution vigorously. In both denominations, moreover, the government's "total onslaught" rhetoric made a great impact

during the era of decolonisation in central and southern Africa. The government did not fail to notice the general if not universal acquiescence of the Baptist Union to its policies. It is conspicuous how many Baptists both the national and the Transvaal governments have chosen for leading positions in educational administration and religious broadcasting. While no statistical study of this has been attempted, it is difficult to avoid the impression that the Baptist Union has been strongly disproportionately represented in these respects.

Even the reformist moves of the Baptist Union and the Dutch Reformed Church illuminate common ground. In 1985, with violence in the townships at record levels and a growing sector of public opinion calling for fundamental reforms of society, the former denomination sent its letter to P.W. Botha urging him to dismantle apartheid and terminate the State of Emergency. At its quadrennial General Synod some twelve months later, the Dutch Reformed Church finally dropped its historic theological defence of apartheid. In reaction to these liberalising trends, large numbers of Dutch Reformed Christians seceded from the parent denomination to form the Afrikaans Protestant Church, voted for the Conservative Party which promised to reinstate a large measure of apartheid, and supported such fascist movements as the Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging. It would be facile to set up a fully corresponding Baptist parallel to these reactionary developments, but it is striking how prominent such Baptists as Edward Cain, Francis Grim, and Peter Hammond have been in Anglophone right-wing religio-political movements. One might arguably hypothesise that allowing for its relatively small size and lack of political power, no other English-speaking denomination more closely resembled the Dutch Reformed Church in its responses to apartheid and militarism than did the Baptist Union of Southern Africa.

How can this be explained? Theologically, one of the Baptist Union's roots lies in Calvinism, and to a greater extent this certainly is true of the Dutch Reformed tradition, notwithstanding the influence of nineteenth-century pietistic movements on both denominations. Such an explanation, however, would be inadequate, for other denominations in South Africa, **perhaps** most notably Presbyterians and Congregationalists, **also trace part** of their theological ancestry to Geneva but have taken appreciably more liberal positions on social

issues. Furthermore, Baptists and the Dutch Reformed represent different, if overlapping, social groups. The former, for example, number few farmers in their ranks, while the Dutch Reformed were for centuries a predominantly rural denomination in South Africa.

One significant characteristic which the two denominations share, and this may well be the key to understanding the similar positions they long took - or failed to take - on certain issues, is the fact that both are essentially white churches. True, both the Dutch Reformed and the Baptists have conducted missionary work amongst other ethnic groups in South Africa since the nineteenth century, but in both instances the mission churches were either clearly subordinate to the parent denomination or detached from it. Blacks and Coloureds, in other words, did not have a powerful voice in either camp. White social and political defensiveness was thus. This fact distinguished the Baptists and the Dutch Reformed from many other denominations, such as the Church of the Province and the Methodists, which have long had black majorities and, owing heavily to this fundamental demographic characteristic, became quite outspoken in campaigns for social reform.

A Comparison on the Right

Admittedly, in itself the foregoing comparison with the Dutch Reformed Church does not do justice to the Baptist Union in any full sense. After all, by the very nature of its polity and ecclesiology that Anglophone denomination calls for a more nuanced analysis of its individual members, congregations, and agencies. As we have seen, both the annual assemblies and other Baptist voices repeatedly called for reforms, most of them, to be sure, rather small, for decades before the assembled delegates sent their controversial letter to **Botha** in 1985. Furthermore, historical accuracy demands that one not give the impression that the Baptist Union stood at the politically conservative pole of the Anglophone denominational spectrum. Having followed its social ethics through approximately three-quarters of a century and described it in well over 100 000 words, it should be evident that South African members of Baptist congregations and their denomination

in general do not really fit the stereotypical designation "apolitical" which some theologians and historians have applied to them. Only slightly less obviously, the Baptist Union has tended to remain well behind the cutting edge of social reform and at times shown little interest in it. In this respect the denomination has hardly been in the same category as some of its counterparts which remained affiliated with the South African Council of Churches, such as the Church of the Province of South Africa or the Methodist Church of South Africa. A detailed comparison with such denominations could prove enlightening. Such studies as those by de Gruchy and Villa-Vicencio referred to in Chapter II provide much of the stuff for drawing parallels and indicating contrasts.

It may be even more meaningful, however, and contribute at least as much to pinpointing the Baptist Union in the context of the nation's denominational pluralism, to examine briefly the social ethics of a denomination which shares some features with the Baptist Union, namely the Church of England in South Africa, often abbreviated "CESA". Despite its name, this communion is a relatively small one on the national religious landscape. It traces its origins and its distinctiveness from the much larger Anglican denomination, the Church of the Province of South Africa, to a schism during the latter half of the nineteenth century. At the beginning of the 1990s it had approximately 170 parishes, the majority of which were served by men who had received their theological training at the Bible Institute of South Africa at Kalk Bay near Cape Town or, if black, at the interdenominational Union Bible Institute near Pietermaritzburg. An annual "General Synod" of three days' duration governs the affairs of the church, which also has a presiding bishop. The Church of England in South Africa does not belong to the World Council of Churches or the South African Council of Churches. Moreover, unlike most other Anglican denominations and provinces internationally, it has no links of even a ceremonial kind with the Archbishop of Canterbury. This particular South African denomination stresses its reliance on the Bible as the final authority and touchstone of doctrinal purity. The Church of England in South Africa once had its own periodical, titled simply *Church News*, but eventually gave up that journal and began to use the columns of the interdenominational magazine *Today* as one means

of keeping its members informed about its affairs, including the proceedings at the General Synod.

It lies outside the scope of the present study to present a history of CESA's positions - or lack thereof - on such matters as race relations since its formative years in the nineteenth century. We shall concentrate on the period since 1960. To the extent that one can generalise about the three subsequent decades, CESA has usually given socio-political issues a wide berth, focusing part of its attention instead on personal ethics. Even the most careful gleaning of the pertinent published sources yields only a very meagre crop of statements that are immediately pertinent to social ethics, and they tend to be weak and vague. Some, for that matter, are explicit denials that the church should raise its voice on public issues. Interviews with concerned and frustrated members of the denomination who have experienced its apparent indifference to social ethics confirm this impression.

A sample of expressed opinion and actions taken by the General Synod will illustrate the point. In January 1961, after one of the most turbulent years in the recent history of South Africa up to that point, the editor of *Church News* commented that "there were a lot of things [in 1960] that we didn't like" and warned that "prospects for 1961 are far from pleasant". He mentioned *inter alia* the massacre at Sharpeville, the attempted assassination of Prime Minister Verwoerd, and riots in the black townships of Langa and Cato Manor. The editor remained silent, however, on the causes of racial unrest; his editorial did not contain a word about apartheid, economic exploitation, or the absence of political rights for the vast majority of the people in South Africa. Instead, writing from a distinctly white perspective, he offered a traditionally pietistic *nostrum* for the nation's ills: "Here are the essentials - personal faith in the Lord - personal obedience to the Lord - as we attend to these things, then we may count on the Lord's protection and guidance and blessing along our way, no matter what the circumstances may be".⁴

Two years later a pastor in CESA, Bernard Wright, preached a sermon at the denomination's well-known Christ Church parish in Johannesburg which directly addressed the question of the church's involvement in public affairs. "Our own Church of England in South

Africa has been criticised for taking no interest in politics", he acknowledged. "Our bishops have indeed advised us not to have politics in the pulpit". Wright agreed with this position and set out to defend it. His argument reflected an attitude quite similar to that of the editor cited above, although his reasoning differed markedly. Wright built it partly on the imitation of Christ. "If the primary task of the Church is to preach the gospel, and not to make pronouncements on political and international affairs of the day, then we would expect Him to set us a very clear example in this. He did". Wright reasoned that Jesus had encountered "as great an evil as Communism" in the "tyranny and colonialism of Rome, and the slavery which shackled his own racial group - and he never once raised his voice against it". This Anglican priest did not explain how he could make such a generalisation, nor did he comment on the sayings of Jesus, e.g. those dealing with the poor and justice as one of the "weightier matters of the law" which many Christian commentators across the denominational spectrum had cited for decades in justifying their own decisions to apply the Gospel to social ethics. Instead of engaging in close exegesis of the gospels, Wright sought to stimulate his parishioners as individual Christians to serve as "salt" and improve race relations through their actions. "There is an onus on all of us to exercise the function of salt in the multi-racial society in South Africa today". He declared that eleven years as a missionary had convinced him that "goodwill" in personal relations could bring about significant improvement in this regard. "If every Christian from tomorrow would show goodwill - in buses, train, lifts, offices, factories and on farms and filling stations", Wright believed, "a mighty spiritual force would be liberated which would have an immediate and beneficial effect". Entirely absent from his sermon, however, was any indication of specific direction which individual Christians could find in their Bibles for serving as metaphoric "salt". Also missing was any explanation of how the expression of courtesy - or whatever inhered in the curious word "goodwill" - in the relationships of domination and subjugation which characterised South African racial contacts would begin to address the underlying problems which perpetuated the national racial ills.⁵

During the early 1970s, when the World Council of Churches' Programme to Combat Racism increased white South African criticism of that organisation, CESA, like the Baptist Union and various other denominations, declared unambiguously that it had nothing to do with the WCC. At its General Synod in September 1974 it resolved that "the World Council of Churches must be rejected by all Christians until it can establish that it neither morally nor financially subsidises violence, terrorism or revolution in Africa or elsewhere". At the same time, the General Synod fired a similar salvo at the SACC. Behind its rejection of these two organisations was clearly the fear of violent threats to the *status quo* in South Africa. The resolution mentioned nothing about racism as such but declared that "the fearful consequences to all inhabitants of South Africa, black, brown or white, and particularly to all black Christians, if the forces of violence and terror are let loose, should cause the South African Council to make the strongest possible protest to the World Council instead of supporting the fallacy that non-resistance to these forces is a Christian duty". In harmony with its general policy of political non-involvement, CESA did not attempt to offer secular solutions to racial problems and their ramifications in South Africa. The religious answer was much simpler: "History proves that when men are first in a right relationship with God that [*sic*] there follows a right relationship with their fellowmen". What that "right relationship" entailed, or how it naturally followed that it would prompt people to interact in a sinless manner was not stated. Rather than reflecting evangelical theology, the resolution of the General Synod arguably bordered on Christian perfectionism.⁶

CESA never departed significantly from this tradition of virtual silence, although during the 1980s a few of its pastors occasionally commented on such social ethical issues as the Mixed Marriages Act. Even after the Dutch Reformed Church in 1986 abandoned its traditional theological defence of apartheid and many other denominations had taken special measures to try to cope with the unprecedented violence in the black townships which had led the government to impose the State of Emergency, CESA remained aloof. It remained one of the most consistently apolitical white-dominated denominations in South Africa.

A major challenge finally came in 1989. Craig Bartholomew, an Oxford-educated South African Old Testament scholar at Kalk Bay, accepted a request by the presiding bishop of the denomination to prepare a statement on social ethics for the General Synod. That such a request was made was in itself novel and gave the few white political liberals in the denomination reason to believe that CESA might be entering a new era. Bartholomew responded by writing a courteous but, in the context of the times and the ecclesiastical record under consideration, scathing indictment of the denomination's general avoidance of social issues. His analysis of the subject employed the concepts "evangelism" and "socio-political involvement". Structurally, it was largely an effort to describe the relationships between these two phenomena, especially with regard to CESA. Bartholomew argued cogently that some Christians regarded socio-political involvement as a distraction from evangelism and therefore believed that the former should be avoided. Others took the opposite approach, embracing such secular activism as a primary mission of the church and consequently minimised evangelism. Still others maintained that socio-political involvement aided evangelism, e.g. by attending to the material needs of people in the hope that by doing so they could more easily evangelise them. Another approach placed the two on an equal footing but regarded them as essentially distinct entities without a close relationship to each other. Bartholomew then asked where CESA stood on this matter and concluded that the denomination stood squarely in the first camp, *i.e.* amongst those who rejected socio-political involvement as "altogether secondary, if not undesirable". He acknowledged that CESA had recently published a statement on the "State of the Nation" but dismissed it as a "vague" document which "seems to be saying that the answer to SA's problems is just evangelism and that we as a denomination need to avoid socio-political involvement". Bartholomew offered further evidence for his conclusion by pointing out that while CESA had made numerous statements about such topics as nudity and observance of the Sabbath, "we have no statement[s] on apartheid, conscientious objection, the ways in which SA policies are racist [*sic*], practical ways in which the church can combat racism etc, etc, etc."⁷

Bartholomew did not disguise his disappointment that his denomination had not only failed to come to grips with these matters but also that it was becoming increasingly isolated as many other churches adopted more activist approaches to social ethics. He emphasised that internationally many "evangelical" denominations had done so since the original Lausanne conference in 1974 (without, however, mentioning that this issue had been hotly debated in many quarters since that year). Moreover, "Even in the SA context or should I say especially in the SA context we have not I think been in open and real dialogue with other evangelicals on these issues". Bartholomew wondered whether CESA would continue to "write off" such movements as the South African Christian Leadership Assembly and the National Initiative for Reconciliation. "In a crisis situation like the present it seems to me that we are silent".⁸

Bartholomew was not content merely to criticise the shortcomings of his fellow conservative Anglicans in South Africa. He offered several "practical suggestions" which he believed would help the CESA return to "the mainstream of evangelicalism". Among these were engaging in dialogue with other Christians in South Africa, co-operating with them in wrestling with "the macro issues that SA is facing at the present", the creation of structures within CESA which would stimulate theological reflection on social problems, and a re-emphasis on "vocation and discipleship" within the parishes which would link Christian faith more closely to involvement with such areas as commerce, politics, and medicine. By engaging in these and related activities, Bartholomew insisted, CESA would not become more, not less, "evangelical", because there was a venerable history of evangelical socio-political involvement, especially in England where the denomination had its roots.⁹

In the short term, at least, CESA did not heed Bartholomew's pleas, notwithstanding the major changes in and challenges to the *status quo* which contributed to great instability in South Africa as the decade of the 1980s gave way to the 1990s. In his charge to the General Synod of 1990, Presiding Bishop Joe Bell, in what Bartholomew interprets as a general rejection of his efforts to stimulate the denomination to engage in significant socio-political involvement, asserted that "the role of our church remains the same, whatever the circumstances

around us may be". Bell rejected suggestions that CESA join other denominations in repenting for past sins of racism, declaring that CESA had engaged in benevolent endeavours on behalf of "non-whites" and reminding his audience that he had personally met with P.W. Botha. The bishop left no doubt that CESA would not begin to alter its agenda and become an advocate of the Social Gospel.¹⁰ When interviewed in 1991, Bartholomew expressed great frustration at his inability to move the denomination in the direction which he had sought to two years earlier and feared that it would become increasingly isolated.¹¹

Had Bartholomew turned his critical gaze to the Baptist Union, he would have found much which fitted his analysis of CESA. Like their conservative Anglican counterparts, many Baptists had tended to shun socio-political involvement and indeed had criticised it as ostensibly lying outside the legitimate perimeter of ecclesiastical functions. On the other hand, Bartholomew would have discovered much which contradicted his perception of CESA, especially during the 1980s. As we have seen, during that decade many Baptists became increasingly critical of the government's policies which they believed ran counter to the Gospel, and some openly attacked apartheid, military conscription, and so on. Therein lies an essential difference separating these two denominations. To some degree, admittedly one much too small to please many of its internal critics, the Baptist Union began to recover its Nonconformist heritage as the national crisis in South Africa worsened. CESA, however, lagged far behind in this respect. Such a comparison, however brief it may be, helps to understand more closely the relative and shifting position of the Baptist Union on social ethics during the 1980s. To some casual observers of the South African Christian scene in recent decades, the Baptists might at first glance appear to stand at the right extreme of the social ethical spectrum. Such a perception, however, does not hold up under close scrutiny, especially if CESA is also examined.

This comparison on the right is not intended to imply that by any means that relative to CESA the Baptist Union has adequately come to grips with the implications of social ethical issues for Christians in South Africa. On the contrary, on the eve of a new era in the troubled history of the country, the denomination had just begun to do so.

Despite prophetic voices from within, and certain areas of increasingly relevant thought during the late 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, it was evident that the Baptist Union entered that age very seriously divided, burdened by decades of inadequate responses to the gravity of the national situation, understaffed and poorly funded with regard to its Christian Citizenship Committee, and incapable of consistently addressing public issues in terms immediately relevant to most South Africans regardless of denominational affiliation.

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1. John Poorter, "Organised Chaos?" *The South African Baptist*, September 1966, p. 10.
2. R.S.W. Ford (unspecified provenance) to *The South African Baptist*, undated, in *The South African Baptist*, November 1966, p. 17.
3. Nicky Grieshaber (Pietermaritzburg) to *The South African Baptist*, undated, in *The South African Baptist*, February 1983, pp. 12-13.
4. "Editorial", *Church News*, January-February 1961, p. 1.
5. Bernard Wright, "the [sic] Church and Politics", *Church News*, March-April 1963, pp. 14-16.
6. "News", *Today*, no. 7 (December 1974), p. 6.
7. C.G. Bartholomew, *The Church and Society* (Gillitts: Church of England in South Africa, 1989), pp. 2-6.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.
10. J. Bell, *Presiding Bishop's Charge - Synod 1990* (n.p., n.publ., n.d.), pp. 3-6.
11. Interview with Craig Bartholomew, Cape Town, 15 February 1991.

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