

**ECCLESIOLOGY AND ETHICS: An Analysis of the History of  
the All Africa Conference of Churches (1963 – 2013)**

By

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## KEY WORDS

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Social Responsibility of the Church

Ubuntu



## ABSTRACT

This study entails an historical investigation of how the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) has addressed the ecumenical tension between ecclesiology and ethics in its history between 1963 and 2013. The study is arguably the first comprehensive analysis of the history of the AACC focussing on ecclesiology and ethics and will therefore make an original contribution to ecumenical theology in Africa in this regard. The study argues that the tension between what the church *is* (read: ecclesiology) and what *it* does (read: ethics) has undeniably been present in the ecumenical movement in Africa.

The study is situated within two concentric contexts. Firstly, it is located within the context of the WCC study project on ecclesiology and ethics that was conducted during the period 1992 to 1996 and will contribute to wider discourse in this regard. The WCC project was an attempt to bridge a deep divide in the ecumenical movement between those who emphasise that the way to unity is through doctrinal agreement and those who believe that “doctrine divides” while a common moral cause (service) may unite.

Secondly, this study is aimed at discerning how the AACC has addressed the relationship between the theological quest for unity (read: ecclesiology) and the social responsibility of the church (read: ethics). The study examines how the AACC assisted its member churches to respond to contemporary challenges in three distinct periods in recent African history, namely the periods of decolonisation (1963-1974), development (1975-1992) and neo-liberal globalisation (1993-2013). The hypothesis of this study is that these periods correlate with the AACC’s ways of negotiating the tension between ecclesiology and ethics.

The study argues that although the AACC has privileged the social agenda of the church in society (read: ethics), the ecumenical quest for ecclesial unity (read: ecclesiology) has not been completely absent. While the study acknowledges that the tension between ecclesiology and ethics is not easily resolved, it affirms that these two ecumenical concerns are inseparable. The study therefore suggests an appropriation of the African notion of *ubuntu* as a horizon for ecclesiology and ethics. The intuition behind the proposal is that *ubuntu* resonates with biblical notions of *koinonia* and *diakonia* and is thus an apt notion for an articulation of the interconnectedness between ecclesiology and ethics.

The study is divided into two parts, comprising eight chapters. The first part covers four chapters in which I offer an historical background to the modern ecumenical movement, an analysis of the ecclesiology and ethics debate in the wider ecumenical context and a brief institutional history of the AACC. The second part of the study comprises three chapters. Therein, I present a critical analysis of the AACC’s handling of the tension between ecclesiology and ethics in the period 1963-2013. Each chapter describes and analyses the various ways in which the AACC addressed the tension between the theological quest for the visible unity of the church on the one hand (read: ecclesiology) and the social responsibility of the church (read: ethics) on the other in specific socio-historical contexts. The hypothesis of the study is confirmed on the basis of such analysis.

This study contributes to discourse in African theology on *authenticity* (read: ecclesiology) as expressed in theologies of inculturation and indigenisation and on *social relevance* (read: ethics) as expressed in theologies of liberation and reconstruction. It further contributes to academic reflection on the history of the ecumenical movement in Africa and the quest for an appropriate ecumenical vision on the African continent amidst the tensions between mainline churches, independent churches (AICs) and a variety of Pentecostal churches and the many social challenges that churches have to address.

## DECLARATION

I declare that **Ecclesiology and Ethics: An Analysis of the History of the All Africa Conference of Churches (1963-2013)** is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Full Name: Teddy Chalwe Sakupapa

Date: December 2016

Signed:



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# DEDICATION

**To the Glory of God**

**And**

**The Memory of my Mother**

**Tebby Chalwe Chibolya (Bana Teddy)**



## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AACC	All Africa Conference of Churches
AAATRS	All Africa Academy of Religion and Theology Studies
AU	African Union
CC	Costly Commitment
CO	Costly Obedience
CU	Costly Unity
CWC	Christian World Communions
EDAN	Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network
EHAIA	Ecumenical HIV&AIDS Initiative in Africa
EPEAA	Ecumenical Programme for Emergency Action in Africa
FO	Faith and order
IMC	International Missionary Council
LW	Life and Work
NCC	National Council of Churches
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
PROCMURA	Programme for Muslim Christian Relations in Africa
RDCS	Research and Development Consultancy Service
WCC	World Council of Churches

  
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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

This study entails an investigation of how the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) has addressed the ecumenical tension between “ecclesiology” and “ethics” in different periods of its history between 1963 and 2013. The point of departure for this study is located within the context of a project on “Ecclesiology and Ethics” conducted by the World Council of Churches (WCC) during the period 1992-1996. This WCC study project was a sustained endeavour to overcome a deep tension in the modern ecumenical movement between “ecclesiology” and “ethics”. Behind this tension were two contrasting views. Some maintain that the way to unity is through doctrinal agreement. Others believe that “doctrine divides”, while a common moral cause (service) may unite (cf. Forrester 1997b:90). In the context of the WCC, these two views are representative of the programmatic emphases of ecumenical structures committed to visible church unity, namely on “Faith and Order” (Unit I), and those focused on witness, service and moral struggle, namely on “Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC)” (Unit III), respectively. While most would agree that ecclesiology and ethics are inseparable (Clapsis 1995; Best 1993), the project clearly indicates that this tension remains undeniably present and is not resolved easily.

This study is situated within this tension between ecclesiology and ethics and will contribute to wider ecumenical discourse in this regard. It is aimed at discerning how the ecumenical movement in Africa has addressed the relationship between the theological quest for unity and the witness, moral struggle and social responsibility of the church. It will focus more specifically on the AACC as the most significant ecumenical structure on the African continent. The AACC was established in Kampala in 1963 and hosted its 10<sup>th</sup> General Assembly in Kampala in 2013. It played a crucial role in the quest for authenticity amongst African Churches, as well as their endeavours to remain socially relevant on the African continent. This study will offer a historical analysis of how the tension between ecclesiology and ethics has been addressed within the context of the AACC. This will be addressed in terms of how the AACC assisted its member churches to respond to contemporary challenges in three distinct periods in recent African history, namely the periods of decolonisation (1963-1974), development (1975-1992) and neo-liberal globalisation (1993-2013). The assumption of this study is that these periods correlate with the AACC’s ways of negotiating the tension between ecclesiology and ethics. Provisionally, one may expect that the period dominated by the quest for political independence (1963-1975) correlated with an emphasis on ecclesiological self-governance. The subsequent two periods were characterised by an emphasis on ethics in the programmatic commitment of the AACC.

This study entails an investigation of the primary ecumenical literature on ecclesiology and ethics, a survey of the available secondary sources on the history of the AACC, a detailed description and analysis of the official documentation emerging from the AACC in the form of minutes and reports on conferences and consultations, press releases, and keynote addresses of its presidents and general-secretaries, while also taking supplementary sources in the fields of global ecumenical theology and African theology into consideration.

While this study does not claim to offer a solution to the tension on “ecclesiology” and “ethics”, its significance may be understood in terms of the quest for an appropriate vision for the ecumenical movement in Africa.

## 1.2 Context and Relevance

### 1.2.1 Four concentric contexts

This study is especially situated in four concentric contexts:

Firstly, it contributes to contemporary ecumenical literature on an appropriate vision for the ecumenical movement given widespread comments on a sense of “crisis” and diminishing budgets for ecumenical organisations (see §1.2.2 below). More specifically, it contributes to ecumenical discourse on “ecclesiology and ethics” as one attempt to capture the unresolved underlying tensions within the ecumenical movement (see §1.2.3 below).

Secondly, it contributes to discourse in African theology on *authenticity* (read: ecclesiology), as expressed in theologies of inculturation and indigenisation and on *social relevance* (read: ethics), as expressed in theologies of liberation and reconstruction. More specifically, it contributes to academic reflection on the history of the ecumenical movement in Africa and the quest for an appropriate ecumenical vision on the African continent amidst the tensions between mainline churches, independent churches (AICs) and a variety of Pentecostal churches and the many social challenges that churches have to address (see §1.2.4 below). It will contribute to the available secondary literature seeking to assess the significance of the AACC as the most significant ecumenical organisation on the African continent (see §1.3 below).

Thirdly, the study is situated in a three year project on “ecumenical studies and social ethics” that was registered at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) during the period 2012-2015 (see Conradie 2015a). The purpose of the project was to explore the interface between these two themes with specific reference to the African context through a series of ten workshops and public conferences (July 2012-June 2015). The assumption of the project is that the tension between ecclesiology and ethics lies at the core of current ecumenical discourse in Africa.

Fourthly, this study has to be understood in terms of my personal context as a member of the United Church of Zambia (itself the result of ecumenical endeavours), a lecturer in ecumenical studies at the UWC and as a former lecturer in systematic theology and ethics at the UCZ’s Theological College, engaged in ecumenical theological formation and located on the grounds of the Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation, one of the most significant ecumenical institutions in Zambia and indeed in Africa as a whole.

### 1.2.2 The Modern Ecumenical Movement: A Brief Overview

The term ecumenical has been a subject of many definitions. In more general terms, the word ecumenical has often been used to speak about church unity given the obvious signs of disunity among churches. Already in the first centuries of Christian existence, doctrinal controversies emerged amongst Christians, resulting in attempts to clarify Christian doctrine through the so-called ecumenical councils. This resulted in dogmatic ecclesiastical pronouncements. James Amanze (1999a:30-54) has helpfully documented the history of divisions in the church from the apostolic times to the reformation period in Christian history. Amongst the several factors that nurtured divisions, Amanze highlights doctrinal differences, cultural differences, and differences in the understanding of church practice (cf. FitzGerald 2004:33-55).

Controversy over the *filioque*, whose climax is dated back to the year 1054, is symbolic of deepening divisions within Christianity (see FitzGerald 2004:39). This refers to the debate on whether the Holy Spirit “proceeds” from both the Father “and” the Son. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century,

there was a major split in the church that resulted in two streams, namely the Eastern Orthodox Patriarchate and the Roman Catholic See. Later in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Protestant reformation led to further divisions in the church, as evidenced by the birth of several communions, both national and denominational. Over time, divisions amongst churches came to be accepted as normative. According to FitzGerald (2004:55), this in turn “led to expressions of ecclesiastical exclusion, polemical theology, missionary conflicts, and proselytism”. Historically therefore, the ecumenical movement may be described as the quest for reconciliation and restoration of the visible unity “in faith, sacramental life, and witness in the world” of mainly Orthodox, Roman Catholic and most Protestant churches (cf. FitzGerald 2004:1). This ecclesial orientation of the ecumenical movement is characteristic of most descriptions of the ecumenical movement. To situate this ecclesial usage in perspective, I will briefly discuss the meaning of the term ecumenical and then proceed to a very brief description of the modern ecumenical movement.

#### a) *The Meaning of the Ecumenical Movement*

Etymologically, the term ecumenical is derived from the Greek word *oikoumene*, originally used in the Greco-Roman world to refer to the ‘inhabited world’ (or at least the known part of it (see Conradie 2013a:18). *Oikoumene* is itself derived from the verb *oikein* (to inhabit) and is thus related to two other terms, namely *oikos* (household) and *oikia* (dwelling or house). The word *oikos* provides the root meaning not only for *oikoumene*, but also for economy and ecology (see chapter § 3.3.3). Strictly, the ancient Greek interpretation of the *oikoumene* differed from that of the Romans. The Greek interpretation was along linguistic, cultural and literary lines while that of the Romans tended to be military, legal and administrative (see Mudge 1998:51).

As an adjective, the term ecumenical carries several connotations with regard to its usage in ecclesial circles. Koshy and Santa Ana (2006:45-51) identify at least six dimensions in this regard. These are the unity of the church, renewal and human community, the unity of humankind, struggle for justice, liberation, and a dialogue of cultures. Writing within the context of the search for unity among churches in South Africa, Ernst Conradie (2013a:18-65) describes about 23 notions and forms of ecumenicity. The logic behind Conradie’s reflection on various notions of ecumenicity is that no one way of defining ecumenicity would be satisfactory.

According to Visser ’t Hooft (1982:91), a man regarded by many as one of the pioneers and architects of the ecumenical movement, “the word “ecumenical” embraces “everything that relates to the whole task of the whole Church to bring the Gospel to the whole World.” In his view, ecumenism involved the creation of ‘spiritual traffic’ between the churches, something which would draw them out of their isolation and into a fellowship of conversation, mutual enrichment, common witness and common action (see Visser ’t Hooft 2004:735-740). Following this logic, this study adopts the classic definition of the term ecumenical as referring to “the whole task of the whole church to bring the gospel to the whole world” (cf. WCC 1999a:102). This definition was formulated at the WCC’s Central Committee meeting at Rolle in 1951 and was later affirmed in the WCC’s Common Understanding and Vision document (CUV). With regard to the 1951 formulation, Kinnamon (2004:53) observes that it focuses on the church as the universal body of Christ and on the church’s proclamation of Christ throughout the *oikoumene*. As the ecumenical movement took institutional forms as will be discussed below, the meaning and implications of the ecumenical movement expanded to also include what the German Ecumenist Konrad Raiser (1991:86) refers to as “world-oriented forms”. He writes:

When we say “oikoumene”, we are not referring to a global abstraction, such as ‘one world,’ the ‘whole human race,’ or ‘one united world church’.” Rather, we refer to actual “connections and relationships between churches, between cultures, between people and human societies in their infinite variety, and between the world of humankind and creation as a whole.

The foregoing notwithstanding, it is clear that the adjective ecumenical in the phrase “ecumenical movement” traditionally connotes a quest for unity.

*b) The Imperative of Unity: Basis of the Modern Ecumenical Movement*

A detailed discussion of the origins of the ecumenical movement will be provided in the next chapter. In this introductory chapter, it is helpful to simply indicate the historical trajectory of the modern ecumenical movement in very broad strokes. From the discussion above, one may infer that the ecumenical movement refers to the quest for the unity of church. The unity of the church has been described both as a gift and goal of the ecumenical movement (Kinnamon & Cope 1997:124-124; Kinnamon 2003:9-12; Raiser 1991:75). Although it is generally affirmed that the unity of the churches is the goal of the ecumenical movement (CUV 2.4), perceptions of what that unity entails vary (see Meyer 1999:3). To this end, Meyer (1999:8-12) has helpfully distinguished between the “basic ecumenical conviction”, the “ecumenical indicative”, and the “ecumenical imperative”. The basic ecumenical conviction refers to the view that the church is *one* as encapsulated in the credo formulation “one, holy, catholic and apostolic church”. In this sense, unity is understood as intrinsic to the nature of the church; it belongs to the nature of the church. The basic ecumenical conviction is therefore another way of describing the essential unity of the church. By the ecumenical indicative, Meyer (1999:9) implies that “the unity of the church is a “God-given” unity; it is God’s “gift”, his “present”.” The ecumenical imperative refers to the task or vocation of the church to express the unity of the church. In ecumenical language, this has come to be known as the visible unity of the church. It is predicated on the prayer of Jesus in John 17:21, namely “that they may all be one”.

Following Günther Gassman (1991:1038), one may argue that while unity is a goal yet to be realised in history (the ecumenical imperative), it has as its essential presupposition the already-given oneness of the church (the ecumenical indicative). Accordingly, the ecumenical task is to manifest this oneness and make it visible. At a deeper level of analysis, it may therefore be argued that in every effort towards church unity, the essential unity of the church (ecumenical indicative) is presupposed. However, this is not to suggest that there is a standard view of the nature of such unity. Practically, the ecclesiological diversity amongst churches that participate in the ecumenical movement renders any attempt to articulate a definitive notion of unity unfeasible. As will become clear in this study, the history of the ecumenical movement illustrates several attempts to define, redefine and sharpen visions of unity. Accordingly, a variety of models, visions, concepts, notions and forms of ecumenicity have been proposed in the historical unfolding of the modern ecumenical movement (Fuchs 2008:48-68; Gros, Meyer & Rusch 2000:2-45; Haar 2009:51-60; May 2004:86-97; Meyer 1999:80). These are discussed in more detail in the next chapter (see §2.4.1). How then may the modern ecumenical movement be understood?

*c) Origins of the Modern Ecumenical Movement: A Very Brief Overview*

The origin of the modern ecumenical movement in its institutional expression is often traced to the World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh in 1910. This conference is generally regarded as the greatest landmark in the history of the ecumenical movement in modern history (Amanze 1999a:154; Stanley 2010:8). Developments related to Edinburgh 1910 and subsequent institutionalisation of the ecumenical movement may be interpreted as part of the church’s response to the ecumenical imperative of Christian unity. However, the roots of the

modern ecumenical movement reach back to a few decades before the Edinburgh conference with Christian lay organisations such the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF), Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) (see Raiser 1991:34). In 1921 the International Missionary Council (IMC) was established and was soon followed by the inaugural conferences on "Faith and Order" (Lausanne, 1927) and "Life and Work" (Stockholm, 1925). According to Brian Stanley (2010:4), the World Council of Churches (WCC), as an institutional expression of ecumenism, was the offspring of the marriage agreed upon in 1938 of the "Faith and Order" and "Life and Work" movements. Arising from this merger, 147 churches constituted the WCC in 1948 and the headquarters was established in Geneva under the leadership of its first general secretary W.A. Visser 't Hooft. The IMC became integrated with the WCC in New Delhi in 1961 as its Division on World Mission and Evangelism (DWME), later the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME).

In its early history the ecumenical movement was mainly a European and North American Protestant "affair" (Mudge 1998:49). Within the Roman Catholic Church (RCC), it was the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) with its decree on ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, which opened up the Roman Catholic Church to dialogue with other churches on the question of ecumenism. Other ecumenical efforts emerging from the RCC include the establishment by Pope John XXIII of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity (later the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity). Although not (yet) a member of the WCC, the RCC does participate in the Faith and Order commission of the WCC and in the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (see Gros 2004:26). The highest-level continuing contact between the WCC and the RCC is a Joint Working Group (JWG) that was established in 1965 (see Van Elderen & Conway 2001:127).

Amongst both ecumenical Protestants and the RCC, there has been recognition that there is only one ecumenical movement in which all participate. This one ecumenical movement has found expression in ecumenical structures such as the WCC, continental structures such as the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), regional ecumenical institutions, national councils of churches, and in the "less ecclesial" forms of ecumenism in organisations such as the WSCF and the YMCA. In this research project, the focus is on the ecumenical fellowship of churches as represented by the WCC more generally and by the AACC in particular. Historically, the formation of the WCC and its various founding streams contributed in diverse ways to strengthening the ecumenical movement in Africa through its various commissions and programmes.

#### *d) Crisis of the Ecumenical Movement*

Since the beginning of the 1990s, there has been a general sense of crisis within the ecumenical movement, both globally and regionally (see Avis 2010a, 2010b:21-22; Hughson 1992; Raiser 1991). German theologian and former General Secretary of the WCC Konrad Raiser (1991:31), presents this crisis in terms of uncertainty in the goals, methods and agents of responsibility for the ecumenical movement. According to another commentator, Thomas Hughson (1992:338), the crisis

[H]as been puzzling ecumenists even as they persevere in the cause of unity. It may be described briefly as a relative immobility succeeding a halcyon period during which the RCC entered into the ecumenical movement (ca 1962-1970) and the WCC assembled at Uppsala (1968).

For Paul Avis (2010a:31), the ecumenical movement is still in crisis and "[E]cumenical endeavour, wherever it is found, is now shot through with doubt and uncertainty." Indeed, churches in many parts of the world are still divided and the momentum towards visible unity

seems to be flagging. The diminishing budgets of ecumenical structures and the criticism of these structures as trapped in bureaucracy remain critical issues within the ecumenical movement today. While major efforts to find a way forward for the ecumenical movement continue to be undertaken at various levels, the relevance of this research project may be understood as contributing to literature on an appropriate vision for the ecumenical movement today (see § 2.3 below).

### **1.2.3 Underlying tensions in the Ecumenical Movement: Ecclesiology & Ethics as one way of understanding this**

One may locate several tensions within the ecumenical movement. This research project specifically focuses on the tension between ecclesiology and ethics. According to Aagaard (1996:140), the phrase “ecclesiology and ethics” mirrors concerns and priorities of the WCC after its convocation on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC) held in Seoul, Korea in 1990. Following Seoul (1990), the WCC commissioned a study project (1992-1996) on “ecclesiology and ethics” to be conducted jointly by “Faith and Order” (Unit I) and Justice, Peace and Creation (Unit III). Aagaard (2001:158) observes that this joint enterprise came about as a result of pressures, internal as well as external. She writes:

There were pressures on Life and Work to have the quest for “Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation” acknowledge distinctively Christian ways of seeing and analyzing the world and thus explicitly place moral judgment and social practices within the context of traditioned ecclesial communities. Faith and Order was under pressure to challenge the assumptions that made the 20th century “oikoumene” separate ecclesial practices and discourses about church from social ethics and involvement in the public realm (Aagaard 2001:158).

The ecclesiology and ethics study project is indicative of the historic tension between the concerns of the movements of “Faith and Order” and “Life and Work” (more recently JPIC), or between what the church *is* and what the church *does*. The study was aimed at finding the proper connection between the quest for visible unity (ecclesiology) and the need for ecumenical social responsibility (ethics). Best and Robra (1997:vii) capture this well: “It explored the ethical dimension not as a separate department of the church’s life, but as integrally related to its worship, its confession of faith, its witness and service in the world.”

The project was structured in the form of three consultations, which each produced a report, namely at Rønne (1993) on *Costly Unity: Koinonia and Justice, Peace and Creation* (see Best & Granberg-Michaelson 1993), at Tantar (1994) on *Costly Commitment* (see Best & Robra 1995), and at Johannesburg (1996) on *Costly Obedience* (see WCC 1997). Given such titles, the project has been dubbed the “litany of costlies”. These reports have also been published together as *Ecclesiology and Ethics: Ecumenical ethical engagement, moral formation and the nature of the church*, with four interpretative essays on the study project by theologians from different confessional and cultural backgrounds (see Best & Robra 1997).

According to Root (1994:199), the report on *Costly Unity* sought to find a connection between traditional Faith and Order and Life and Work themes by means of the concept *koinonia*. It affirmed with American ethicist Stanley Hauerwas that “[T]he church not only has, but is, a social ethic, a *koinonia* ethic” (par. 6). For *Costly Unity*, the church as *koinonia* is a “moral community”. Arguably, *Costly Unity* called for an ecclesiology that is ethically responsible and ethical reflection that is ecclesialogically grounded. This is critical given that for *Costly Unity* “The being (esse) of the church is at stake in the justice, peace and integrity of creation process” (par. 5).

The second consultation at Tantar (1994) focused on the ecclesiological significance of ethical reflection and action, while seeing ethical reflection in relation to the nature of the

church (see Mudge 2004:309). The report entitled *Costly Commitment* observed that there can be no ecclesiology without ethics and no [Christian] ethics without ecclesiology (par. 22; see Best & Robra 1997:30). The report thus asks:

Is it enough to say ...that ethical engagement is intrinsic to the church as church? Is it enough to say that, if a church is not engaging responsibly with the ethical issues of its day, it is not being fully church? Must we not also say: if the churches are not engaging these ethical issues, together, then none of them individually is being fully church?" (Best & Robra 1997:29)

Tantur explored one way in which the church claims its moral identity, namely through the practice of moral formation. This formation, according to *Costly Commitment*, is not only done through the explicit teaching of the church, but also by the whole way of life of the church, which forms and educates (see Best & Robra 1997:42).

In his interpretative essay on the report from Johannesburg, entitled *Costly Obedience*, Larry Rasmussen (1997:105) observes that *Costly Obedience* developed the potential of "moral formation", suggested at Tantur, "as a promising way to articulate this core assertion about being church". *Costly Obedience* focussed on moral formation as an essential dimension of the ecclesial life of the churches individually and within the wider context of the ecumenical movement (see Robra 2004:92). While having introduced the notion of the church as a community of "moral formation", the report also highlights that the church is not immune to malformation.

Subsequent to this WCC study project, several scholars have explored the relationship between ecclesiology and ethics as indicative of a crucial tension underlying the modern ecumenical movement. Lewis Mudge (1998) attempted to offer a bridge between the ecclesiology and ethics in the image of "household of life", which emerged in earlier writings of ecumenists such as Philip Potter, Konrad Raiser, and Geiko Muller-Fahrenholz. The core of Mudge's (1998:8) argument is that "churches need to recover the vocation of providing primary moral formation, of shaping people's moral identity, long before politicized policy arguments begin." Duncan Forrester (1997b) has also sought to address this tension by focussing on the importance of worship for the *koinonia* of the church and its social ethics. For Forrester (1997b:2), doctrine and ethics are intertwined.

As the reports of the WCC study project and subsequent publications on the subject show, both ecclesiology and ethics are essential to the nature of the church and indispensable to the ecumenical task today (see Best 1993:15). The WCC study project indicates that doctrine and life, faith and action are intrinsically bound together. The tension between ecclesiology and ethics may indeed be addressed by notions of the church such as *koinonia*, "moral community" and "household of life", as the WCC study project reports demonstrate. However, there are still deeper underlying tensions. As Conradie (2013a:43) argues, "[P]erhaps the deeper problem verges on the relationship between the theological and the sociological dimensions of the church." This research project may therefore be understood as a contribution to the wider ecumenical discourse on ecclesiology and ethics.

#### **1.2.4 Ecclesiology and Ethics in the African Context**

This study is more specifically located within the context of the ecumenical movement in Africa. Oduyoye (2004:476) has described ecumenism in Africa as a "highly unstable context of disorganised political, military, economic and social changes". Such context(s) raises the question of how the churches in Africa understand the distinctive nature of the church vis-à-vis its moral struggles and social responsibilities. The assumption behind this formulation is that churches in Africa have and continue to play a significant role in addressing social and political issues in various parts of the continent. The AACC, as an expression of ecumenism

in Africa, has been actively involved in crisis alleviation and advocacy directly, as well as through its member churches. This study assumes that “Faith and Order” matters have not played a central role in the programmatic emphasis and self-understanding of the AACC. It appears that the orientation has been more towards the “Life and Work” tradition. Put differently, the AACC has had a strong social orientation.

Given this perceived lack of interest in matters of Faith and Order, the danger is to underplay the distinctive nature of the church. If so, the question before African churches today is whether the church is just another sort of NGO or social club. What ecclesial identity is adopted and can a split between what the church *is* and what the church *does* be avoided (see De Gruchy 1995b:15)? Given the many social challenges in Africa such as corruption, ethnicity, disease, and poverty, the need for churches to offer common witness to these challenges is obvious and urgent. However, given the tension between mainline churches and a range of Pentecostal and several other African Initiated Churches (AIC’s), the conditions under which common witness would be possible cannot be clarified without ecumenical attention to questions of Faith and Order.

How, then, should the distinctive nature of the church (in Africa) be understood? Proposals for an African ecclesiology seem to be framed in sociological rather than theological terms (see Onwubiko 1999). Nevertheless, there have been several proposals in African theologies of inculturation and indigenisation suggesting that the church may be understood in terms of images such as clan (Waliggo 1998), family (Oduyoye 1991; Getui 1998; Onwubiko 1999; Chukwu 2011) and community (Omenyo 2000; Nkurunziza 2007). This suggests that questions of Faith and Order are not absent but are indeed at the heart of the quest for cultural authenticity, albeit that the focus is not on the distinctive nature of the church but on its embeddedness in the African context with its evolving cultures.

This also suggests that the tension underlying the ecumenical movement in Africa may be understood in terms of the quest for (cultural) *authenticity* found in theologies of inculturation and indigenisation on the one hand and the quest for (social, economic and indeed political) *relevance* found more recently in theologies of liberation and reconstruction on the other (see especially Utuk 1997). If so, the tension between ecclesiology and ethics lies at the heart of the divergent approaches to African theology that are widely acknowledged in the available literature.

In light of the above observations, this research project seeks to contribute to literature that addresses the underlying tensions in African theology generally and African ecumenism in particular.

### **1.3 Delimitation and statement of research problem**

This study will focus on ecclesiology and ethics in the AACC. The review of literature will start with a broad, albeit brief overview of the modern ecumenical movement. This will be narrowed down to focus on debate on the ecumenical tension between ecclesiology and ethics within the context of the WCC study project on ecclesiology and ethics. The literature review will be further delimited to specifically focus on how the AACC, as a significant expression of ecumenism on the African continent, has addressed the ecumenical tension between ecclesiology and ethics within its constituency from 1963-2013. This delimitation is recognition that the tension between ecclesiology and ethics is one among several other tensions within the ecumenical movement in Africa (see 1.2.4 above; cf. Oduyoye 2004; Conradie 2013a). A glance at the AACC’s institutional history seemingly indicates that this tension may well be at the heart of the AACC’s programmatic arrangements.

### 1.3.1 AACC: A brief institutional history

Historically, the idea of a continent wide ecumenical fellowship of churches in Africa was conceived in Ibadan, Nigeria in 1958 during an All Africa Church conference. At this conference, two hundred representatives of church bodies in twenty-five African countries gathered to share their experiences, joys, challenges and hopes for the church in Africa. The participants made a resolution to appoint a provisional committee that would consult with existing Christian Councils of Churches and other church bodies on the continent for the consideration of appointing a continuation committee of similar gatherings (see M'Timkulu 1962:64; Dickson & Ellingworth 1971:6). Ten members were chosen to constitute the provisional committee and Dr Donald M'Timkulu from South Africa was appointed as the provisional secretary (see Appendix 1). After a series of consultations and mini-conferences organised by the provisional committee in a number of places<sup>1</sup>, the AACC was formally inaugurated as a fellowship of consultation and co-operation among churches in Africa at Kampala, Uganda in 1963 (AACC 1963).

The founding of the AACC was a sign that ecumenism in Africa was growing. However, the establishment of the AACC was not in itself the first expression of ecumenical co-operation in Africa. By the time of the inauguration of the AACC, ecumenical initiatives were already underway in countries such as Zambia and Kenya, where missionary conferences culminated in the formation of National Christian Councils (NCC's) in 1945 and 1943, respectively (see Mugambi 1998:10; Kobia 2001:300; Chuba 2005). Seen from this perspective, one may argue that the formation of the AACC was significant in that it was the first continent-wide ecumenical structure in Africa. Later, with the support of the AACC, an innovation in conciliar fellowship in Africa in the form of sub-regional ecumenical fellowships emerged during the 1980's and 1990's, signalling a new dimension in ecumenical relations (see Oduyoye 2004:481). According to Kobia (2003:134), these fellowships are "a good sign of renewal and consolidation of regional partnerships... that bring closer to home the search for unity, peace and justice." In this sense, they are complimentary to the continental body, the AACC.

From its very beginning, the AACC has placed the quest for authentic African Christianity central to its self-understanding. According to Utuk (1997:27), this quest "played a major role in attracting many churches to the AACC inaugural Assembly" and also served "as the unifying and mobilising magnet, in view of the rising tide of ambivalence towards everything foreign". The importance attached to this quest within the AACC explains why for many the AACC is seen as being in the vanguard for the development of African theology (see Muzorewa 1985:57). This quest for authenticity within theological circles was akin to the call for nationalism within the political sphere in many African countries at the time. This is understandable given the socio-political milieu in which the AACC was founded, namely during an era of political independence (Muzorewa 1985:61). Little wonder then that the AACC held its inaugural Assembly under the theme "Freedom and Unity in Christ" in the same year (only a month apart) that the Organisation of African Unity (OAU – now known as the African Union) was founded.

In terms of organisational structure, the AACC comprises of a policy structure and the general secretariat (see §4.5.4 below). The highest policy body is the General Assembly (GA), which meets every four years and is comprised of representatives of AACC member churches. In between the Assemblies, policy matters are handled by the General Committee

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<sup>1</sup> These included the following: Urban Africa (Nairobi 1961), Literature and Audio-Visual (Mindolo 1961), Youth (Nairobi 1962), Education (Salisbury 1962), Independent Church movements (Mindolo 1964), Home and Family (Mindolo 1963), Women's Status and Responsibility in Church and Society (Kampala 1963).

(GC), which is made up of officials (Executive Committee) elected by the GC and a number of representatives from each region of the AACC constituency. The GC meets every eighteen months. The Executive Committee may meet in between the meetings of the GC to act on urgent matters.

The secretariat is based in Nairobi, Kenya and headed by the General Secretary, who, together with other staff of AACC, implement and interpret the decisions of the GA. The mandate of the AACC is given by the churches through the GA. In order to act on the mandate of the churches, the AACC has the following directorates. The directorate on Empowerment and Capacity Building comprises of the Women's desk and also carries out programmes on climate change and care of creation. The directorate on Theology, Ecumenical and Interfaith relations brings together the desks on 'Theology, Ecumenical and Interfaith relations' and Youth/Children. It seeks to provide space for in-depth theological, ecumenical and interfaith dialogue by stimulating a fresh understanding based on contextual reality, and by speaking out with a united voice to address the challenges facing the African continent. It also deals with networking with theological institutions and runs a library. The directorate on Peace, Healing and Reconciliation is an advocacy programme that deals with issues related to conflicts, peace, democracy, health, development and disabilities in Africa. Each of the above directorates is headed by a director who is also responsible for one desk within the directorate. In addition to the above programmatic directorates, the AACC also has a functional directorate on Finance, Administration and Resource Development, whose primary function is to "acquire, protect and manage AACC's fixed and current assets to support other directorates so that they can produce and deliver the organizational mandate." The AACC also operates a regional office in Lome, Togo and a liaison office at the African Union (AU) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

A number of eminent African theologians and ecumenists have served the AACC in various capacities such as Presidents or General Secretaries (see Appendix 1). Some of Africa's renowned theologians, such as Jesse Mugambi and John Mbiti, have closely developed their theologies in quite close association with the programmes and initiatives of the AACC. To date, the AACC has held ten General Assemblies with the most recent one being the 2013 Jubilee Assembly that was held in Kampala, Uganda under the theme "God of life, lead Africa to peace, justice and dignity". A glance at the GA themes of the AACC is partly indicative of the programmatic emphasis of the AACC and also reflects the prophetic witness of the church in Africa (see Appendix 1). In light of the above description of the AACC's organisational and programmatic structures, one may argue that the social-political (ethics) agenda has been privileged in the AACC. Conversely, the "Faith and Order" tradition (ecclesiology) does not seem to have been a major focus within the AACC. The same may be true of NCC's (see Otieno & McCullum 2005:82-91). The assessment of why this is so will constitute a significant aspect for this research project.

### **1.3.2 Possible ways of tackling Ecclesiology and Ethics in the AACC**

Given that the programmatic structures of the AACC are indicative of the privilege given to ethics in the AACC, it remains a question what sort of ecclesiology the AACC operates with. In order to investigate how the AACC has addressed the ecumenical tension between ecclesiology and ethics, three options seem to be available. First, one may choose to focus on case studies of selected AACC member churches. This option, however, may not be sufficiently representative of the ecumenical movement in Africa. It would also be nearly impossible to conduct fairly representative research on AACC member churches given their geographical spread, and partly due to financial and logistical constraints. The second option would be to focus on a selected number of ecumenical figures who have served the AACC.

The limitations of this approach would include financial and geographical constraints involved in meeting these figures. Further, some of the ecumenical figures are well published while the others have hardly published anything, thus making it difficult to compare and assess their perspectives on the ecclesiology and ethics debate. The third option is to focus research on the AACC itself.

The third option will be followed here. This option is feasible on a number of grounds. Firstly, the choice of the AACC is significant in that it is fairly representative of the ecumenical movement in Africa. Secondly, there is reasonably sufficient literature on the work of the AACC in the form of minutes and reports on conferences, assemblies and consultations, press releases, and keynote addresses of its presidents and general-secretaries. Additionally, the recently organised archives at the AACC headquarters in Nairobi provide further resources to enable adequate research for the question of this research project. Therefore, this option has been chosen in order to investigate how the AACC has addressed the ecumenical tension between ecclesiology and ethics in three distinct periods in recent African history, namely the periods of decolonisation (1963-1974), development (1975-1992), and neo-liberal globalisation (1993- 2013). This choice does not suggest that these options are mutually exclusive. This notwithstanding, there are limitations to the option chosen for this study.

Firstly, the study cannot claim to offer a comprehensive Africa-wide trajectory. It only offers a continental perspective as articulated in AACC official documents. Secondly and naturally flowing from the above, the study is limited to formal discourse within the context of institutional ecumenism in Africa and therefore leaves out many sources of practical ecumenism especially in local contexts where churches in their historic form are found. The third limitation has to do with periodisation. The study does not venture into a thorough analysis of historical justification of the periodisation adopted in the study namely, decolonisation (1963-1974), development (1975-1992) and neo-liberal globalisation (1993-2013). Nevertheless, as I will show in the study, my intuition is that none of these took place in a single trajectory (see §1.5.4 below). The choice implies that I will follow a pattern that corresponds with the General Assemblies of the AACC held during the period under investigation. My discussion of the period of decolonisation will thus focus on the era from the inaugural Assembly in Kampala (1963) to the Lusaka Assembly (1974). The period of development will centre on the period from the Lusaka Assembly (1974) to the Harare Assembly (1992). The third and final period in this scheme will be that of neo-liberal globalisation running from the period between the Harare (1992) Assembly to the jubilee Assembly held in Kampala (2013). Therefore, the approach combines a broadly linear and thematic structure. This is further based on the view that in a variety of ways, Christianity has played a crucial role in the political and social histories of continent as partly implied by the themes of decolonisation, development and neo-liberal globalisation. Additionally, I agree with church historian Elizabeth Isichei (1997:5) that history “refuses to fit neatly into chronological or regional categories.”

### **1.3.3 Statement and explanation of the research problem**

Authenticity and relevance have been central concerns for Christians of Africa in general and the AACC in particular. Already at its Inaugural Assembly in Kampala in 1963, the AACC was in pursuit of African Christian authenticity and thus facilitated the first theological consultation of African theologians in Ibadan, Nigeria in 1966, which stressed the need for an African theology. The papers from this consultation were published as *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs* (1969). In the introduction to this book Nigerian theologian Bolaji Idowu notes the following;

During the All Africa Conference of Churches in 1963, it became quite clear to a number of us that the Church in Africa could only attain selfhood and be adequate for her mission when she possessed a first-hand knowledge of the Lord of the Church and was able to express that knowledge in clear accents made possible through her own original meditation and thinking (Dickson & Ellingworth 1969:9).

Accordingly, the AACC supported calls for making the African cultural and religious heritage the foundation for African ecclesial life. Theological debates within the AACC, and for that matter in much of African inculturation theology, were as such framed within the authenticity discourse.

In subsequent periods of its history, the AACC focused on assisting member churches in Africa to respond to issues affecting the African church and society. It is in this regard that the theme of reconstruction entered theological debate in the AACC. The symposium organised by the AACC in Mombasa, Kenya (in 1991) on “Problems and Promises of the Church in Africa” was in the vanguard of this development (see Karamaga 1992). The AACC General Assembly at Addis Ababa in 1997 was thus greeted with the publication by the AACC of *The Church and Reconstruction of Africa* (1997). This new paradigm of reconstruction, strongly advocated for by Kenyan theologian Jesse Mugambi and South African scholar Charles Villa-Vicencio among others, has become a central theological theme within the AACC (see §7.3 below). It continues to inform the AACC’s approach to Africa’s social transformation. On this basis, one may argue that in recent times, the contributions of the AACC could be understood in terms of the rubrics of “Life and Work”, “Justice, Peace and Creation” and “Church and Society.” One way of explaining this could be that there is continued need for advocacy by the church amidst African peoples struggle for peace, justice and dignity in the light of social challenges related to health, politics, poverty and ethnocentrism.

The limitations of the theology of reconstruction notwithstanding, it remains largely unclear as to the ecumenical and ecclesiological understanding of the AACC’s social witness. The question in this regard therefore has to do with how the AACC has addressed the relationship between the theological quest for unity and the witness, moral struggle and social responsibility of the church. For as Kobia (2003:135) observes, “although much has been achieved in terms of high profile advocacy through ecumenical initiatives... the ecumenical movement [in Africa] has yet to provide much needed leadership in the theological understanding of advocacy and translation of such understanding into the life of the church.” Similarly, Kwesi Dickson, the then President of the AACC, observed that while the AACC needed to play its advocacy role in addressing social-economic and political issues affecting Africans, the nature of this role needed to be carefully understood from a theological point of view (AACC 1997:237). This is indicative of an underlying tension between ecclesiology and ethics. Kobia (2003:135) captures the tension between ecclesiology and ethics in the ecumenical movement in Africa when he notes that

While identifying positively with the progressive forces of change and occasionally extending ecumenical hospitality to civil society and political parties fighting for justice, the church must not lose touch with the common ground of its own identity.

In view of the foregoing, the problem that will be investigated in this research project is to discern how the All African Conference of Churches has addressed the ecumenical tension between “ecclesiology” and “ethics” in different periods of its history between 1963 and 2013. The main question of this research project may thus be stated as follows:

*How has the AACC as the most significant ecumenical structure in Africa addressed the relationship between the theological quest for unity (read: ecclesiology) and the social responsibility (read: ethics) of the church in Africa between 1963 and 2013?*

## **1.4 Provisional hypothesis**

The preliminary “working hypothesis” in this study is that the periods of decolonisation (1963-1974), development (1975-1992), and neo-liberal globalisation (1993- 2013) in recent African history correlate with the AACC’s handling of ecclesiology and ethics.

## **1.5 Research Procedures**

This study broadly adopts a qualitative research methodology. The study is literature based and will more specifically follow the basic principles of historical research method in the examination of primary sources. According to Gray (1996:398), “historical research is the systematic collection and objective evaluation of data related to past occurrences in order to test hypotheses concerning causes, effects, or trends of those events that may help to explain present events and anticipate future events.” In similar vein, Isaac and Michael (1995:48) describe the purpose of historical research as one of “reconstruct[ing] the past systematically and objectively by collecting, evaluating, verifying and synthesizing evidence to establish facts and reach defensible conclusions, often in relation to particular hypotheses.” They further suggest five steps in conducting historical research that may be summarised as follows: (1) define the problem, (2) state the research objective, (3), collect the data, (4) evaluate the data, and (5) report the findings.

Accordingly, the method employed in this study involved a descriptive and explanatory literature study. This was employed at three levels. Firstly, it involved library data collection, as well as collection of other primary and secondary sources such as reports and minutes. Much of the primary data was accessed from the archives of the AACC located at its headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya. The archives at the Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation in Kitwe, where the nascent AACC was initially housed until 1965, proved useful especially for documents relating to the early history of the AACC. Additional primary data was accessed from the libraries of the EMW and the Missions Akademie at the University of Hamburg, both located in Hamburg, Germany. The second level of research involved the analysis of the data. The third and final level of research focussed on the synthesis and analysis of the results. The second and third levels necessarily required systematic reflection whereby analysis and reflection alternate one another.

In view of the method of research used in this study, the literature review consisted of both primary and secondary sources on the ecumenical tension between ecclesiology and ethics in the wider ecumenical movement more broadly (see §1.5.1 & §1.5.2 below) and that of the AACC in particular (see §1.5.3 below). The hypothesis of the study was tested on the basis of a comparative review of literature on the subject (see §1.5.4). This was done from a hermeneutical approach.

The study is however faced with a methodology challenge namely comparing WCC discourse on ecclesiology and ethics with the AACC debates on the same. The challenge relates to the contention on whether the AACC and the WCC are comparable. I agree with Mugambi (2015) that the WCC “must not be considered as a norm-setter for the regional Conferences of churches (such as AACC, European Council of Churches, National Council of Churches of USA, Christian Conference of Asia, etc). I refer to this fundamental methodological concern in chapter 6 (see §6.8.3 below). While the WCC has had the formal programmatic thrusts on “Faith and Order” and on “Life and Work”, this is not the case for the AACC. This has to do with the differing historical reality of the two institutions. Further, the WCC has developed discourse and study documents on the tension between ecclesiology and ethics while the same is not true of the AACC. Such an absence of intentional debate and literature does not suggest that the AACC has not addressed the tension between the crucial

ecumenical concerns of ecclesiology and ethics. The concepts of “ecclesiology” and “ethics” are not merely abstract concepts but rather living realities of discourses and divergent loyalties. Therefore, by utilising primary documents arising from the AACC in the form of Assembly reports, minutes and conference/workshop proceedings, I do not suggest that these provide the textual basis of the debate comparable, for instance, to the study documents on ecclesiology and ethics within the WCC. In view of my discussion on possible ways of tackling “ecclesiology” and “ethics” in the AACC above (see §1.3.2), this historical study attempts to indirectly ‘reconstruct’ positions and changing perspectives on the relations between ecclesiology and ethics from both primary and secondary sources on the AACC.

This notwithstanding, the assumption taken in this study is that the WCC study project on ecclesiology and ethics to which this study refers, has ecumenical significance for reflection on the relationship between the theological quest for unity (read: ecclesiology) and the social responsibility of the church (read:ethics) within the ambits of the AACC. It is argued that this tension indeed lies at the heart of the ecumenical movement in Africa. Procedurally therefore, the study consisted of five phases as follows:

### **1.5.1 Phase 1: Ecumenical movement: Very Brief Overview of the Changing Landscape of the Ecumenical Movement**

The first phase consisted of a review of literature on the history of the modern ecumenical movement with a specific focus on the changing ecumenical landscape within the ecumenical movement. The phase relied heavily on the primary works of the contributors to the three volumes of the WCC’s *A History of the Ecumenical Movement* (Briggs, Oduyoye & Tsetsis 2004; Fey 1970; Rouse & Neill 2004). Other standard sources included: Avis (2010b), Birmelé (1994), FitzGerald (2004), Fuchs (2008), Granberg-Michaelson (2013), Hawkey (2004), Visser ’t Hooft (1982, 1974), Kinnamon (2004, 2003), Kinnamon & Cope (1997), Raiser (1991), Stanley (2010, 2009), and Meyer (1999, 1994). The research findings of this phase will be documented in chapter 2 of this study.

### **1.5.2 Phase 2: Ecclesiology and Ethics Project: Overview and Critical Analysis**

The second phase of research focused on a survey of literature on the unresolved tension between ecclesiology and ethics based on primary and secondary sources. The main primary source for this phase was the final report of the WCC study project on ecclesiology and ethics, namely *Ecclesiology and Ethics: Ecumenical Ethical Engagement, Moral Formation and the Nature of the Church* (1997) edited by Thomas Best and Martin Robra. Other sources included: Aagaard (2001), Bent (1995), Best (1993), Best & Robra (1995), Forrester (1997b), Gibault (2013), Mudge (1998), Raiser (1996), Rasmussen (1995), Rasmusson (2010), Robra (2004), and Root (1994). The research findings of this phase are documented in chapter 3 of this study.

### **1.5.3 Phase 3: A Brief History of the AACC**

The third phase of research included a focus on a survey of literature on the ecumenical movement in Africa. The review of literature was specifically centred on the AACC. It included a detailed description and analysis of the official documentation emerging from the AACC in the form of minutes and reports on conferences and consultations, press releases, and keynote addresses of its presidents and general-secretaries. The literature review for this phase also include the following supplementary sources: Amanze (1999a, 1999b), Baur (1994), Byaruhanga (2015), Greaves (1958), Hastings (1994), Isichei (1995), Kalu (1988), Mugambi (1998), Muzorewa (1985), Sundkler & Steed (2000), and Utuk (1997, 1991). The findings of this phase of research are documented in chapter 4 of this study.

#### **1.5.4 Phase 4: A Critical Analysis and Comparison of the Ways in Which Ecclesiology & Ethics was Addressed in the History of the AACC since 1963 and 2013**

The fourth phase consisted of a critical analysis and comparison of the findings of the ways in which ecclesiology and ethics was addressed in the history of the AACC between 1963 and 2013. This phase constituted the core of the study and was mainly based on primary documents on the AACC. These included official reports of all AACC General Assemblies held since the founding of the AACC in 1963 to its 10<sup>th</sup> Assembly held in Kampala, Uganda in 2013. This phase of research also relied on the following sources: Chipenda et al (1991), Karamaga (1993), Mugambi (1997a, 1997b, 1997c), Nyang'oro (1993), and Utuk (1997). In this phase, I critically engaged with the research problem and hypothesis of the study. Methodologically, the chapters are structured in a broadly linear historical approach albeit within a thematic structure. The research findings for this phase are documented in chapters 5-7 of this study.

#### **1.5.5 Phase 5: Conclusions**

The final phase of the research offers some inconclusive perspectives on the significance of this study for (a) broader ecumenical attempts to do justice to both “ecclesiology” and “ethics”, (b) the AACC, and (c) a vision for the ecumenical movement in Africa. This forms chapter 8 of this study.

### **1.6 Chapter Outline**

In view of the above mentioned phases of research, this study is divided into two parts. The first part, which comprises chapters 1-4, entails a historical account of the ecumenical movement and background study on the ecumenical tension between ecclesiology and ethics. The first chapter is an introduction to the study and provides the background to the study, the statement of the problem, and outlines the structure of the dissertation. Chapter 2 traces the origins of the ecumenical movement and provides a brief overview of the changing landscape of the modern ecumenical movement. The chapter specifically discusses the changing landscape of the modern ecumenical movement and highlights the sense of ‘malaise’ that has characterised recent discussions on the state and future ecumenism. Chapter 3 provides an overview and critical analysis of the ecclesiology and ethics project conducted by the World Council of Churches between 1992 and 1996. This chapter underscores the significance of the WCC study project on ecclesiology and ethics by highlighting the salient proposals regarding the relationship between ecclesiology and ethics. Chapter 4 is a historical description and analysis of the emergence of the AACC as a significant ecumenical structure on the continent.

The second part of this study, comprising chapters 5-7, constitutes the core of this study. Each chapter in this part provides an answer to the research question of this study by examining how the AACC as the most significant ecumenical structure in Africa addressed the relationship between the theological quest for unity (read: ecclesiology) and the social responsibility (read: ethics) of the church in Africa between 1963 and 2013. Further, each chapter is preceded by a brief description of the African social context followed by a discussion of the research question in terms of three thematic sections namely “the selfhood of the church”, “church and society”, and “ecumenical vision”. The concluding chapter provides a summary of the study and draws out implications for the ecumenical movement in Africa.

## **Chapter 2: The Ecumenical Movement: A Brief Overview of the Changing Ecumenical Landscapes**

### **2.1 Introduction**

In the preceding chapter, the description of this research project and the methodology employed were presented. The present chapter entails a brief overview of the changing landscapes of the modern ecumenical movement. As background to the changing ecumenical landscapes, a very brief overview of the history of the modern ecumenical movement will be offered. This is significant for two reasons. First, since the point of departure for this study lies within the context of a research project on “Ecclesiology and Ethics” conducted by a global institutional expression of the ecumenical movement (namely the WCC) during the period 1992-1996, a brief overview of the history of the ecumenical movement would be in order. Secondly, because the focus of this research is on the AACC, such an overview is necessary, given that the history and development of the AACC cannot be fully grasped without reflecting on the wider ecumenical developments (cf. Tsetsis 2004:461). The story of the origins of the AACC would be incomplete without making mention of the role of wider ecumenical developments in the process of its formation. It must be pointed out, however, that given the bulk of literature on the history of the modern ecumenical movement, the purpose of the present chapter is not to offer a detailed history of the complex modern ecumenical movement. Rather, the focus of this chapter is on the changing ecumenical landscapes.

The chapter will subsequently highlight the implications of the changing situation of both the church and the world for the ecumenical movement in Africa. The same is true of global institutional ecumenism as represented by the WCC. To address this, the chapter begins with a brief background on the advance of the modern ecumenical movement. Thereafter, I will briefly discuss the so-called crisis in the ecumenical movement. The chapter will close with a discussion on the changed ecumenical landscape. Given the scope of this study, this chapter is intended to form the background for an analysis of ecclesiology and ethics in the context of both the WCC study (see chapter 3) and in the history of AACC (see chapters 5-7).

### **2.2 The advance of the Modern Ecumenical Movement: Its many layered streams**

An account of the origins and development of the modern ecumenical movement requires cognisance of its many layered streams. In order to do so, it is necessary to explore both the significant role of Edinburgh 1910 in the birth of the modern ecumenical movement and the subsequent institutionalisation of international cooperation in mission.

#### **2.2.1 Historical Roots of the Modern Ecumenical Movement**

The modern ecumenical movement came into existence in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Its roots however, reach back to the Student Christian Movements in the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Ruth Rouse (2004:343-344) argues that the student movements “provided experimental laboratories in which new ecumenical attitudes, individual and corporate, were produced.” They played a significant pioneering role in the ecumenical movement. Having already coalesced in the World’s Student Christian Federation at Vadstena, Sweden in 1895, the Student Christian Movements contributed a new ecumenical idea regarding the basis on which Christians of different denominations could unite. Such a new idea lay in the understanding of the Student Christian Movement as being interdenominational. The Student Christian Movements further produced a bulk of the leadership of the modern ecumenical movement, such as John Mott, Nathan Söderblom, W.A. Visser ’t Hooft, V.S. Azariah,

William Temple, and J.H. Oldham, amongst others (see Rouse 2004:341). Of these, Mott and Oldham were particularly instrumental in the preparatory work and proceedings of the meeting of the 1,215 official delegates – mostly male – who gathered for the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh from 14<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1910. The conference has been variously hailed as “a landmark in the history of mission” (Walls 2002:53), an “ecumenical keystone” (Hogg 1960) and most popularly, as “the birthplace of the modern ecumenical movement” (Amanze 1999a:158; Latourette 1954:362; Thomas 1995:224). But it was much more than that. As Boyd (2007:12) notes, “it was the culmination of a century of cross-cultural missionary enterprise, which had already produced a remarkable degree of inter-church co-operation, symbolised for example in the decennial missionary conferences held regularly in India in the later decades of the nineteenth century”, as well as other gatherings such as the Protestant Missionary Conferences held in London in 1888 and in New York in 1900 (see also Latourette 2004:355; Stanley 2010:15).

Even though Edinburgh 1910 stood in the succession of earlier conferences, it marked a unique advance over its predecessors. It had such a quantity of preliminary work that eight major topics for the conference were prepared well in advance. Another major advance of this conference was its ecclesiastical comprehensiveness in terms of confession, tradition, and ethos (see Walls 2002:55). It must be borne in mind however that Edinburgh 1910 was a conference of missionary societies rather than that of churches (Stanley 2010:8; Walls 2002:58). The participants were mainly representatives from different missionary societies.

That the impetus for the ecumenical movement arose out of such a missionary conference underscores the view that the modern missionary movement was the springboard for the ecumenical movement (see Amanze 1999b:5; Walls 2002:53). In this regard, it is plausible to argue that to a great extent, the missionary movement prepared for the arrival of the so-called “ecumenical century” (Saayman 1984). According to Saayman (1984:8), “[t]he ecumenical movement does not derive simply from a passion for unity; it sprang from a passion for unity that is completely fused in mission.” In a similar vein, Latourette (2004:353) contends that “the ecumenical movement was in large part the outgrowth of the missionary movement”. This is understandable, given that missionaries of the modern missionary movement felt the weight of the tragedy of divisions in the “mission field” in a more direct way.

Shenk (1992:71) shares a similar view when he notes that “the earliest and strongest impulses for Christian unity came from those places where new churches were being founded and the scandal of Western denominationalism was thrown up in bold relief” (cf. Amanze 1999a:154). Little wonder then that already in 1806, the great British missionary pioneer William Carey proposed that an intercontinental missionary gathering be held at the Cape of Good Hope in 1810 to be followed by a similar gathering every ten years (cf. Hogg 1960:340). Although Carey’s dream did not materialise during his life time, Edinburgh 1910 may be said to have been a realisation of his ambitious dream.

At Edinburgh 1910, it was generally agreed that the conference was to concern itself primarily with practical co-operation. Matters of doctrine and ecclesiastical structure were thus not on the agenda of the conference (cf. Goodall 1964:43). This position was particularly emphasised by participants from the Anglican Communion such as Bishop Montgomery, Archbishop Lang and Bishop Gore. Nonetheless, there were some participants at the conference such as Charles Brent, who were convinced that matters of faith and order were critical (see Avis 2010a:30). Such individuals later became instrumental in the founding of the Faith and Order movement (see below). Apart from the exclusion of faith and order matters, there were other dynamics at Edinburgh 1910. Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches were – by their decision – not present at the conference. Another dynamic is that out of the 1,215

official delegates at Edinburgh 1910, only twenty participants, at the latest count, came from the non-Western world (see Stanley 2009:91-131). There was unfortunately not a single Christian from “black Africa” (Stanley 2005:166). In view of this, it may be plausible to argue that the conference was to a large extent a Protestant and Western affair (see 2.3.2 below). A more paradoxical dynamic is that the ecumenical movement had its impulse from Protestantism, a branch of the Christian church, which may be said to be organisationally the most divided (cf. Latourette 2004:401).

### **2.2.2 Initial Streams of the Ecumenical Movement**

The above dynamics notwithstanding, Edinburgh 1910 gave momentum to various initiatives for international cooperation on doctrine and church order, Christian service in the world and in mission. As Kinnamon and Cope (1997:1-2) observe, from this “conference flowed streams that carried the movement’s continuing priorities” of common witness (International Missionary Conference), common service (Life and Work) and common fellowship (Faith and Order). In what follows, I will give a very brief overview of the institutionalisation of the nascent ecumenical movement.

At the close of the Edinburgh conference, a continuation committee was appointed. This committee later gave way to a new organisation named the International Missionary Council (IMC) formed at Lake Mohonk, New York State in 1921. John Mott and J.H. Oldham were appointed chairman and secretary of the IMC, respectively. The IMC held its first conference in Jerusalem in 1928. The functions of the IMC included amongst others; to stimulate thinking and investigation on missionary questions; and to bring about united action where necessary in missionary matters (see Goodall 1964:23). Latourette (2004:368) captures the primary functions of this council well when he observes that “the IMC extended its activities in many directions as a co-ordinating and central planning agency for the large majority of the Protestant missions.”

The Edinburgh conference also gave the impulse, issued at the first World Conference on Faith and Order convened at Lausanne in 1927, to deal with the matters of doctrine and church order, which were excluded at Edinburgh 1910. Bishop Charles H. Brent of the Episcopal Church of the United States of America was remarkably inspirational in the founding of the Faith and Order movement. Since its inception, the aim of Faith and Order has been to call the churches to the goal of visible unity in one faith and Eucharistic fellowship.

Already in 1925, two years before the first Faith and Order World Conference at Lausanne, the Life and Work movement held its first world conference in Stockholm under the leadership of Lutheran archbishop of Uppsala Nathan Söderblom. Stockholm affirmed the churches’ obligation to apply the gospel “in all realms of human life – industrial, social, political and international” (see Bell 1925:18ff). With regard to its formation, the Life and Work movement was strictly speaking a response, not to the Edinburgh Missionary Conference, but to the First World War (Stanley 2010:10). That is to say, it came about as a way to address societal problems in the aftermath of the First World War. Nonetheless, as Stanley (2010:10) argues, “its principal architect, Nathan Söderblom, was deeply influenced by the international student movement which organisation proved formative for the collaborative and non-dogmatic approach adopted by the Edinburgh missionary conference.” Later, the Life and Work movement united with the Faith and Order movement to form the World Council of Churches in 1948 (see § 2.2.3a below).

The Edinburgh missionary conference also provided momentum to the pursuit of unity in places such as Asia. Stanley (2010:14) cites as an example of this, the eventual formation of

the Church of South India in 1947, and of the church of North India in 1970 (cf. Sundkler 1965:62-67). The formation of the Church of South India following the union of Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Methodists and Anglicans soon became a model and inspiration to many united and uniting churches within Asia and in some parts of Africa (see Neill 2004:476). Stanley (2010:14-16) described similar trends in the formation of national councils of churches and united Protestant churches in various places in the wake of the Edinburgh missionary conference.

With regard to Africa, Malawian theologian James Amanze (1999a:153-161) has argued that the call for church unity in Africa preceded the Edinburgh conference (see §4.3.2 below). In view of this claim, Amanze mentions united missionary conferences held in Nyasaland (Malawi) in 1900, in Congo (1902), in Johannesburg (1904) and in Kenya (1908). This notwithstanding, Amanze (1999a:199) does acknowledge the impact of Edinburgh 1910 on the birth of the Ecumenical movement in Africa by alluding to role of the IMC in the formation of missionary and Christian councils in several parts of the African continent (see § 2.2.3.b below). I will discuss this in detail in Chapter 4 (see § 4.3.3 below).

### **2.2.3 The formation of World Council of Churches**

From the above discussion, one may observe that the ecumenical impulse of Edinburgh 1910 was carried further through the institutional endeavours of the IMC and the movements of Faith and Order and Life and Work. Such institutionalisation of international cooperation in mission may be said to have taken a significant turn with the formation of the WCC in 1948. In order to capture the historical background of institutionalisation of ecclesial ecumenism, this section will provide a very brief institutional history of the WCC. Further, it will be observed that in its early history, the WCC was mainly a protestant and indeed a Western affair.

#### *(a) Brief Institutional History of the WCC*

Literature on the history of the modern ecumenical movement shows that the formation of the WCC was to a larger extent influenced by ecumenical ideas inspired by the Edinburgh missionary conference of 1910 (see Briggs et al 2004; Fey 1970; FitzGerald 2004; Rouse 2004). Such ecumenical ideas were expressed by some individuals, as well as in some quarters of the Christian Church. Nathan Söderblom (1866-1931), J.H. Oldham (1874-1969) and William Temple (1881-1944) are amongst the ecumenical pioneers who are associated with the proposal for the establishment of a Council of Churches (see Visser 't Hooft 2004:697-708; 1982:1-16). In 1919 Nathan Söderblom advocated for “an ecumenical council of churches” (see Goodall 1964:65). Söderblom’s proposal initially led to the establishment of the Life and Work movement, as argued above. Oldham also made a proposal in 1920, calling for the formation of a league of churches (Visser 't Hooft 2004:697).

Another important antecedent that has been associated with the formation of the WCC is the encyclical that was issued by the Ecumenical Patriarchate at Constantinople in 1920 (see FitzGerald 2004:104-106; Kinnamon & Cope 1997:11-14). The encyclical addressed “Unto all the Churches of Christ Everywhere” proposed the establishment of a fellowship of churches (*koinōnia tōn Ekklesiōn*) parallel to the nascent League of Nations (see Ariarajah 2012). Visser 't Hooft (1982:94-97) has described this encyclical as an initiative that is unprecedented in church history.

It remains somewhat unclear however, whether the above three proposals were related in any way. Whichever the case, the dreams of a council of churches as envisaged in these proposals only began to take shape following the decision in 1937 of both Life and Work and Faith and Order to form a body that would continue to carry forward their respective

emphases. This decision led to the formation of a provisional committee of the WCC ‘in process of formation’ in 1938 in Utrecht, the Netherlands. The formation of the WCC was however delayed by the Second World War.

The WCC was finally inaugurated at Amsterdam in 1948 as a merger of the Faith and Order movement and the Life and Work movement. The WCC was constituted by 147 churches at its Founding Assembly. Of these, only two churches from the African continent were involved, namely the Egyptian Coptic Church and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Slightly over a decade later, the IMC was integrated into the WCC in 1961 at New Delhi to become its Commission for World Mission and Evangelism (CWME). The Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (formed in 1946) and the World Council of Christian Education were also incorporated in the WCC in 1948 and 1971, respectively. At the WCC Founding Assembly in Amsterdam (1948), the churches made a declaration that they “intended to stay together”.

According to the basis of the WCC, reformulated at the New Dehli Assembly in 1961: “The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches which confess Christ as God and saviour according to the scriptures and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit” (WCC Constitution). It may therefore be plausible to note that the task of the WCC arises from the disunity of the church. Yet, the WCC is not the goal of ecumenism. Rather, it is an instrument for promoting Christian unity. As a fellowship of churches, the WCC does not have juridical powers over its members. According to the *WCC Toronto Statement* of 1950, the WCC “is not a super-church”. In Bria’s (1991:76) interpretation of the Toronto statement, the WCC “is not the manifestation of the one church, nor does it deny the individual identities, confessional doctrines or institutional status of its members.” Its authority and existence is derivative from the member churches. In light of this, one may observe that it is the ethos of fellowship that offers the WCC a unique role in the ecumenical movement.

Implicit in the foregoing is the recognition that the ecumenical movement is much wider than the WCC (Castro 1992:7). That is to say, the ecumenical movement has a polycentric character. Thus, as Lutheran theologian and long-time ecumenist Harding Meyer (1994:383) observes, the ecumenical movement has “never been an homogeneous phenomenon”. That is to say, within the ecumenical movement, there are many players. These include Christian World Communions (CWC), Regional Ecumenical Organisations (REO) such as the AACC, and specialised agencies (in ecumenical diakonia and development), amongst others. Yet for the moment, the WCC remains a vital framework and support for the ecumenical movement (Preston 1994:83). This central role of the WCC is well expressed by Orthodox theologian Niko Nissiotis (1981:284), when he observes that the WCC is, at this moment, “the unique effort for a global expression of this one church-centered ecumenical movement with all of its limitations and deficiencies as far as its structure and function are concerned.” More recently, it has become common to speak of the WCC as a “uniquely privileged instrument” of the churches and as the most comprehensive and organic expression of the ecumenical movement (Ariarajah 2012; Briggs 2004:672; Raiser 1994a:172). In light of the changed ecumenical landscape, an issue that will be addressed in section 2.4 of this study, the WCC self understanding reflects an acceptance of “the mandate to foster the coherence of the ecumenical movement without claiming a position of central control” (cf. Raiser 2003b:398).

The above notwithstanding, it has been generally acknowledged that the ecumenical movement is one in spite of its many forms and expressions. The WCC recognises this in its “purpose and functions”, as well as in the CUV (WCC Constitution; CUV 2:10). Vatican II also acknowledges this “one and only ecumenical movement” in its *Decree on Ecumenism*

(1964).

An as institutional expression of global ecumenism, the focus areas of the WCC may be understood in terms of the programmatic structures such as Faith and Order, Life and Work / Church and Society, World Mission and Evangelism (CWME), Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) and Ecumenical Theological Education (ETE). Faith and Order is a long-standing commission and has been a major expression of ecumenism (see Kinnamon 2004:55). It studies theological and doctrinal issues that continue to divide churches, with the focus of calling churches to visible unity (cf. Rusch 1985:62). Although this ultimate aim of visible unity has not been achieved yet, “Faith and Order has achieved a sustained multilateral theological dialogue involving the participation of a very wide constituency” (Henn 2012:50). Its major achievement in the last third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the Lima text on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM) produced in 1982 after 55 years of theological dialogue (see Kinnamon 2004:56). Another major achievement is the document *Confessing the One Faith* (1991) that articulated a mutual recognition of expressions of the Christian faith amongst member churches despite the many differences that may also be found. Günther Gassmann’s *Documentary History of the Faith and Order Movement 1963-1993* is instructive about the several achievements of Faith and Order (see also Vischer 1963).

Life and Work, on the other hand, has been committed to furthering justice in the world by calling churches to common witness and service in the world. The Life and Work tradition continues to be part of the WCC through its successor programmes, most recently on “Justice, Diakonia and Responsibility for Creation”.

The CWME, owing to its roots in the IMC, has had a focus on the theology and practice of mission (see § 2.2.3b below). It provides a structure for churches to seek means of encouraging and expressing unity in mission. The major contributions of CWME may be tracked through its world conferences held in Bangkok (1973), Melbourne (1980), San Antonio (1989), Salvador (1996), Athens (2005), Edinburgh (2010) and most recently, the interim conference in Manilla (2012).

The CCIA was formally established by the WCC and the IMC in 1949. The CCIA was established with a view to serve the councils and member churches of the WCC as a source of stimulus and knowledge in their approach to international problems and as a medium of common counsel and action. Following its merger with three other advisory bodies of the WCC in 2006, the mandate of the CCIA was extended to reflect a variety of concerns including human rights and the promotion of a peaceful and reconciling role of religion in conflicts. The CCIA has collaborated with the AACC on several peacebuilding initiatives.

The Ecumenical Theological Education (ETE) is a successor programme to the Theological Education Fund (TEF) of the IMC. TEF (1958-1976) was formed in 1958 at the IMC in Ghana and was later integrated into the WCC in 1976. It soon gave shape to the subsequent programmes of Theological Education (PTE) and ETE. The focus of ETE is on ecumenical theological education and formation within the ecumenical movement. It also supports curriculum innovation and library and staff development in theological institutions of member churches especially those in the global South (see Pobee 2002).

*(b) From a Western and Protestant movement to a ‘Global’ Ecumenical Movement*

The two movements that historically united to form the World Council of Churches (WCC), namely the Life and Work and Faith and Order (and later the IMC) complimented each other in giving breadth to ecumenical movement. Nonetheless, tensions between these streams persisted (see § 3.2.1 below). According to Weber (1996:16), one serious limitation of the early movements of Faith and Order and Life and Work “was their preoccupation with

questions raised in the societies and the divided churches of Europe and North America”(. They were Eurocentric. Issues that arose from contexts such as Asia, Africa or Latin America were at the time hardly ever discussed. Ernst Lange (1971:6) echoed this when he observed that “the ecumenical movement has for far too long been dominated by rich white Christians and their theologies.” This deep steeped North Atlantic inclination of the ecumenical movement at the time may partly be explained by a historical fact, namely that the churches that were involved in the founding of the WCC were mainly the Protestant and Orthodox churches of Europe and North America. With regard to its inception, some argue that the ecumenical movement emerged from the environment of “liberal Protestantism”. For others still, “[m]odern ecumenism reflected a kind of Western European idealism in its early days in the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century” (Nissiotis 1981:285). In Nissiotis’ view, the pioneers of the ecumenical movement were influenced by a kind of idealistic trend and optimistic attitude that regarded Western Christian culture and progress as having world-wide value (Nissiotis 1981:285).

The Eurocentric outlook of the Protestant churches permeated ecumenism up to the 1960’s (see Johnson 2008:85). According to Ronald Preston (1994:23) it was the integration of the IMC into the WCC at the New Delhi Assembly in 1961 that brought the concerns of the Third World firmly into the agenda of the WCC (cf. Visser ’t Hooft 1974:61). Before discussing the significance of the integration for the participation of the non-western world in the ecumenical movement, it is helpful to briefly highlight the impact of this merger on the understanding of the relationship between church and mission. Such a relationship is best understood in light of the discussions that surrounded the integration process itself.

A survey of standard literature dealing with the history of the integration of the IMC into the WCC shows that the process that led to the integration of these two bodies was not without challenges (see Laing 2012:87-109; Thomas 2010:101-105; Warren 1979). Within IMC circles, the 1958 conference at Achimota, Ghana - where a “Draft Plan for Integration” as worked out by the WCC-IMC joint committee was served - is regarded as the place where formal approval for integration was given. At this meeting, the issue of integration became predominant and was strenuously debated. A notable figure who advanced arguments against the merger was Marx Warren, the then secretary of the Anglican Church Missionary Society and also a member of the WCC-IMC joint committee. Warren opposed the view that mission can only be fulfilled in unity (see Thomas 2010:102-104). In his view, while cooperation between the WCC and the IMC was desirable, the proposal to unite them within a single structure was premature (Warren 1979:105). In similar vein, others were more wary of structural unity fearing that the IMC would be swallowed by the WCC institutionally (see Newbiggin 1958:29).

From the foregoing, one may argue that arguments against integration were focussed more on institutional and organisational questions rather than on the theological import of the integration. The case was rather different for the proponents of integration, as they tended to address the theological issues at stake in the integration question. Laing (2012:90) has summarised the views of the proponents in five points. First, that integration was the appropriate outcome of the trends of development which had brought the two bodies to their present situations. Second, that integration expressed the theological belief that mission and unity were of the *esse* of the church.<sup>2</sup> Third, it was believed that integration had the potential outcome of putting mission at the heart of the ecumenical movement. Fourth, was the argument of necessity, namely, if not integration then what? The fifth point in commending

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<sup>2</sup> This was well captured in the ‘A Draft Plan of Integration’ (1957:72). Therein, it is noted that “the unity of the church and the mission of the church both belong, in equal degree, to the essence of the church.”

integration was the argument of preservation. That is, integration would conserve in the new body all that was represented by the IMC assembly.

With the IMC having voted overwhelmingly for integration at its Ghana conference, the IMC was formally integrated into the WCC at the New Delhi Assembly in 1961 and became its Division of World Mission and Evangelism, later the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME). From an institutional perspective, it may therefore be argued that with the integration of the IMC, the three streams which grew out of the Edinburgh Conference of 1910, namely Life and Work, Faith and Order, and the International Missionary Council, became structurally united. It should be noted however that various mission agencies responded differently to the integration depending on their relations to the churches who were members of the WCC (see Ott 2001:58-60).

In the view of David Bosch (1991:371), the integration of the IMC into the WCC signalled a turning point in the history of mission. Bosch (1991:470) goes further to argue that the integration made a significant theological point, namely that unity and mission belong together (cf. Saayman 1984:28). In view of such views, one may argue that the integration implied that the dichotomy between unity and mission epitomised in the existence of the WCC and the IMC side by side was, at least in institutional terms, now overcome. Put differently, it was an expression of the integration of church and mission (Bosch 1991:370).

From the perspective of the IMC, the integration may be seen as part of missiological developments since the time of IMC meeting at Tambaram in 1938. From the church-centric focus of Tambaram, the IMC conference at Willingen in 1952 initiated a shift from “an emphasis on a church centred mission” (Tambaram) to a “mission centred church”. Little wonder then that the merger of the IMC with the WCC was soon followed by integration of church and mission in many countries. These developments clearly signalled a promise of a much closer relationship between church and mission. From the ecumenical perspective of the WCC, this meant a closer relationship between unity and mission. Thus, in the section report on unity at the WCC New Delhi Assembly, the relationship between church and mission was expressed in the following way:

In the fulfilment of our missionary obedience the call to unity is seen to be imperative, the vision of one Church proclaiming one Gospel to the whole world becomes more vivid and the experience and expression of our given unity more real (WCC 1961:121).

The merger of the IMC with the WCC necessarily had further implications for integrating missionary concerns into WCC structures (see Kinnamon 2004:53). The WCC’s commission and division of World Mission and Evangelism at the New Delhi Assembly expressed its views on the issues as follows:

The spiritual heritage must not be dissipated; it must remain, ever renewed in the hidden life of prayer and adoration, at the heart of the World Council of Churches. Without it the ecumenical movement would petrify. Integration must mean that the World Council of Churches takes this missionary task to the very heart of its life (WCC 1961:249f).

With regard to the so-called third world countries, the integration of the IMC into the WCC soon proved positive. Over against fears amongst some opponents to the integration, namely that the newly integrated IMC (Commission for World Mission and Evangelism) would be lost in a bureaucratic machine, the commission proved “a mobility in thought and action uncharacteristic of bureaucracies” (see Warren 1979:107). The commission dramatically contributed to the recognition of the importance of Asia, Africa and Latin America within the ecumenical movement. Clearly, the IMC brought with it into the WCC a rich heritage of third world concerns that had come about through its international collaboration in missions particularly in the third world. In order to highlight this rich heritage, it may be helpful to cite

a few examples.

Before its integration in the WCC, the IMC had set off several initiatives in the third world and a number of these took place in Africa. It supported several programmes such as the research and consultations on “Home and Family Life” in Africa. In other cases, the IMC contributed to church union in some African countries. In Zambia (formerly Northern Rhodesia), it contributed to the formation of the “United Missions in the Copperbelt” (UMCB) in 1936, following a study conducted in 1932 by its Department of Social and Industrial Research (see Davis 1933; Snelson 1974:186; Taylor & Lehmann 1961:37).

Through its missionary studies department, the IMC then also initiated a series of studies under the title “Studies in the Life and Growth of the Younger Churches” with specific reference to Protestant churches in Asia, Africa and Latin America (see Taylor & Lehmann 1961). Later, at its meeting at Achimota near Accra, Ghana in 1958, the IMC established a Theological Education Fund (TEF), thus creating a facility through which to support the training needs of churches. It was also at this meeting that the idea of the merging with the WCC was discussed.

The IMC further made a “silent”, yet significant contribution to the establishment of regional Christian conferences in a number of places. In 1957, the East Asia Christian conference held its first meeting at Prapat in Sumatra, Indonesia. A similar development was taking place in Africa when in 1958 the first All Africa Christian conference was held in Ibadan, Nigeria (see §4 below). It was at this conference that the idea of an All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) was conceived. The impulse for the Ibadan conference was initially supplied by the IMC (see All Africa Church Conference 1958:9; M’Timkulu 1962:63).

With the integration of the IMC in the WCC at the New Dehli Assembly, there emerged a shift to more ecclesial diversity within the WCC than had been the case hitherto. The joining of the WCC of eighteen (18) so-called younger churches at New Dehli illustrates this shift (Kinnamon 2004:52). This ecclesial diversity also began to be reflected in the programmatic work of the WCC. Accordingly, the issues of Third World liberation became critical in the ecumenical movement. As a case in point, the WCC Geneva Conference of 1966 on “Church and Society” reflected this increasing attention to Third World issues. This conference, held under the theme ‘The Social Revolutions of our Time’, had significant representation from churches in Africa, Asia and Latin America (see Preston 1994:25). About 40% of the delegates came from the so-called Third World. In this regard, Bent (1995:29) writes:

The central place the Geneva conference attained in future ecumenical discussion of social issues was partly due to the strong lay representation and the large number of representatives from the non-Western world.

The increasing participation of the third world in the ecumenical movement also came to reflect in the formation of Regional Ecumenical Organisations (REO) (see Tsetsis 2004). By the time of the WCC fourth Assembly at Uppsala in 1968, Regional Councils of Churches had been formed in Asia, Africa, Europe and the Pacific. In Asia, the East Asia Conference came into being in 1957 and it later changed its name to the Christian Conference of Asia in 1973. In 1959, the Conference of European Churches was formed. The Protestant churches in Africa created the All Africa Conference of Churches in 1963. In 1966, the churches in the Pacific formed the Pacific Conference of Churches. This was soon followed by the establishment of the Caribbean Conference of Churches and the Middle East Council of Churches in 1973 and 1974, respectively. The Latin American Council of Churches was the latest to be formed in 1982.

In Asia and Africa, the regionalisation of ecumenism occurred during the period of decolonisation (see chapter 4.4.3 below). The formation of REO's in these two regions was therefore partly a response to the political needs of the time. To take the AACC as an example, the central place that discussions on nationalism took at its first General Assembly held in Kampala in 1963 bespeaks of the concerns of the churches in Africa with decolonisation (see AACC 1963:60). On the other hand, the African churches were on a quest for ecclesial independence and this soon ensued into a focus on the contextualisation of theology. The choice of the theme for the first AACC Assembly in Kampala – “Freedom and Unity in Christ” – captures this quest well. The outcome of this quest was an emphasis on theological reflection that took both the African (local) context (past and present) and the questions shaping the African reality seriously (see Dickson & Ellingworth 1969).

In view of the foregoing, it is understandable that emerging third world theologies also contributed to the widening of participation within the ecumenical movement (see Birmele et al 1994:8-9). According to Birmele et al (1994:9), the concerns of third world churches enlarged the scope of the WCC's vision. Commenting on this expanding participation of the third world within the WCC during this period, Micheal Kinnamon (2004:54) writes:

To the list of “Northern” concerns – the challenge of a scientific technological culture, the challenge of secularism ... was added a new set of priorities: endemic poverty, interfaith relations, the lingering effects of colonialism.

Henceforth, one finds the history of the WCC replete with several ecumenical initiatives reflecting the interests and aspirations of the Global South. These include, for instance, the Programme to Combat Racism, the Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiative in Africa (EHAIA), the Ecumenical Focus on Africa (EFA), and the influence of the WCC Christian Medical Commission in the shaping of the Churches Health Associations in Africa beginning in the late 1960s. Over the years, the WCC has indeed come take the interests of the third world seriously in its programmatic work, as well as in its staff composition. In this vein, collaboration with other ecumenical bodies such as the All Africa Conference of Churches has heightened (see Otieno 2005; § 4 below). This integration of third world concerns is good news for churches in the Gglobal South and true to the calling of the WCC as a Global Council of Churches.

### **2.3 Crisis of the Ecumenical Movement**

The increased participation of the third world in the WCC was a remarkable achievement. This and other achievements of the ecumenical movement have been well captured by several scholars (see Kinnamon 2004:51-59; Kasper 2009; Gnanadason 2004). As evident in the discussions and programmes that ensued from its assemblies in Evanston (1954), New Dehli (1961) and Uppsala (1968), the WCC continued to grow steadily (see FitzGerald 2004:109 – 114). During this period, the WCC was joined by several Orthodox Churches. The Roman Catholic Church (RCC) also became increasingly active in the ecumenical movement during this period, mainly as a consequence of Vatican II (see Gros 2004:26-27; Nissiotis 1985:334-335). The setting up, in 1965, of the Joint Working Group (JWG) between the WCC and the RCC (by mutual agreement) as an instrument of collaboration between the two partners aptly demonstrates the mounted cooperation between the two. Within the WCC, membership increased considerably. Commenting on this, Briggs (2004:669) observes that the WCC became more representative of the *oikoumenē* “both in terms of ecclesiastical and cultural traditions and geographical spread.” Given such the progress in the ecumenical movement in much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it has been common, at least from the perspective of church history, to refer to the 20<sup>th</sup> century as the ecumenical century.

However, over and against the above background, a deep sense of uncertainty in the ecumenical movement began to be expressed by a number of ecumenists. Already in 1972, the first general secretary of the WCC, Willem Visser't Hooft, raised a deeply perceptive question, namely: "Has the ecumenical movement a future?" In several ecumenical texts, one finds various descriptions of the uncertainty in the ecumenical movement. Some spoke of malaise in the ecumenical movement (Ernst Lange 1971); of a floundering of the ecumenical movement for lack of clarity about its fundamental goals (Lewis Mudge 1987:493); of an "ecumenical winter" (that the ecumenical movement as being in the "winter of its existence" [Aruna Gnanadason 2004:8]); of a "decline of ecumenical impulse" (Birmele et al 1994); of a "deterioration of the ecumenical urgency" (Meyer 2009:151); and of a "crisis" (Avis 2010a:31; Hughson 1992:338) amongst others.

At both global and regional levels, institutional ecumenism was said to be in crisis. Within the African context, South African theologian John de Gruchy (1995b:12) noted a growing lack of ecumenical enthusiasm amongst churches in South Africa following that country's first democratic elections in 1994. According to De Gruchy, there was a certain malaise in the ecumenical churches in South Africa during the period of transition. Another South African theologian, Molefe Tsele (2004:111), described ecumenism in Africa as being in a "sorry state of atrophy", that is, in its institutional, theological, political and historical dimensions.

At continental level, the AACC was going through serious financial and institutional challenges, especially during the 1980's, and this was partly reflective of the general situation in much of Africa during this period. Meeting at Lomé, Togo for the 5<sup>th</sup> General Assembly in 1987, it was clear to most participants that "the ecumenical boat" in Africa was not faring well (see AACC 1987).

At global level, the crisis in the ecumenical movement has been widely noted and variously interpreted. A number of interpretations explain the crisis in terms of challenges related to resources and agenda for ecumenism. Other interpretations also abound. According to Koshi and Santa Ana (2006:32), "the critical period that ecumenism is going through today is mainly a crisis of modernisation." Following philosopher Samuel Eisenstadt's view of modernisation as a process that has different manifestations and contexts, Koshi & Santa Ana (2006:32) argue: "The ecumenical movement has grown up and exists in contexts of various forms of being modern." Pointing to the failure of the classic ideologies of Marxist socialism and neo-liberalism to overcome socio-economic contradictions in many societies and to the challenge that the women's emancipation movement posed to modernity, Koshi and Santa Ana (2006:36-38) contend that the ecumenical movement has been shaken and challenged by these trends. They also cite the phenomenon of globalisation as having problematised the tension between the individual and the masses in modern times. The implication of this tension according to Koshi and Santa Ana (2006:35) is that:

Individuals, while participating in the mass movements, search to privatise their lives in order to create and preserve meaning. At the same time, they try to share with other individuals, through participating in the mass movements, how they produce meaning. This paradox is one of the elements of the crisis of modernity.

For Koshi and Santa Ana, the above elements of the crisis of modernity have huge implications for the ecumenical movement. Thus they understand the so-called crisis of the ecumenical movement as a crisis of modernity.

In his *Ecumenism in Transition* (1991), Konrad Raiser has offered a more comprehensive analysis of the so-called crisis in ecumenism. Raiser observes that there has been uncertainty in the ecumenical movement in terms of its goals, methods and the agent(s) responsible for the movement since 1968 (Uppsala). Raiser (1991:31) accounts for the crisis in terms of the

inadequacy of the paradigm of Christocentric universalism<sup>3</sup> to address four critical challenges in the ecumenical movement, namely dialogue with non-Christian religions, confrontation with global structures of domination, especially in economic life, ecological concerns, and polarities within churches. According to Raiser (1991:87), the future of the ecumenical movement may well lie in a renewed understanding of the *oikoumenē* as “one household of life”. Raiser thus sees the image of household<sup>4</sup> as the root metaphor of the emerging paradigm within the ecumenical movement.

For Kinnamon & Cope (1997:8), the uncertainty within the ecumenical movement is better understood as “a period of momentous transition”. They thus write: “The era that is now emerging will likely be marked not by a single new paradigm but by multiple centres of energy, multiple methodologies, multiple priority concerns” (Kinnamon & Cope 1997:8). In light of these various interpretations of the crisis, one may argue that the uncertainty or crisis in the ecumenical movement is a manifestation of several challenges facing global institutional ecumenism (see 2.4 below). However, it must be observed that ecumenical scholars have not interpreted the crisis or transition in a similar fashion. For instance, Kinnamon (2004) finds some aspects of Raiser’s analysis of the crisis problematic. He argues that Raiser undervalued “theological dialogue, often associated with Faith and Order, aimed at realising the church’s visible unity” (Kinnamon 2004:114).

Nevertheless, the varied concerns with the uncertainty in the ecumenical movement led the WCC and other players in the ecumenical movement to reflect on a renewed vision for the ecumenical movement against the background of continued disunity of churches and new ecumenical challenges (see §2.4 below). From within the context of the WCC, the search for a common understanding and vision was begun. This culminated in a study known as the “Towards a Common Understanding and Vision of the World Council of Churches” (CUV). Impetus for this study arose out of the necessary programmatic reorganisation of the WCC. The initiative for the CUV process was taken at the WCC central committee meeting in Moscow in 1989. This resulted in a policy document that was adopted by the central committee in 1997 and subsequently affirmed by the Harare Assembly in 1998. The CUV was intended to articulate the ethos of the WCC for the 21<sup>st</sup> century in light of the crisis or uncertainty of the ecumenical movement. According to the CUV, the uncertainty in the ecumenical movement also extended to the very question of what is meant by the “ecumenical movement” (see WCC 1999a; cf. § 2.2 above). In this regard, the CUV states:

In the present situation of uncertainty and transition, the ambiguities surrounding the meaning of the term ‘ecumenical’ will not be resolved by a descriptive – even less a normative – definition which identifies a particular model, strategy or organizational affiliation as criteria for what is ‘ecumenical’. (CUV § 2.8)

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<sup>3</sup> Raiser explains that, from its beginning, the vision that drove the WCC and the ecumenical movement was “Christocentric universalism,” a term coined by the WCC’s first General Secretary, W. A. Visser ’t Hooft. In light of a WCC study between its New Delhi (1961) and Uppsala (1968) assemblies titled “The Finality of Jesus Christ in the Age of Universal History”. Raiser has analysed the old paradigm of Christocentric universalism. He borrows the idea of paradigm shift from American philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn, who describes a paradigm as “a guiding frame of reference that gives direction and criteria for human intellectual activity”. Seen as an alternative to Christocentric universalism, Raiser’s proposal for a Trinitarian perspective has received sharp criticism. The contention is that you cannot have one without the other. Newbigin (1994:5) claims that Raiser’s proposal neglects the church’s missionary obligation. According to Kinnamon (2003:114), it appears that Raiser undervalues theological dialogue, often associated with Faith and Order.

<sup>4</sup> Raiser holds that Ernst Lange (see 1971:1-8) was the first to use the term “household” as a translation of *oikoumenē*. I will elaborate on the metaphor of “household” as used in ecumenical discourse in chapter 3 below (see § 3.3.3).

South African theologian Ernst Conradie has explored this question further and discussed 23 different notions of what the term ‘ecumenical’ may mean (see Conradie 2013a). Conradie’s discussion shows that posing the question of what it means to be ecumenical today remains a significant question for the churches today.

## **2.4 Changing Ecumenical landscapes: Global Perspectives**

As helpful as the CUV process was to addressing the crisis in the ecumenical movement, other challenges related to changing ecumenical landscapes soon emerged within the ecumenical movement. The context for ecumenism became complex over the years due to significant changes in the ecumenical landscape and challenges posed by emerging new ecumenical realities. Thus, as Koshy & Santa Ana (2006:35) rightly observe: “To be ecumenical at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is not the same as it was at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>, when the vision of an ecumenical utopia began to inspire some Christian leaders”.

By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the WCC and REO’s such as the AACC were already faced with several challenges posed by the changing “face” of both Christianity and the ecumenical movement at both global and local levels. Of course, most of these challenges reach back to the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Addressing some of these challenges was one of the central endeavours of German ecumenist Konrad Raiser during his tenure as WCC general secretary from 1993 to 2003. In his report to the WCC Central Committee in 2002, Raiser (2002b) observed that the time had come to review the organisational and structural arrangements in the world-wide ecumenical movement and to explore a new ecumenical configuration, which can respond effectively to the challenges that lie ahead in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In subsequent years, several consultations were held in a quest to address the pressing challenges that confronted the ecumenical movement.

In a paper read at the WCC consultation on the reconfiguration of the ecumenical movement in Lebanon (2003), His Holiness Aram I of the Armenian Apostolic Church noted that the real problems facing the ecumenical movement were “those associated with global changes, major geopolitical and economic developments, and the resurgence of religion in the public sphere” (Aram I 2003:2). These problems, he argued, had profoundly affected the life and witness of the churches, as well as the ecumenical landscape.

Several other ecumenists observe that the ecumenical landscape has indeed drastically changed (Briggs 2004:659-674; CCE21; Granberg-Michaelson 2013; Hawkey 2004; Johnson 2013; Raiser 1994a). According to many observers, elements of the changing ecumenical landscapes include, amongst others, a shift from multilateral to bilateral ecumenical relations, changing ecclesial landscape (world Christianity), institutionalisation of the ecumenical movement, and new challenges posed by globalisation (see WCC 2005a). Addressing these challenges has been a critical concern for many ecumenical organisations during the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. On the basis of several sources, in what follows I will offer an exploratory survey of the changing ecumenical landscapes. The approach will be thematic. While the tension between ecclesiology and ethics is a topic of discussion in the next chapter, this survey will be helpful for understanding the broader context in which the study on *Ecclesiology and Ethics* (1992 – 1996) may be situated.

### **2.4.1 From Multilateralism to Bilateralism**

Within the ecumenical movement, relations or dialogues between churches and ecumenical structures has taken different forms. Here, we may distinguish between multilateral and bilateral dialogues. Multilateral dialogues include conciliar and non-conciliar ecumenism. The first refers to councils of churches, while the later refers to ecumenical relations outside of the

conciliar structure. Bilateral dialogues on the other hand, refer to relations between two churches. At the level of global institutional ecumenism, it began to be recognised that bilateral relationships were beginning to take the place of the former multilateral processes of ecumenical sharing of resources. Related to this was the phenomenon of new ecumenical networks and instruments such as the Christian World Communions (CWC's), which were focusing on serving particular constituencies, interests and concerns without clear links with the existing ecumenical organizations (Hawkey 2004).

Characteristically, CWC's are mainly intra-confessional in nature and aim at closer fellowship within confessional families. Since the 1960's, CWC's intensified bilateral inter-confessional dialogues at world level. This coincided with the end of the second Vatican Council, which opened up the Roman Catholic Church to participate in the bilateral dialogues with other confessional bodies. Some see the entry of the Roman Catholic Church in the ecumenical movement to have contributed to the proliferation of bilateral dialogues (Vischer 2004:31).

A common criticism of bilateral dialogues has been that they reinforce confessionalism, thus bringing into question the conciliar model of ecumenism (see Meyer & Vischer 1984:2 – 8). Those who raised such criticisms also argued that the 'unity of the church' and 'confessional identity' were incompatible and mutually exclusive. Some further raised questions regarding the extent to which bilateral conversations can be extrapolated to the wider multilateral ecumenical conversations (see Radano 2012).

In response to such criticisms, Meyer (1994) argues that CWC's are not obstacles to ecumenical advance. He argues that that CWC's have contributed to the ecumenical movement by reminding the churches that contextual and confessional diversities are not necessarily divisive (Meyer 1994:384). Following Meyer's line of thought, Brigham (2012:100) notes that CWC's "have presented alternative models of unity that reflect their commitment to honoring contextual and confessional diversity." While diversity has frequently been emphasised in ecumenical discourse, concerns regarding the limits of diversity have equally been raised (Fuchs 2008:65; Kinnamon 1988).

These perspectives on CWC's notwithstanding, the need to integrate both bilateral and multilateral dialogues within the ecumenical movement had already been raised as early as the 1970's. The creation of the 'Forum on Bilateral Conversations' by the Conference of Secretaries of CWC's in cooperation with the WCC already in 1978, was therefore critical as one way of addressing the need for partnership in the one ecumenical movement between conciliar and confessional ecumenical actors. With much optimism, the 1985 report of the Forum on Bilateral Conversations (1985:5) noted that discussions on bilaterals being in competition with multilaterals had receded into the background. It may be fair to say that such discussions had lessened but not by any means ended. In the early 90's, the tension between multilateral and bilateral dialogues came to be a matter of concern as a number of ecumenical consultations between the WCC, Christian World Communions (formerly known as World Confessional Families) and Regional Ecumenical Organisations such as the AACC show. The sixth forum on bilateral dialogues held in 1994 identified several difficulties of the ecumenical methodology of the bilateral. One may observe in this connection that bilateral conversations further complicated the question of the nature of the visible unity of the church. From the models of organic unity and conciliar fellowship that dominated the ecumenical scene up until the Nairobi Assembly, bilateral dialogues introduced the models of reconciled diversity and communion of communions (see Fuchs 2008:48-68; Meyer 1999:73-147).

Yet again, the need for partnership and complementarity between multilateral and bilateral dialogues was emphasised. Thus, in the early 1990's the search for such partnership took

centre stage in discussions on ecumenical sharing of resources and membership of ecumenical institutions. It was particularly feared that insufficient programme coordination by confessional and ecumenical bodies represented a duplication of efforts. As such, during this period, a strong call was made for the reconfiguration of the ecumenical movement in order to address ecumenical challenges posed by multiple ecumenical actors. As Birmele et al (1994:7) observe, the increased number of ecumenical players fuelled further tensions in the ecumenical movement. For purposes of this study, it is important to note that both the WCC and CWC's realised more and more that it was detrimental to see conciliar and confessional expressions of ecumenism in competition with each other. Thus, it was recommended at the WCC Assembly in Harare (1998) that "a process be initiated to facilitate and strengthen the relationships between the WCC and CWC's as called for in the document "Towards a Common Understanding and Vision of the World Council of Churches" (see Kessler 1999:165).

In a major study of the WCC titled *Mapping the Oikoumenē* (2005), Jill Hawkey has succinctly described these concerns within the context of the ecumenical infrastructure, specifically as manifested in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The ecumenical picture portrayed in Hawkey's study does indeed justify Konrad Raiser's call already made in 2002 for the reconfiguration of the ecumenical movement.

Following several initiatives, a decision was later taken at the Porte Alegre Assembly to constitute a Joint Consultative Commission between the WCC and CWC's with an initial mandate of exploring the coordination of programmes of different ecumenical actors, and the significance and implications of overlapping membership. Within the context of the AACC, ilar conversations emerged in 2004 between the AACC and the sub-regional ecumenical fellowships. The need was felt to find a way of working towards a common vision within the ecumenical movement in Africa (The Panel of 12 2004). Echoing this concern, Mvume Dandala, the then General Secretary of the AACC, noted during his presentation at the WCC consultation on ecumenism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that there was need for coherency in the ecumenical movement in Africa with the NCC's and sub-regional fellowships becoming complementary to one another (Reconfiguration Report 2004:18).

Although the above tensions around multilateral and bilateral ecumenical initiatives are not as yet fully resolved, it is clear as the Continuation Committee on Ecumenism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century reported, namely that "there is growing intentional cooperation and a division of labour, between the WCC and Regional Ecumenical Organizations (REOs), National Councils of Churches (NCCs) and in Africa sub – regional Fellowships of Churches" (Werner & Lorke 2013:378). Nonetheless, the task of bringing the complimentary work of bilateral and multilaterals into reality remains a continuing task.

#### **2.4.2 The Institutional versus Movement character of Ecumenism**

The contributions of the WCC in addressing the changed landscapes – such as the one described above in which a multiplicity of ecumenical actors is obvious – have been viewed with mixed feelings by some. Specifically, the WCC's call for the reconfiguration of the ecumenical movement as one way of addressing the tension between multilateral and bilateral ecumenical relations has received criticism. For some, discussions on the reconfiguration process were prompted by the need for the institutional survival of the WCC. In this regard, the WCC as an organisational form of the ecumenical movement was faulted for its preoccupation with institutional survival and structures. The discussions on "reconfiguration" thus shifted to "ecumenism in the twenty first century". Some argue that the latter takes into account the theological, contextual and institutional ramifications of the ecumenical movement in a more coherent fashion.

Nevertheless, the tension between the institutional and the movement character of the ecumenical movement has been long standing. Visser 't Hooft (1974:34) already argued that criticisms of this sort must not be dismissed quickly by those active in the ecumenical movement. Even so, Visser 't Hooft's view was that the complete rejection of the institution character of the WCC is surely impracticable (see Visser 't Hooft 1974:34-54). Ernst Conradie (2013a:62) underscores this view when he notes: "The ecumenical movement is indeed a movement. To sustain such a movement some form of institutionalisation is necessary." Orthodox theologian Aram I (2003:3) also believes that it is impractical to de-institutionalize the ecumenical movement, arguing that the ecumenical movement requires structures to survive and to function. In a similar vein, Raiser (1997:104) notes:

Even if the World Council of Churches develops a genuinely conciliar form of life and strengthens its character as a fellowship of churches, it must remain an instrument of the ecumenical movement, responding to a vision and a calling which transcends any and all institutional manifestations. The awareness of a common calling is the inner dynamic of the ecumenical movement.

Indeed, both the institutional and the movement character of the ecumenical movement contribute to the role of the ecumenical movement in the world. This tension between the institutional and movement character of ecumenism may thus not be easily resolved. This notwithstanding, there is as Raiser (2003a) observes, "legitimate concern that in the present situation of the ecumenical movement the institutional constraints have become too dominant, thus marginalising the innovative and creative voices and initiatives."

### **2.4.3 Changing Ecclesial Landscapes: World Christianity**

Apart from the above tensions in the ecumenical landscapes, the ecumenical movement has also witnessed significant changes in the ecclesial landscape. Church life has drastically changed world over. In a paper prepared for the WCC 9<sup>th</sup> General Assembly in Porto Alegre (2006), major shifts in world Christianity were identified. The paper highlighted general demographic shifts and new developments in spirituality, and some notable changes affecting church life. With this background, it was affirmed at the Porto Alegre Assembly that the global context was rapid changing. It was also noted that given the changing ecclesial landscapes, there was need within the ecumenical movement to reflect on this reality. Accordingly, a Continuation Committee on Ecumenism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (hereafter referred to as CCE21) was appointed comprising representatives from WCC member churches, from the Roman Catholic Church, churches outside the membership of the WCC and other conciliar ecumenical movements such as REO's, NCC's, CWC's and specialised ecumenical agencies.

In its final report, the CCE21 identified major trends of the changing context of world Christianity and also analysed how these trends had impacted institutional ecumenism. One of the major trends that the committee identified was the shift in the centre of gravity of Christianity (in terms of numbers of people confessing Christ as Lord and Saviour) towards the Global South (CCE21 2013:373). This trend had already been identified in several studies (see Robert 2000; Sanneh 2005, 2003; Jenkins 2002; Walls 2002).

Commenting on the changing shape of the ecumenical movement in the last third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Briggs (2004:662) observes that towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, one of the conspicuous markers of this period had been the shift in the centre of gravity for membership of the Christian church from the North to the South. A critical insight of this new landscape is that ecumenism can no longer be reduced to traditional forms of Christianity. Quite evidently, this changed landscape has huge implications for the future of the ecumenical movement. In what follows, I will therefore

discuss a number of aspects related to changing ecclesial landscapes.

a) *From Christendom to World Christianity*

To better grasp the so-called “shift of the centre of gravity of Christianity” within the context of the ecumenical movement, it may be helpful to look back to the missionary origins of the ecumenical movement. It has already been noted that the ecumenical movement was in large part the outgrowth of the missionary movement (see § 2.2.1 above). The origins of the modern missionary movement itself, as eminent scholar of world Christianity Andrew Walls (2002) argues, lay in the territorial idea of Christianity. In mission studies, this has been known as Christendom, given the conceptualisation of the Christian church – the *corpus Christianum* – in territorial ways. The consequence of this notion was the geographical dichotomy of Christian and non-Christian worlds. Christian mission was thus characterised by concepts of geographical expansion from a Christian centre to the unreached territories. How the creation of Christendom came about is itself a complex process (see Robert 2009). Suffice it to say that even at the Edinburgh missionary conference of 1910, the thinking that mission was ‘one way traffic’ from the Christian West to the Christian South/East was very much dominant.

The Christendom idea seems to have been extremely resilient in much of European church history. Andrew Walls (2002:37) argues that this idea “survived the sixteenth century Reformation practically unscathed.” For instance, the 16<sup>th</sup> century Protestant Reformation culminated in the division of Christendom, but not in the abandonment of the idea. But the situation did not remain the same. Walls (1996:258) thus writes; “the idea of territorial Christianity, of geographically contiguous Christian states, lies irretrievably broken.” Studies show that there has been a demographic transformation of the situation of Christianity within the world as a whole since the Edinburgh Missionary conference (Walls 1996:184). This is particularly reflected in the exponential growth of Christianity in the Global South, thus world Christianity (cf. Jenkins 2006:9). Seen in light of the old paradigm of Christendom therefore, world Christianity is indicative of the global scope of the Christian faith.

According to sociologist Robert Wuthnow (2009:34), the phrase “world Christianity” first appeared in Francis John McConnell’s *Human Needs and World Christianity* (1927). The phrase was later popularised through the writings of Dana Robert (2000), Phillip Jenkins (2002), and Lamin Sanneh (2003). In this study, I follow Lamin Sanneh’s (2003) rendering of both “global Christianity” and “world Christianity”. Accordingly, “global Christianity” will refer to churches of the North or Western worlds, formerly known within missionary circles as “sending” churches. The term “world Christianity” will be used to refer to churches of the Global South and East, formerly known as “younger” churches.

b) *A Reversal of the Christian Geography*

World Christianity bespeaks of a major demographic shift within Christianity, which has resulted in a new understanding of Christianity as a World Religion. Numerical details of this demographic shift are well captured in the *World Christian Encyclopedia* (2001) and the recently published *Atlas of Global Christianity* (2009). This demographic shift has been dubbed as ‘the shift in Christianity’s centre of gravity’. Lamin Sanneh (2003, 2005, 2008), Philip Jenkins (2002, 2006), and Andrew Walls (1996, 2002) have done considerable work in their respective attempts at describing the trends shaping world Christianity and the implications thereof.

Already in 1976, Swiss Roman Catholic Capuchin missionary to Tanzania Walbert Bühlmann (1977:ix) coined the term “the Third Church,” on the analogy of the Third World to refer to emerging Christian communities in Africa, Asian and Latin America. Bühlmann

predicted that the centre of gravity of Christianity would shift from the Northern hemisphere to the Southern hemisphere. For him, “the Third Church is the Church of the future as well as the future of the Church” (Bühlmann 1977:23). Indeed, as Robert (2000) shows, this prediction came to pass. In a much more nuanced manner, Andrews Walls has discussed this significant shift in the centre of gravity of Christianity in several of his publications. According to Walls (2002:30), the demographic and geographical centre of gravity of Christianity is subject to periodic shifts. He understands Christian history as “the story of successive transformations of the Christian faith following its translation into a series of diverse cultural settings” (Walls 2002:194). In this regard, he cites historic shifts in the centre of gravity of Christianity, beginning in the 1<sup>st</sup> century with the shift from a Hebrew to a Graeco-Roman (Hellenistic) milieu, and then from that Hellenistic-Mediterranean setting to the Germanic regions of Europe in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries. Further, Walls shows how with the voyagers of discovery, Europeans then exported the Christian faith to other parts of the world, beginning with the Roman Catholic mission in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and later that of the Protestants in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Finally, Walls points to present demographic shift of Christianity to the Global South, describing it as a huge reversal of Christian geography. In all these demographic shifts, Walls (2002:32) argues, “a threatened eclipse of Christianity was averted by its cross-cultural diffusion.” In this manner, Walls (2002:31) underscores a view of the history of Christianity as a “serial process of recession and advance, of withering heartland and emergence.”

In his *The Next Christendom* (2002), American historian and scholar of religion Philip Jenkins has succinctly described the massive shift to Christianity in the Global South. While taking note of earlier research by Walls, he further argues that the future of Christianity is fixed in the Global South; it is embedded in the third world. Missiologist Dana Robert (2000:50) summarises the implications of the demographic shift with a telling statement: “The typical late twentieth-century Christian was no longer a European man, but a Latin American or African woman.” Thus, the demographic shift of Christianity in recent times has been a southward shift. It needs to be observed though, that this shift does not entail a single “southern” Christianity. To be sure, the new landscape of world Christianity offers a mosaic of many varieties of Christian expressions and practices. Some observers interpret this multiplicity in terms of the adaptability of the Christian faith itself (cf. Bediako 1995:109-123; Sanneh 1989; Walls 2002).<sup>5</sup> However, reasons for the drastic change in the profile of world Christianity are notorious and too diverse to pinpoint. Robert (2009:70) suggests that both external and internal factors to Christianity may account for this. Of the external factors, Robert lists decolonisation, population explosion, urbanisation, migration, globalisation and improved transportation, and communication networks.

Within the broader context of the demographic shift of Christianity Jenkins (2002:3,90) projects that by 2050, the largest Christian population will reside in Africa (cf. Barrett et al 2001). That Christianity is rapidly growing in Africa is well captured by Schreier (1991:vii) when he perceptively observes that “Africa is the fastest growing Christian continent in the world.” The demographic shift has brought about a diversity of Christianities within the (sub-Saharan) African context. This fact has been well documented. Suffice it to state here that this diversity of Christianities in Africa has evolved over time, beginning with the African

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<sup>5</sup> Scholars Andrew Walls, Kwame Bediako and Lamin Sanneh have explained this in terms of translatability. Andrew Walls (1981:39) has thus spoken of the Christian religion as “culturally infinitely translatable”. Building on Walls’ thinking in this regard, Bediako (1995:62,109) has described the translatability as signifying the fundamental relevance and accessibility of the Christian religion “to persons in any culture within which the Christian faith is transmitted and assimilated”. This is another way of underscoring the universality of the Christian religion.

Instituted Churches and presently with that of the many forms of African Pentecostalism (see Barrett 1971; Daneel 1987). In this matrix, many observers note that mainline churches (Roman Catholic and Historic Protestant churches) have felt the impact of this changing landscape. The responses of these mainline churches to the “new” Christianities have ranged from a total rejection of the new forms of African Christianity to making internal adjustments in terms of theology and worship.

Unarguably, the rapid numerical growth of Christianity on the African continent cannot be fully accounted for without taking proper cognizance of the Pentecostal phenomena. The huge diversity of Pentecostalism however, makes the task of attaching a clear label to this phenomenon problematic. Several publications on Pentecostalism in Africa posit different classifications for describing the Pentecostal phenomena in Africa (Anderson 2010, 2004; Gifford 2004; Kalu 2008; Lado 2006; Sanneh 1990). According to Lado (2006), four main variants of African Pentecostalism can be distinguished, namely; the independent African churches with Pentecostal features (also called spiritual churches), the classic Pentecostal churches (dependent or independent), the neo-Pentecostal churches, and the charismatic movements within the Roman Catholic or Protestant churches (cf. Anderson 2010). Admittedly, there are varied nuances and emphases among these different variants. In this study, the term Pentecostal will therefore be used to refer to a wide range of Christian movements which share some similar expressions such as classical Pentecostalism, charismatic renewal movements, and neo-Pentecostalism. More specifically, the term ‘African Pentecostalism’ will be employed to refer to this phenomenon within the context of African Christianity. The idea of speaking about African Pentecostalism in this broader sense despite the acknowledgement that there are varied nuances among the different variants of African Pentecostalism is based on the realisation that a recognisable common thread runs through the different variants of African Pentecostalism. This is the stress placed on the power of the Holy Spirit and the emphasis on material prosperity of believers.

According to Allan Anderson (2006:117), “Pentecostalism is one of the most significant expressions of Christianity on the African continent today and probably the most rapidly expanding, not only in its thousands of denominational forms but also in its effects upon older churches.” Thus, it is not an overestimation to assert that Pentecostalism is fast becoming the characteristic form of African Christianity (Anderson 1992:116). But wherein lies the ecumenical challenge of these developments?

The *World Christian Encyclopedia* estimates that Christianity had divided into 33,820 denominations by the end of the second millennium. These estimates, as Granberg – Michaelson (2013:14) observes, are indeed astonishing for they indicate the “growing complexity, enormous diversity, and proliferating disunity of world Christianity.” Looked at from the perspective of institutional ecumenism, it is astounding to note that the WCC comprises only 349 denominations, while the AACC records 183 member churches in 42 African countries. In both the WCC and the AACC, member churches are mainly from the historic Protestant and the Orthodox churches. The challenge of the new Christian configuration on the African continent for instance, has therefore been the continued denominational disunity of the churches and the emergence of new denominations that operate in ecclesiological worlds detached from the traditional ecumenical structures. To help its member churches to address challenges posed by proliferation of Pentecostal type churches, the AACC set up a study project in 1990 to investigate these new churches. One of the outcomes of this project was the publication of *New Dimensions in African Christianity* edited by Paul Gifford (1992), coordinator of the project (see Gifford 1994).

From the foregoing, it be argued that dramatic shift in world Christianity has accentuated

the divisions and tensions in the Global South and its ecumenical institutions. It thus poses serious challenges to nurturing unity in world Christianity.

Swedish ecumenist Jonas Johnson (2013:103) underscores this point: “The greatest challenge to the global ecumenical movement ... is the larger number of new forms of Christianity which have sprung up in all parts of the world.” Johnson (2013:103) further observes that these new forms of Christianity seem to virtually stand outside the ecumenical movement. Within the WCC, the recognition that the Christian communities that constitute the fastest growing Christian communities – such as Pentecostals and evangelicals, which had not previously been very involved in official endeavours of the ecumenical movement in general or with the WCC in particular – resulted in discussions about broadening the ecumenical movement.

### *c) Broadening the Ecumenical Space*

One outcome of the quest to broaden the participation in the ecumenical movement was the creation of the Global Christian Forum (GCF). The idea of a GCF was initiated by the WCC at its eighth general Assembly in Harare in 1998 (see Huibert 2009). Following several regional consultations, the GCF held its first world gathering in Lumuru, Kenya in 2007. The second global meeting took place in Manado in 2011. The creation of the GCF answers a number of questions raised regarding whether the WCC with its formal membership is the only way for Christian churches to relate to one another (see Radano 2012:339). The GCF is intended to be a platform that broadens ecumenical participation in dialogue with charismatics, Pentecostals, and other churches that have not been active in the ecumenical movement (see Granberg-Michaelson 2013:60-69). Even with such initiatives, it remains necessary to pose the question of what Christian identity and unity might mean in changing ecclesial landscapes. This is especially important given that many Pentecostal churches continue to think of the ecumenical movement suspiciously (Robeck 2002:1214).

In light of the demographic shift of Christianity to the Global South as argued above, two observations can be made with regard to Christianity in the Global North (particularly in Europe). Firstly, while Christianity is rapidly spreading in the Global South, the financial resources are largely concentrated in the Global North. According to Oduyoye (2004:470), while it is true that “Africa’s financial participation in the ecumenical movement has been far below that of Europe and North America”, African hospitality has never failed to facilitate ecumenical gatherings and encounters. Here one also ought to take into account the historical economic imbalances between the Global North and South. Yet, the significance of the huge numbers of Christians in Africa still needs to be probed. If numbers are anything to go by, one may ask what the real impact of the numerical growth of Christianity in Africa is. Of what significance and value are these numbers for Africa’s ecumenical endeavours, as well as its place in the universal church? Mugambi (1995:151) thus warns, “if African Christianity remains on the fringes of the Church Universal, what is the significance of its numerical strength?” Elsewhere, he argues that the shift the much talked about shift “ought to be reflected in the decision making structures of both the ecumenical movement and the world Christian communions” (Mugambi 2003:199). John Pobee (2001:324) puts the challenge even more bluntly: “Africa has received much from the ecumenical church based in the North; what contribution can this new centre of world Christianity make in turn?” I will return to these questions in chapter 4. Suffice to state here that the challenge to the churches in the Global South is as Kobia (2006) puts it, “the extent to which they are prepared to embrace their responsibility as the centre of Christianity.” In addition to this, there appears to be a tension between western centred ecumenism and new expressions of ecumenism that are emerging out of southern Christianities.

The second observation on the demographic shift relates to the fact that while Christianity is growing in numbers in the Global South, Christianity in the Global North is reported to be in recession. Andrew Walls (2009:48) has noted that “Between the twentieth century and the present day, Western Europe has moved from Christian heartland to Christian wasteland, and there has been a degree of withering in the West as a whole.” Reasons advanced for the decline of Christianity in Europe are varied. Some point to the cultural changes linked with the move from modernity to postmodernity. It is, however, not within the scope of this study to explore such reasons. Within the European religious scene, several patterns of religious life have emerged. Most obvious of these is the notion of “believing without belonging”. This means that most Europeans do not attend church regularly. While much need not be said on this, suffice it to state that the decline of membership in European churches has had an impact on the ecclesial landscape and subsequently on ecumenism. With regard to the later, the declining church membership in some European and North American churches is said to have had negative consequences on material resourcing for ecumenical bodies.

d) *Global South encounters the Global North*

Ecclesiastically, the European and North American landscape has also witnessed a plurality of Christianities, mainly as a result of migration (Hanciles 2008:7). As Jenkins (2002:192) notes, “while traditional Christianity is weakening in large sections of the North, it is indeed being reinforced and reinvigorated by Southern churches, by means of immigration and evangelisation.” In this sense, migration is impacting on the ecclesial landscapes in the Global North in a number of ways – such as through the rise in local denominational numbers, ethnic diversity in church membership and the formation of migrant churches (see Adogame 2013:73-80). Theologically however, the churches’ understanding and response to migration has recently been a subject of considerable attention within the ecumenical movement (see Jackson & Passarelli 2008:39-46).

Several migrant churches have emerged in recent times in many parts of Europe. These churches often begin as mono-ethnic “congregations” and gradually become multi-ethnic. For the purposes of this study, attention is here focussed on African migrant churches. Representative churches of this kind could be London’s Kingsway International Christian Centre (KICC) founded by Nigerian pastor Matthew Ashimolowo. The successes of these churches in providing spiritual support and fellowship for its membership notwithstanding, the extent to which migrant churches affect the religious lives of host societies remains highly debatable. While it is plausible to argue for the immense missionary potential of South – North migratory flows as some do (Hanciles 2008), the real fruits of South – North missionary impact on the Global North is yet to be harvested. This point is well underscored in the several essays published in a volume titled *European Pentecostalism*. This notwithstanding, one may trace a history of collaborative initiatives between migrant churches and the “host” Protestant churches together with their related organisations (Wahrlich-Oblau 2009:9-20).

The recession of Christianity in the West has further had implications on how mission is to be conceived today. As noted in section 2.4.2(a) above, the Christendom paradigm of mission with its territorial agenda has been challenged by the reality of the changed situation of world Christianity. This has raised questions regarding appropriate models or concepts of mission for the changed situation of world Christianity. This is especially critical for ecumenical engagement, given that the question of mission has been a core issue at stake in the relationship between the WCC, charismatics, Pentecostals, and evangelicals. In addition to this missional implication, one finds a significant shift in the writing of church history in contemporary studies on mission and non-Western Christianity. I will return to this issue in

chapter 4 below.

#### 2.4.4 Ecumenism in the context of Globalisation

The above elements of the changed ecumenical landscape have been compounded by the phenomenon of globalisation. In order to cast light on this, I will give a brief overview of the impact and challenge of globalisation on the ecumenical landscape. A more detailed discussion of the phenomenon will be addressed in Chapter 7 in the context of my analysis of the history of the AACC (see § 7.2.2 below).

The term globalisation has been described variously. Following sociologist Roland Robertson, the term globalisation is here used to describe “the compression of the world and the intensification of our conscious awareness of the world as a totality” (Robertson 1992:8). Most studies on globalisation indicate that this phenomenon entails increasing socio-cultural interconnectedness and our awareness of the world as a single place. Its emergence was indeed a complex historical process (Raiser 2002a:8-13). Amongst theologians in general, one finds competing scholarly views regarding the impact and challenge of globalisation on the ecumenical movement. Some such theologians are critical of globalisation (Moe-Lobeda 2002; Smit 2003), while others are optimistic globalists (Stackhouse 2007). Given the complexity surrounding the phenomenon of globalisation, the focus here is limited to the challenge of globalisation on “economic globalisation”, the “question of unity”, and on “ecclesiology and ethics”.

Within the WCC, the Harare Assembly (1998) may be said to have occasioned the emergence of coherent and comprehensive discussions on the challenges of globalisation as a major priority of the WCC in subsequent years. At Harare, discussion ensued on the need for a comprehensive approach on the ecumenical response to the challenge of economic globalisation. The Harare Assembly took some steps in responding to the challenges of globalisation by “issuing a jubilee call to end the stranglehold of debt on impoverished people” and with a number of policy recommendations (Kessler 1999:177ff). The Assembly recommended that:

The logic of globalisation needs to be challenged by an alternative way of life of community in diversity. Christians and churches should reflect on the challenge of globalisation from a faith perspective and, therefore, resist the unilateral domination of economic and cultural globalisation. The search for alternative options to the present economic system and the realisation of effective political limitations and corrections to the process of globalisation and its implications are urgently needed (Kessler 1999:183-184)

These recommendations later culminated in a call to an *Alternative Globalization Addressing Peoples and Earth* (AGAPE), which was endorsed at the Porto Alegre Assembly in 2006 (see WCC 2006a). Meeting a year and half earlier in Accra, Ghana, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) launched a similar challenge to the project of economic neoliberal globalisation. This meeting issued the call for a committed process of recognition, education and confession (*processus confessionis*) concerning economic injustice and ecological destruction (see § 3.2.4 below). These two initiatives were theological attempts to offer alternative visions to economic globalisation that are life affirming, participatory and all-inclusive. Meanwhile, within the circles of the AACC, several conferences and publications sought to address the challenges and impact of economic globalisation on the African continent. It was recognised that the negative impact of globalisation on Africa only exacerbated the already troubled continent which continued to face diverse social, economic and political challenges (see § 4 below). Thus, at the AACC Assembly in Yaoundé in 2003, there was a special focus on challenges posed by globalisation on the African continent. The contribution of the AACC in addressing challenges related to economic globalisation will be

discussed in detail in chapter 7 under the rubric of neo-liberal globalisation.

Globalisation has also posed a challenge to the ecumenical question of unity. Aruna Gnanadason (2004:16) frames this challenge thus: “If the ecumenical movement has at its heart the unity of humankind then globalisation poses a direct challenge to it” (cf. Raiser 2002a:52). This challenge was highlighted at the Harare Assembly where it was observed that the vision behind globalisation is “a competing vision of the Christian commitment to the *oikoumenē*, the unity of humankind and the whole inhabited earth” (Kessler 1999:183).

Drawing on the discourse of globalisation, one may observe that this challenge initially props up in light of advances in communicational technologies and structures that are generally regarded as key drivers of the compression of space. Such advances have, as Briggs (2004:659) observes, brought about a “false type of global unity”. Similarly, Dutch theologian Bert Hoedemaker (1998:310) notes that globalization is a “deceptive form of “unity”.” For Hoedemaker, globalisation suggests universal salvation while hiding and disguising division and fragmentation – a growing dichotomy between rich and poor, between global uniformity and local pluriformity – and a merciless attack on the “integrity of creation”. He continues:

In this respect it signals the failure of the “modern visions of unity” which had been so important for the genesis of the ecumenical movement. The ecumenical movement is deeply indebted to modernity and now finds itself called, by the logic of its own development, to rethink this heritage in a fundamental way (Hoedemaker 1998:310).

The CUV (2.9) thus spoke of global unity “as a serious threat to the integrity of the ecumenical movement, whose organizational forms represent a distinctly different model of relationships, based on solidarity and sharing, mutual accountability and empowerment.” These perspectives show that the ecumenical movement has identified the necessity to rethink its visions of unity to reflect concerns for inclusiveness and community globalisation. To use CUV language, the real challenge that globalisation poses – particularly on the ecumenical vision of unity – is on (re) defining the *catholicity of the church* in the context of the *oikoumenē*. In his reflections on globalisation, Robert Schreiter (1997) has made helpful pointers in this direction. According to Schreiter (1997:127), “a renewed and expanded concept of catholicity may well serve as a theological response to the challenge of globalisation.” He sees such a concept to be “most suited to developing a theological view of theology between the global and the local in a world church.”

Another challenge of globalisation on the ecumenical movement regards the question of “ecclesiology and ethics”. In today’s global era, it is recognisable that the issues that divide the world such as racism, violence, economic disparity and sexism also divide the church. To speak of such issues as not only being questions of social justice, but also of ecclesiology, was already becoming central in ecumenical discussions during the 1990’s (see Aagaard 1996:139). This especially culminated in the WCC study project on ecclesiology and ethics, which sought to explore the link between what the church *is* and what the church *does* (see chapter 3). According to South African theologian Dirkie Smit (2003:430), the ecclesiology and ethics study process was “at least partly caused by the impact and challenge of globalisation on ecumenism.” In his reflections on moral formation in a globalised world – within the context of the study on ecclesiology and ethics – Raiser (2002a:149) notes: “in a situation where several moral and cultural environments overlap and where globalisation colonises human life, Christians need particular guidance for moral discernment.” Behind this formulation is Raiser’s awareness that in the context of pluralistic societies, an inevitable outcome of globalisation, there are often competing and overlapping moral and cultural questions which makes it difficult for Christians in different parts of the world to arrive at common values. In an earlier article on ecclesiology and ethics, Raiser (1996:5) notes that

“the progressive globalization of all areas of life was steadily increasing the scope and difficulty of ethical problems.” On this basis, Raiser underscores the relevance of notions arising out of the “ecclesiology and ethics” study project – such as “moral community” and “moral formation” – for coherent theological response to globalisation.

As the above shows, globalisation has indeed contributed to the changed landscape of the ecumenical movement. One may argue that it is within the context of these changing realities that the ACCC and the WCC have carried out their ecumenical tasks in the last few decades. In view of the foregoing, it may be argued that a reasonable understanding of the background to the changing ecumenical landscape as outlined above is germane to a proper analysis of how the tension between ecclesiology and ethics has been addressed in the ecumenical movement in general and within the AACC in particular.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has offered a survey of the historical development of the ecumenical movement and described the changed ecumenical landscape. With regard to the former, it was highlighted that the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly after the Second World War, were dominated by movements of convergence. After the 1960's, an increased diversity of players in the ecumenical movement emerged, mainly as a consequence of the integration of the IMC with the WCC. A significant development of this period was the formation of regional ecumenical organisations such as the AACC. In the later decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a deep sense of crisis was discerned by several ecumenists at many levels of the ecumenical movement. Thus, the quest for a common vision of the ecumenical movement became necessary.

It was argued in this chapter that the ecumenical landscape has significantly changed. The chapter explored a number of elements of the changed ecumenical landscape and highlighted how the shift in centre of gravity for Christianity to the Global South has altered the map of Christianity. It was argued that this has had inevitable ecumenical implications such as the role and place of Africa Christianity in the global ecumenical movement. In this connection, it was also noted that the form of Christianity that is rapidly growing in the Global South is characteristically Pentecostal, charismatic and evangelical. Given that most of these forms of Christianity stand outside the ecumenical movement, the chapter pointed out that initiatives such as the GCF are examples of attempts at broadening the ecumenical space. Such initiatives are indicative of the necessity of ecumenical endeavour beyond the existing institutional framework of the ecumenical movement.

Ending with a brief discussion of challenges posed by globalisation on the ecumenical movement, the chapter underscored the changed situation of both the church and the world. It is in light of this global survey of the changing ecumenical landscape that I now turn to the WCC's study project on ecclesiology and ethics.

## **Chapter 3: The Ecclesiology and Ethics Project: An Overview and Critical Analysis.**

### **3.1 Introduction**

Having described the major global ecumenical initiatives since Edinburgh 1910 and the changing ecumenical landscape in the previous chapter, the present chapter will focus on the ecumenical tension between ecclesiology and ethics. The chapter is specifically aimed at providing an overview and critical analysis of the Ecclesiology and Ethics study project which was jointly conducted by Units I (*Faith and Order*) and III (Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation) of the WCC between 1992 and 1996. The purpose of such an overview is to identify the central contributions of the said WCC study project on the quest to find a proper connection between ecclesiology and ethics. To do so, the chapter will draw on several official texts on the ecclesiology and ethics study project, as well as other related literature from within the WCC constituency in general. Further, the chapter will engage with the views of some of the scholars who participated in the project.

The first part of the chapter offers a brief overview of earlier attempts to relate ecclesiology and ethics in the ecumenical movement. This will then lead to a critical analysis of the three reports of the Ecclesiology and Ethics study project. The last section of the chapter will make tentative conclusions on the significance of this WCC study project for discourse on the “being” and “doing” of the church within the context of the AACC.

### **3.2 A brief overview of early attempts to relate Ecclesiology and Ethics**

In order to adequately set forth an analysis of the ecclesiology and ethics study project, this section will review earlier attempts to relate ecclesiology and ethics. What the “and” between ecclesiology and ethics means has been expressed variously. Some have spoken of the “and” in terms of linkage, interdependence, or relation. Following Danish theologian Anna Marie Aagaard (1993), this study will use these different expressions of the “and” interchangeably. To place the focus of this section in perspective, I will centre my discussion on two aspects. First, I will identify the ecumenical tension between ecclesiology and ethics as a tension between two vital concerns of the modern ecumenical vision. This will be subsequently followed by a brief historical overview of earlier attempts to relate the search for unity and the social responsibility of the church.

#### **3.2.1 Separate visions on Ecclesiology and Ethics: An Ecumenical Tension**

From their inception, *Faith and Order* (hereafter FO) and *Life and Work* (hereafter LW) were concerned with the search for the visible unity of the church and for justice in the world, respectively. FO concentrated on divisions of the church on matters of doctrine without paying attention to social and ethical issues that are equally church dividing. LW on the other hand focussed on social, ethical and political issues in isolation from church dividing doctrinal issues. Put differently, it may be argued that the division between these two ecumenical concerns has to do with the mode of doing things in FO and LW. In FO things are always rather churchy and self-isolating so that talk about the world is always about the world far away. In LW (until recently) the temptation is always to talk about the church in functionalist terms as another NGO, given the need for cooperation with groups other than the church and with the real issues on the ground. Over time, a tendency therefore developed to see these two concerns as separate and distinct with some considering either one or the other as the most urgent ecumenical task of the ecumenical movement. This led to the polarisation of the concerns of FO and LW within the ecumenical movement. Such polarisation highlights

a critical tension between two ecumenical concerns. The tension may thus be understood in terms of the separation between the theological concerns of FO and the socio-ethical commitments of the WCC in its different forms – for a “Responsible Society”, “Church and Society”, the “Commission on the Churches’ Participation in Development”, and more recently for “Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation” (JPIC).

In his introductory essay in the first publication of the ecclesiology and ethics study project, Hoedemaker (1993) notes that these two concerns are aspects of the original ecumenical dream, which have “developed into separate establishments and types of discourse.” For Hoedemaker (1993:1), the recognition of the need to bring the concerns of these two streams together – as implied in the initiation of the ecclesiology and ethics is partly an awareness of the “failure of earlier dreams” namely, that the ecumenical movement “would be one complete vision, a world – convincing witness, in which unity and moral conviction would be two sides of the same coin.”

Historically therefore, the tension between the approaches of FO and LW has indeed been a long standing point of tension in the ecumenical conversation about unity. Paul Abrecht (1970:257) captures this tension thus,

Those who are sceptical about ecumenical social thinking ask: How is it that theologians and laymen are able to come to a relatively large measure of agreement on practical Christian social action in spite of their inability to resolve certain fundamental theological issues of faith and order.

Yet as many ecumenical theologians observe, “the conviction that the call to unity (ecclesiology) and the call to witness and service (ethics) service are inseparably interlinked has, of course, been central to the ecumenical movement from its beginnings” (Best 1992:131; cf. Best & Robra 1997:2). In light of this, Duncan Forrester (1997b:27) argues that the ecumenical movement has from its very beginning wrestled with the relation between ecclesiology and ethics (cf. Lodberg 1995:5). What has been crucial in this regard is to find a proper connection between the concerns of FO and LW. This eventually necessitated the initiation of a study project on ecclesiology and ethics during the 1990s. This project will be discussed in detail in the following (see §3.3 below). Before doing so, it is relevant to identify antecedents of the WCC study.

### **3.2.2 Some Earlier Attempts to relate Ecclesiology and Ethics**

In his account of the LW movement Nils Ehrenstrom (2004:596) concluded with the following words:

It has been perhaps inevitable, but none the less a grave disadvantage to the ecumenical movement, that the various aspects of ecumenical concern – the unity and renewal of the Church, the evangelistic task ... , the social and political witness of the Churches – have been developed in separation from one another. Progress toward integration has been made, but the process is as yet very far from complete.

This quote from Ehrenstrom highlights the polarisation of vital ecumenical concerns. Well aware of such polarisation and some attempts at integration, German Lutheran theologian Margot Kässmann noted an absence of a basic, coherent and argued reflection on the ecclesiological implications of social action in her investigation of the history of both FO and LW before the Vancouver Assembly in 1983. She thus writes:

The fundamental relation between the social responsibility of the church and the theological quest for unity was not worked out. ... It is on the other hand, obvious that mere cooperation between the subunits of the WCC does not provide a solution. The problem centres around the

quest for a comprehensive concept that will hold ethics and dogmatics together in the “*oikoumenē*” (Kässmann cited by Aargaad 1993:9).

While the absence of a comprehensive concept(s) for relating ecclesiology and ethics is clearly discernible as Kässmann’s research (1948 – 1983) indicates, the conviction that there is a relation between ecclesiology and ethics was in years that followed steadily emerging. In fact, for many ecumenical observers, ecclesiology and ethics came to be seen as inseparable (see Aagaard 1993:10; Best 1992:139; Kinnamon 2014:63, 2004:46). Nevertheless, spelling out what that relation is has been difficult and controversial in the history of the ecumenical movement. Perhaps the challenge has been how to describe and theologically ground the relation/interdependence/link between ecclesiology and ethics. A look at some earlier attempts at finding the link between ecclesiology and ethics before 1993 is instructive in this regard.

Within the nascent LW movement, concern with the social responsibility of the church was primary for its self-understanding. Already at its inaugural meeting at Stockholm in 1925, LW ruled out discussions of doctrine and became famous for its slogan ‘doctrine divides, service unites’. At its next meeting in Oxford in 1937, a new emphasis emerged. The phrase “Let the church be the church” has often been used to describe the spirit at Oxford. In a way, this highlighted a budding concern that doctrine and ethics could not be held apart. Meeting at a time when the church in Germany was struggling against Nazism, this conference saw the being of the church to be implicated in the German struggle. In the words of Abrecht (1970:250) “the churches were challenged at Oxford to provide a theologically developed social ethic as a guide to Christian action in the midst of the Great Depression and the ideological conflicts that beset the Western world.” After the WCC inaugural Assembly in Amsterdam (1948), LW continued its work under the broad rubric of “church and society”. Subsequently, LW successively developed three concepts of society namely “the responsible society” (1948-1960’s), “just, participatory and sustainable society” (1970-1983) and the JPIC (1983 onwards). It may be observed that any ecclesiological reflection that was done within the framework of these concepts of society adopted a functional approach (cf. Raiser 1996:5).

Be that as it may, one may still argue that ecclesiological concerns emerged at several points in the history of the LW tradition. The consultation on theological issues of Church and Society that took place in Zagorsk, Russia, in March 1968 expressed the need for systematic theological study of the ethical issues arising from practical ecumenical work (see Abrecht 1970:258). Another significant context in which the ecclesiological concern arose within the LW tradition relates to the WCC “Programme to Combat Racism”, which was set up in 1969 and later endorsed at the Nairobi Assembly in 1975. Within this framework, the question was raised as regard the extent to which racism within the church had to be considered as a fundamental challenge to the unity of the church (see § 3.2.4 below). The ecclesiological concern also emerged in the work of the Commission on the Churches Participation in Development (CCPD), which later engaged in a study on “The Church and the Poor”. As Raiser (1996:6) puts it, this study “considered whether poverty ... must not be elevated to the status of a constitutive mark of the being of the church.” In this vein, a critical question emerged regarding the tension between rich and poor in the church. Questions ensued concerning the implications of such a tension on the credibility of ecumenical efforts to manifest the unity of the church? Reflections on such questions led to the view that poverty was to be seen together with unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity as a mark of the church, thus a church of the poor (see Santa Ana 1979, 1982). In a concluding essay in one of the WCC’s publications on the church and the poor, De Santa Ana perceptively noted the need to consider the nature and form of the church when it tries to respond to Christ’s presence in the poor. In his own attempt to address this, he argued that since the unity of the

church cannot be separated from the unity of humankind, and “because the unity in Christ is a unity of all, it demands decisions which are sometimes political, economic and social in character” (De Santa Ana 1978:185). According to Michael Taylor (1995:102), the study on the church and the poor implies that “social responsibility is not an appendix or an optional extra but an indispensable part of the church’s work.”

In connection with the ecclesiological questions prompted by the question of the poor, it needs to be observed that emerging contextual theologies from Africa, Asia and Latin America equally raised questions that had serious implications for ecclesiology (cf. § 2.2.3.b above). Although such ecclesiological concerns were emerging within the LW tradition, they nevertheless remained largely functional. That is to say, for the LW tradition, interest in ecclesiological issues such as the visible unity was only for practical and functional purposes. Commenting on this, Smit (2003:426) observes that LW would, at the most, regard “ecclesial unity as necessary only for practical reasons, to make the collective efforts of the church stronger, in the face of the enormous social, political, and economic challenges they were facing.”

With regard to FO, one may observe that the remit of this stream of the ecumenical movement was, from its very inception at Lausanne in 1927, to address the issues of doctrine, worship and church order. Developed independently of LW until their coming together to form the WCC in 1948, the WCC commission on *Faith and Order* soon came to face the question of ethics as having implications for ecclesiology. This was not a natural outcome, of course. At the third world conference of the FO commission at Lund (1952) it was recognised that in addition to dogmatic factors of church division, there were also political, national, and social causes of church division. Nevertheless, the latter were simply referred to as “non-theological factors of denominationalism”.

Since the 1960’s studies emerged from within FO, which explored ethical questions in relation to the search for unity. Thomas Best’s (1988:13) description of this new FO approach within the framework of a *Faith and Order* study on “The Unity of the Church and the Renewal of Human Community” is instructive:

Churches today are divided not only over the traditional theological issues of transubstantiation or the proper age and forms for baptism but also, and often with more tragic results, by the alienation between ethnic groups, social and economic classes, and the sexes: the divisions of the world are, insofar as the church is a human institution, church-divisive realities. This did not mean that Faith and Order was shifting its attention to “non-theological” factors, but a new awareness that sexism and racism raise precisely theological and ecclesiological issues, and that work towards greater visible unity of the churches must also take account of these realities.

With such emphasis, the point was made that the search for Christian unity and the struggle to overcome the brokenness of the human community are part of one and same response to the gospel of Jesus Christ. In view of this, it can be argued that discussion on the relation between ecclesiology and ethics has not been completely absent in the work of FO (cf. Best 1992:142; Gibault 2013).

From the above very brief description of the respective emphases of LW and FO, one may note that there have been varying attempts at relating ecclesiology and ethics, both from the ecclesiological and ethical points of view. In what follows, I will point out specific instances of attempts to relate ecclesiology and ethics in the period before the launch of the ecclesiology and ethics study project (1992-1996).

Amongst notable historical attempts in the search for the linkage between ecclesiology and ethics, one may identify amongst others the Uppsala Assembly (1968), the *status confessionis* concept of the Lutheran World Federation (1970’s), the Nairobi Assembly (1975), the BEM

text (1982), the Vancouver Assembly (1983), and the JPIC process. In the following subsections, I will highlight the ways in which ecclesiology and ethics were potentially brought together in such attempts. However, it must be noted that the periodisation as suggested does not imply a conscious and sustained attempt for the relation between the being and social responsibility of the church by any stream of the ecumenical movement. Furthermore, it does not also suggest a linear trajectory of any sort.

### 3.2.3 Linking Church and World: Uppsala Assembly 1968

After the WCC founding Assembly in Amsterdam in 1948, ethical questions were not as yet clearly integrated in reflections on ecclesiology and vice versa. Later however, concepts emerged which suggested an interrelation between ecclesiology and ethics. In this regard, the Uppsala Assembly deserves our attention.

#### (a) *Catholicity: Linking Church and World*

In the report of the fourth Assembly of the WCC held in Uppsala in 1968, one finds a linking of the visions of FO and LW by means of the notion of catholicity. This is particularly so in the report of section 1 on “The Holy Spirit and the Catholicity of the Church”. This section report brought together insights from earlier FO studies on “God in the Nature of History” and on the “Significance of the Early Church for the Ecumenical Movement”. The said report initially began as a working paper of the Commission on FO but later became an Assembly report at the request of the WCC central committee.

In his historical account of the concept of catholicity in the WCC in the period between the assemblies in Amsterdam (1948) and Uppsala (1968), Patrick Fuerth (1973) has argued that the reality of the church as catholic was always an important concern for the WCC, especially in its FO tradition. Fuerth (1973:106-201) has elaborately shown that in the breadth of its meaning, the concept of catholicity was conceived in the period of the WCC’s history from New Dehli to Uppsala. The actual concentration on the concept of catholicity was undertaken by a group chosen at the FO meeting at Aarhus, Denmark in 1964 to study the nature of unity in preparation for the Uppsala Assembly. The first draft of this study appeared in 1966 under the title “the Holy Spirit and Unity”. This was later subjected to further discussions resulting in major revisions on to the draft, most notably at the meeting of the study group (London 1967) and more extensively at the FO commission held in Bristol, England (1967). The final draft – entitled “The Holy Spirit and the Catholicity of the Church” – was presented to the WCC central committee in Greece in 1967 where it was subsequently approved for discussion at the Uppsala Assembly (see Fuerth 1973:146 – 165).

This report spoke of the unity of the church using the notion of catholicity (*kata holon*). Interpreting catholicity pneumatologically, the report noted that it is the Holy Spirit who makes the church an authoritative witness in this world. It further adds that “Catholicity is a gift of the Spirit” which is also “a task, a call and an engagement” (Goodall 1968:7). The Uppsala report also expressed catholicity Christologically by describing the notion as “the deeper, internal dimension” of unity rooted in Christ’s universal work. In all these expressions, the emphasis was on catholicity as a quality rather than on the geographical connotations of the term (see Klooster 1969:77, 82). In this connection, Schlink (1969:102) observes: “The advance made by Uppsala is that the concept of catholicity no longer denotes one confession, and further that it is freed from its geographical connotation and linked with the operation of the Holy Spirit.” In the words of Uppsala report itself, catholicity is “the quality by which the church expresses the fullness, the integrity and the totality of life in Christ” (par 7).

In view of the above, one may observe that there was an evident insistence on the

connection between ecclesiology and ethics in the Uppsala report (see Goodall 1968:11-18). This is apparent in its description of catholicity – a clearly ecclesiological principle – as being connected with the human aspirations for peace, justice and community. It must be noted, however, that the ecclesiological reflection on ethics at Uppsala needs to be understood within the framework of the *Sitz-im-Leben* of the period. Uppsala was held during the period of the social upheavals of the 1960's and only two years after the Geneva Conference on Church and Society (1966). In many respects, the Geneva conference marked a decisive point in the development of ecumenical social thought. At this conference, questions around the Christian response to social and political revolutions of the time were addressed. The social upheavals of the time were intensified on the one hand by the challenges of secularisation, technological and scientific developments, and on the other hand, by the economic, sociological and political crises in most parts of the world (see Abrecht 1961; Goodall 1968:12, 45). Clearly, Uppsala met at a time of tumultuous world events and in that sense the “world set the agenda for Uppsala” (Mudge 2004:282).

Uppsala framed the ecclesiological discussion of the unity of the church within the theology of *missio dei* (cf. Lodberg 1995:3). The report thus notes:

... it is within this very world that God makes catholicity available to men through the ministry of Christ in his Church. The purpose of Christ is to bring people of all times, all races, of all places, of all conditions, into an organic and living unity in Christ by the Holy Spirit under the universal fatherhood of God (WCC 1968:13).

This reference indicates that Uppsala's notion of catholicity linked the unity of church with the unity of all humanity. In the often-quoted sentence from the Uppsala Assembly, the church is thus described as “the sign of the coming unity of mankind” (Goodall 1968:17). The unity of mankind [sic] is connected with the task of catholicity. That catholicity is a task is well expressed in the report when it speaks of catholicity as a gift of the Spirit that involves a task and quest (Goodall 1968:7). As a task, it means that “the Church must express this catholicity in its worship by providing a home for all sorts and conditions of men and women; and in its witness and service by working for the realization of genuine humanity” (Goodall 1968:par 9). Accordingly, discrimination based on race, wealth, social class or education, or on “cultural, ethnic, or political allegiances” is described as a denial of the church's catholicity.

Uppsala's description of the church as “the sign of the coming unity of mankind” is equally indicative of the eschatological dimension of catholicity. In Conradie's (2013a:48) interpretation of this often-quoted phrase from Uppsala, the statement “indicates that the unity of humankind is an eschatological term for the promise of the coming reign of God”. In my view, the crucial point here may well lay in a tension between the eschatological vision of the kingdom of God and the historical events that take place in God's world. As Fuerth (1973:164) argues “the nature of the Church's catholicity then, is that it is in state of becoming, and depends on the continuous living presence of the Spirit and his activity.” Simply put therefore, catholicity is at the same time an eschatological concept.

Although one may note some limitations in Uppsala's *sign* language (see Hoedemaker 1998:309), it was significant that the Uppsala Assembly tried to link church and world, salvation history and secular history by means of “sign theology” (Aagaard 1993:14). For as Raiser (1996:6) notes, “talk of the church as “sign” became the most important theological link between ecclesiology and ethics” during this period.

A further note ought to be made on Uppsala's understanding of the church as *sign*. According to Lodberg (1995:3), such an understanding is intended to keep the two aspects together in a dialectical tension: *intra ecclesia* and *extra ecclesia*. That is to say, “unity within

the church is established by working for unity in the world outside the church. In the same way the work for unity in the world will influence the life of the church” (see Goodall 1968:17).

*(b) The Unity of the Church and the Unity of Mankind*

The relation between the unity of the church and the unity of mankind was taken up in a FO study on “The Unity of the Church – The Unity of Mankind” (1969-1974) at the approval of the Uppsala Assembly. The initial draft of this study that had been presented to the Uppsala Assembly, underwent several revisions without coming to a conclusion. At the FO commission meeting of 1971 in Louvain, Belgium, the traditional FO focus on church unity was placed in the context of human, as well as confessional divisions (see WCC 1971). Thus, it had this discussion pursued in five sections in which the interrelation of the unity of the church with (1) the struggle for justice in society; (2) the encounter with living faiths; (3) the struggle against racism; (4) the handicapped in society; and (5) differences in culture was explored. This led to the so – called intercontextual (listen to raisers interview) method. The main results from these section discussions were envisaged to be their contribution to the main discussion on the theme of “The Unity of the Church – The Unity of Mankind”.

The study continued the “sign theology” and was ended in 1974 only to be revisited by the FO commission later in the 1980’s. Some changes in perspective on the bold “sign theology” of Uppsala is clearly noticeable in subsequent studies such as “The community of women and men in the church” (Sheffield, 1981) and “The unity of the church and the renewal of human community” (Lima, 1982). I will return to this discussion in what follows (see 3.2.7 below).

### **3.2.4 The notion of a Status Confessionis**

From the “sign theology” of Uppsala and ensuing studies on the unity of the Church and the Unity of Humankind, I now turn to a notion from the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) – *status confessionis*, which, as Aagaard (1993:15) argues, represents the only successful attempt to relate ecclesiology and ethics during the late 1970’s. *Status confessionis* is an ecclesiological notion coined in the conceptual language of the Lutheran tradition, which describes a situation of confession in which the integrity of the gospel is at stake. This notion has also found expression within Reformed theology especially within the South African context (see Cloete & Smit 1984). For instance, South African Reformed theologian Dirkie Smit has explored the background and meaning of the notion of *status confessionis* within Protestant circles. He offers an informative and comprehensive definition of *status confesessionis* thus:

Strictly speaking, one could say that the expression *status confessionis* means that a Christian, a group of Christians, a church, or a group of churches are of the opinion that a situation has developed, a moment of truth has dawned, in which nothing less than the gospel itself, their most fundamental confession concerning the Christian gospel itself, is at stake, so that they feel compelled to witness and act over against this threat (see Smit 1984:16).

In light of this understanding of *status confessionis*, Smit identifies three contexts during the 20<sup>th</sup> century within which a *status confessionis* was declared, namely the confessing church struggle in German (1934), the ecumenical rejection of racism by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) at Dar es Salaam (1977) and the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland’s discussion on the possession of weapons (1982).

One may argue that the term *status confessionis* gained popularity following the LWF’s declaration of apartheid as an issue of *status confessionis* at its assembly in Dar es Salaam in 1977. For the LWF (1977:180), declaring apartheid as *status confessionis* meant that “on the basis of faith and in order to manifest the unity of the church, churches would publicly and

unequivocally reject the existing apartheid system.” Thus, as Forrester (1997:40) observes in his reflections on *status confessionis*, “opposition to apartheid and racism was seen as integral to the faith and necessary for the integrity of the church”. Following this declaration, debate arose amongst Lutheran churches prompting the development of a study project in subsequent years aiming at analysing “the meaning of *status confessionis* [in order to] clarify the ethical and theological challenges inherent in the apartheid system” (see Lorenz 1983). In that study, Lutheran theologian Eckehart Lorenz underscored the linking of ecclesiology and ethics in the LWF’s declaration of apartheid as *status confessionis*. Lorenz (1983:43) notes that the LWF “statement makes a distinction between the political and spiritual dimensions of reality, but it does not separate them, since they are dynamically interrelated”.

Meeting in Ottawa in 1982, the WARC made a similar declaration to the one made by the LWF in 1977 by observing that the situation in South Africa “constitutes a *status confessionis* for our churches, which means that we regard this as an issue on which it is not possible to differ without seriously jeopardising the integrity of our common confession as Reformed churches” (1982:176-8). In light of this, the WARC suspended two Reformed Bodies from South Africa<sup>6</sup> on account of their theological support of apartheid and the exclusion of black people from communion. Subsequent discussions within the context of the WARC brought to the fore further reflections on *status confessionis*. Apart from the declaration at Ottawa, the General Assembly of the WARC took its discussion of *status confessionis* further at its meetings in Seoul (1989), in Debrecen (1997), and in Accra (2004). At the Seoul meeting, the WARC elaborately dealt with the issue of *status confessionis* thus:

Every declaration of the *status confessionis* is based on the conviction that the integrity of the gospel is at stake. It is a call from error to truth. It demands of the church a clear and unambiguous decision on the truth of the gospel and identifies the contrary view in doctrine and conduct of life as heretical. The declaring of the *status confessionis* is related to the practice of the church as well as to her teaching. The practice of the church must conform with her doctrine that demands the declaration of the *status confessionis*. The declaring of the *status confessionis* must be directed at a specific situation. It draws error that threatens a particular church to light. At the same time the underlying danger of this error endangers the integrity of the preaching of all churches. Declaring the *status confessionis* in a specific situation is simultaneously aimed at all churches and calls them to join in with the profession of faith” (Perret 1990:173-174).

It is necessary to offer some reflections here on the discussion on *status confessionis* at Debrecen and Accra, given the significance of such on the relation between ecclesiology and ethics. The discussions were largely precipitated by the need to offer a theological response on ethical issues that were seen by some to have an impact on the faith. At Debrecen, the WARC called on its member churches “on every level to an obliging process of increasing perception, clarification and of confessing (*processus confessionis*) regarding economic injustice and ecological destruction” (see WARC 1998:29). The Debrecen declaration was unique from earlier declarations, given its focus on the related issues of the economy and ecology. WARC had in the past called for *status confessionis* in cases of blatant racial and cultural discrimination and genocide. At Debrecen, the call was for “a committed process of progressive recognition, education and confession (*processus confessionis*) within all WARC member churches at all levels regarding economic injustice and ecological destruction”

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<sup>6</sup> These were namely the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika (NHKA) and the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK). The NGK was readmitted into membership of WARC in 2006 after aligning its teachings along the lines of the WARC anti-apartheid stance. The NHKA went through a long process readmission, which started in 2004 and came to an end in 2014 when it was finally readmitted back into the WARC (now WCRC). For a discussion on the readmission process of the NHKA, see Buitendag (2006:787-809). On the DRC’s road back into the wider ecumenical family see Niemandt (2015).

(WARC 1997:198). The Debrecen call was in part a response to the some proposals made at the Kitwe (1995) consultation on “Reformed Faith and Economic Justice” of the Southern African Alliance of Reformed Churches. It was at Kitwe that the first call to consider the global economy or the world economic order as a matter of confession (*status confessionis*) was made (see Kitwe Statement 1995). The Kitwe consultation observed that “the African reality of poverty caused by an unjust economic world order has gone beyond an ethical problem and become a theological one. It now constitutes a status confessionis. The gospel to the poor is at stake in the very mechanism of the global economy today.”

The *processus confessionis* called for at Debrecen culminated into the famous Accra Confession (2004), in which the WARC took a confessional stance on ecological and economic injustices (see § 7.2.2c below). Several theologians have been critical of the possibility of declaring a *status confessionis* on the related issues of ecology and economics. It is often asked how, for instance, the economic reality of our times challenge the Christian faith and whether it constitutes a *status confessionis* (see Conradie 2010:55; Möller 1996:139-143; Smit 2007:415). While the need for a Christian response to economic and ecological issues has been widely accepted as necessary, scholarly debate on whether or not this constitutes a *status confessionis* has characterised a number of reactions to the Accra confession. In light of such concerns, Conradie (2010:55) has argued that the WARC rightly opted for a *processus confessionis*. In a similar vein, Smit (2009:601) argues that the choice not to apply the term *status confessionis* was wise given that the most common criteria for such a declaration were not present in the contemporary process WARC was addressing, but also in terms of the WARC’s description of a *status confessionis* in Seoul. Similarly, German theologian Ulrich Möller (1996:138-144) observes that declaring a *status confessionis* on the impact of the global market may not be appropriate. In support of the *processus confessionis*, Möller (1996:143) argues that declaring a *status confessionis* at the present time “can only hamper communication and impair the openness which the confessing process requires.”

From the above, it may be argued that discussions on *status confessionis* in the context of the global market and ecological destruction have been more pronounced within Reformed circles. Such discussions have of course received mixed reactions, as shown above. Having explored the question of status confessionis within Reformed circles, it needs to be asked how the language of *status confessionis* has featured within the broader context of the WCC. Has such language been widely accepted and used within the WCC?

With reference to the WCC, Kässmann (cited in Aagaard 1993:15) has argued that “the *status confessionis* concept was largely neglected within the WCC” and to some extent even scorned as “ivory tower theology”. Citing the 1980 WCC World Conference on Racism, Aagaard too does not think that the LWF statement - discussed above - had any impact on the discourse on racism within the WCC. This notwithstanding, one could still argue that talk of “ethical heresy” within the WCC (particularly at Uppsala) has close affinities with the idea of *status confessionis* (see Goodall 1968:53, 337). In his speech at the Uppsala Assembly (1968), Visser ’t Hooft introduced the notion of “ethical heresy” on the ecumenical agenda when he spoke of racism and apartheid as the *ethical equivalent of heresy*.

From my discussion of the notion of *status confessionis* in relation to apartheid in South Africa and racism in general, it could be argued that ethical issues have ecclesiological implications. Nevertheless, the concept of *status confessionis* was not hitherto sufficiently comprehensive as a way to theologically ground the relation between ecclesiology and ethics despite its ecclesiological potential. The concept nonetheless represents a significant attempt at linking ecclesiology and ethics.

### 3.2.5 Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry: Liturgy and Ethics

An attempt to link ecclesiology and ethics may also be identified in some sections of the convergence document on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM). Scottish theologian Duncan Forrester (1997b:56-58) has succinctly pointed out the ethical implications of the BEM text. He observes that “BEM is notable for the strength of its concern with the ethical dimension” (Forrester 1995:24). The BEM text, regarded by many as one of the most outstanding results of multilateral ecumenism, does indeed intimate on the ethical significance of the Eucharist. A determined effort was made particularly in the Eucharistic section (BEM par 20) to spell out the ethical implications of the Eucharist. The BEM text notes thus:

All kinds of injustice, racism, separation and lack of freedom are radically challenged when we share in the body and blood of Christ. Through the eucharist the all – renewing grace of God penetrates and restores human personality and dignity. The eucharist involves the believer in the central event of the world’s history. As participants in the eucharist, therefore, we prove ourselves inconsistent if we are not actively participating in this ongoing restoration of the world’s situation and the human condition.

In this way, the BEM document portrays the Eucharist as embracing all aspects of life. Further, the Eucharist is portrayed as an antidote against all status distinctions and separation of communities. Therefore, as Korean theologian Gyeong-Su (2013:18) argues: “The BEM document enlarges the meaning of Eucharist to the spheres of church and society.” On the basis of such perspectives, some theologians like Forrester (1997b) have gleaned clues from BEM in the search for the proper connection between ecclesiology and ethics. Nevertheless, it is plausible to argue that BEM was “itself” far from working out a clear link between ecclesiology and ethics. For instance, with reference to the question of poverty, which had been crucial at the Uppsala Assembly, Ans van der Bent (1986:239) argues that BEM did not establish any “vital and natural link between Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry and the whole concept of the ‘church of the poor’.” Bent’s (1986:240) argument is that while BEM contributed to an inclusive ecclesiology, it did not spell out ecclesiological implications for the socio-political and cultural contexts of a society in which the church finds itself. For some, this is blamed on BEM’s lack of a clear and developed ecclesiology (see Origins 1987:416). That BEM’s treatment of the Eucharist is ecclesologically insufficient was strongly raised by the Vatican in its official response to the BEM text in 1987. However, others such as the Roman Catholic theologian John Burkhard (2004) protest this critique on BEM and in turn suggest that BEM’s ecclesiology was Eucharistic ecclesiology. Nonetheless, Burkhard (2004:192) does note that the ecclesiology of BEM is often implicit.

The more modest and perhaps widely shared position regarding ecclesiology in the BEM text is that it needed further reflection (see Best 2008:409-410). This is understandable given that several responses to BEM lifted up ecclesiology as one of the basic areas on which FO should focus as sequel to BEM. This further explains the later FO focus, which resulted in three texts on ecclesiology, namely *On the way to fuller Koinonia* (1993), *The Nature and Mission of the Church* (2005), and the text from the Porto Alegre Assembly *Called to be the One Church* (2006).

### 3.2.6 Vancouver Assembly (1983): A Eucharistic Vision

If BEM did not sufficiently treat the integration of ecclesiology and ethics, the 6<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the WCC held in Vancouver (1983) went a step ahead and called for a vital and coherent theology as a priority for all WCC units (Gill 1983:251). It emphasised the need for interaction between the diversity of theological approaches within the WCC thus:

A coherent theological approach will incorporate the rich diversity of theological approaches emerging out of the varied experiences of churches throughout the world... it will incorporate tradition and methods of reflection which represent the needs and call of each and all members of the ecumenical movement towards unity of life and faith (Gill 1983:251).

One may argue that such formulation indicates that the hermeneutical assumptions of, for instance, the FO and LW, were at the root of their tension. A coherent theology would thus require a hermeneutic of unity. At Vancouver, it was affirmed that the aspect of Christian Unity that had been most striking was that of “a Eucharistic vision”. Underlying this vision was a conviction that since in the Eucharist God is one with all creation through the elements of the world (bread and wine), “Christ – the life of the world – unites heaven and earth, God and world, spiritual and secular” (see Gill 1983:44). A “Eucharistic vision” was seen as key not only to the unity of the church, but also to an integrated approach to social issues. It was observed that the “Eucharistic vision” “unites our two profoundest ecumenical concerns: the unity and renewal of the Church and the healing and destiny of the human community” (Gill 1983:43 – 42). Thus, by means of a *Eucharistic vision* of Christian unity, Vancouver spoke against the tendency to separate unity and human renewal (justice).

The *Eucharistic vision* was understood to be encompassing of “the whole of reality of Christian worship, life and witness” (Gill 1983:45). Such a vision, Vancouver affirmed, integrates liturgy and *diakonia* (Gill 1983:44). In its report of the issue group on “healing and sharing life community” Vancouver qualified *diakonia* (service) as “the liturgy after the liturgy”. Accordingly, *diakonia* was described as an extension of the Eucharist (Gill 1983:62). With such potential for linking ecclesiology and ethics, the *Eucharistic vision* did not eventually materialise amongst churches, not less within the WCC itself. It still remains scandalous to the unity of the church that Eucharistic communion is still not yet possible amongst members of the WCC. One may thus describe the “Eucharistic vision” of Vancouver somewhat enthusiastic. Or, as Vischer (1993:75) puts it, “the talk about the “Eucharistic vision” often acquired the character of an incantation.” That is, it was claiming a degree of unity which in fact, was not yet there.

Nevertheless, with Vancouver’s decision to “engage member churches in a conciliar process of mutual commitment (covenant) to justice, peace and the integrity of creation”, a possibility for the explicit linking ecclesiology and ethics was underway (see Gill 1983:255). Commenting on this decision, Lodberg (1995:9) observes that for the first time the two “streams” of FO and LW are brought together in this Programme Guidelines Committee proposal. This was critical, given that the need for interaction between the diversity of theological approaches within the ecumenical movement was categorically noted at Vancouver (Gill 1983:254). In addition to this, the Vancouver Assembly confirmed a study on “The unity of the church and the renewal of human community” originally initiated at the FO commission meeting in Lima (1982). The Vancouver Assembly further emphasised the ecclesiological focus on the church as “sign” (see Gill 1983:50). In the next two sections, I will attempt to show how the link between ecclesiology and ethics was attempted to be bridged in both “The unity of the church and the renewal of human community” and in the JIPC process.

### **3.2.7 The Unity of the Church and the Renewal of Human Community**

The “unity of the church and the renewal of human community” study explicitly explored the theological inter-relation between church unity and social concerns (Gassmann 1993:28). After a series of consultations, this study was concluded in 1990 with the publication of *Church and World* (1990). A careful reading of *Church and World* reveals that the study on “The Unity of the Church and the Renewal of Human Community” highlighted the moral

dimension of ecclesiology.

A key question that was addressed in this study was: “How can the church be understood in such a way that the nature of the church, and the mission of the church, are seen as integral and inter – related elements of the being (the *esse*) of the church itself?” (WCC 1990a:4). This is a question regarding the need to find a proper connection between ecclesiology and ethics. The unique contribution of the study in responding to this question lies in its treatment of the link between unity and service via sacramental theology.

Carrying further insights from earlier studies on the unity of the church and the unity of humankind (see 3.2.3 b above), this study strongly challenged the assumption that theological issues were more divisive than ethical issues. It spoke of the church as “mystery and prophetic sign of the kingdom of God” (WCC 1990a:3, 23). Quoting a statement from the fifth international consultation of united and uniting churches in 1988, the study notes that “the search for visible unity is related, and must be seen to be related, to the overcoming of human divisions and the meeting of Human needs” (WCC 1990a:39). In this sense, this FO study challenges the dichotomy between the “ontological ecclesiology” in its own tradition and the “functional ecclesiology” of the LW tradition. In my view, this study as documented in the *Church and World* (1990) reflects a fairly mature understanding on the part of FO on the relationship between ecclesiology and ethics. Nevertheless, the guiding questions in *Church and World* remained in the main ecclesiological.

### 3.2.8 The Conciliar Process

Another initiative that arose out of the Vancouver decision to engage member churches in a “conciliar process of mutual commitment (covenant) to justice, peace and the integrity of creation” begun to take shape. This initiative came to be known as the “Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation” (JPIC) process. In this section, I will attempt to briefly explore the development of the JPIC process. The intention is not to engage in a discussion on the JPIC per se. Rather, this brief discussion on the JPIC process seeks to highlight what in this process points to the linking of ecclesiology and ethics and how this subsequently found expression and much more clearer elucidation in the ecclesiology and ethics study project of the 1990’s.

According to Sri Lankan theologian Preman Niles (1991:452), the JPIC process as defined by the Vancouver Assembly was “not only about bringing together the struggles for justice, peace and the preservation of the environment but also about resisting the threats to life as an expression of the Christian faith.” Indeed, as the Vancouver Assembly put it:

The foundation of this emphasis should be confessing Christ as the life of the world and Christian resistance to the demonic powers of death in racism, sexism, caste oppression, economic exploitation, militarism, violations of human rights, and the misuse of science and technology (Gill 1983:255).

After the Vancouver Assembly, the understanding of JPIC as a conciliar process was further deepened at a consultation held in Glion, Switzerland in 1986. At Glion, several ecclesiological models for linking ecclesiology and ethics within the framework of the JPIC were discussed. These included the “eucharistic vision”, “confessing church”, “prophetic church”, “the church of the poor”, and “communio” or “koinonia”. According to Lodberg (1995:10), the conclusion of the Glion consultation was that “there are different ways of binding ecclesiology and ethics which are already used by various confessions, and that a dialogue between those ways would be helpful.” On this basis, a proposal was made for the continuation of work on the relationship between the different ecclesiological models but this did not come to fruition. This was further compounded by the fact that what was meant by “a conciliar process of mutual commitment” was not clearly spelt out, resulting in difficulties to

proceed with such a notion (see WCC 1987:141; WCC 1990b:4). More so, the JPIC language of mutual covenant hardly fared well for participants coming as they were from different church traditions. These examples are but some of the several practical and conceptual difficulties that confronted the JPIC process (WCC 1990b:4). These have been well captured by several scholars and I will not venture into such discussion (see Kässmann 1992:8-16; Niles 1992; Vischer 1993:73-76).

Suffice it to mention that the JPIC process faced challenges both from within and beyond the WCC (see Niles 1992). This especially comes to light when one takes a closer analysis of the JPIC's Seoul convocation, the event which may be rightly described as the most decisive in the JPIC process (Preston 1994:38). Firstly, the negative response of the Roman Catholic Church to the invitation to co-sponsor the Seoul world convocation was not a negligible challenge (cf. Raiser 1991:118). Secondly, one gets the impression that there was reticence on the part of FO to get fully involved in the conciliar process (Kässmann 1992:11). Partly as a consequence of this, the ecclesiological perspective was greatly lacking in the JPIC process in general and at the Seoul convocation in particular (Aagaard 1993:19; Best 1992:135; Enns 2007:32). Hence, the JPIC process remained an ethical endeavour yet an important one and with deep spirituality.

Despite the challenges and limitations noted above, the JPIC process was a very significant ecumenical endeavour that brought together three critical areas of human need, namely justice, peace, and the integrity of creation. This was significant given the tension between those who focussed on justice issues and those committed to the search for peace. Stereotypically, as Best (1992:134) puts it, these issues were focussed in the Southern and Northern hemisphere, respectively. Furthermore, while justice and peace had often been regarded as LW matters, the JPIC process put these two concerns together with the concern for creation, a subject which had long been looked at from a theological point of view. Justice, Peace and Creation were thus seen as inextricably intertwined. The bringing together of justice, peace and creation was indeed a vital contribution of the JPIC process.

However, in Aagaard's (1993:20) judgement, Seoul did not "come anywhere near clarifying the models of relationship ecclesiology and ethics." Thus, as then General Secretary of the WCC Emilio Castro observed in his introduction to the report of the WCC central Committee to the Canberra Assembly (1991), "the relationship between social ethics and ecclesiology remains a major challenge, one to which we need to devote our best intellectual effort" (Best 1990:xvii). For Castro, Seoul was to a great extent an exemplar of both the possibilities and challenges of a world conversation on ecclesiology and ethics. Following the Seoul convocation, the WCC central committee meeting in March 1990 recommended that work continue on the question of the interconnectedness of ecclesiology and ethics (see Best 1990:151). A year later, at the Canberra Assembly, the question of ecclesiology and ethics found expression in the statement on the "The unity of the church as Koinonia: Gift and Calling" (see Kinnamon 1991:172-174).

Following Meyer (1999:63-72), I think it is plausible to argue that the notion of *koinonia*, at least in as far as its content is concerned, may be said to have had a place in ecumenical thought from the very beginning of the ecumenical movement (see also Fuchs 2013; May 2004:93-95). The Ecumenical Patriarchate already introduced the term *koinonia* in its 1920 encyclical. Within the WCC, the 1961 New Delhi report highlighted *koinonia* as a description of the church. The New Delhi report described the sought after visible unity of the church as a "fully committed fellowship" (see WCC 1961:117-118). This line of thinking was further developed at the Nairobi Assembly (1975) in terms of "conciliar fellowship". In that regard, the churches were encouraged to ensure greater interdependence between ecumenical

initiatives (see Paton 1976:68). In bilateral conversations, the Roman Catholic documents *Lumen Getium* and *Unitatis Redintegration* equally brought to the forefront the idea of *koinonia* in ecumenical conversations.

Nevertheless, it was only in the Canberra Assembly unity statement that the notion of *koinonia* was sharply and more explicitly brought into focus as a leitmotif in the ecumenical movement. The Canberra Assembly spoke of “The unity of the church as Koinonia: Gift and Calling”. It identifies church unity as “... a *koinonia* given and expressed in the common confession of the apostolic faith; a common sacramental life... and a common mission witnessing to the gospel of God’s grace to all people and serving the whole creation” (Kinnamon 1991:173). In this way, the statement describes unity in terms of an ecclesiology of communion.

At Canberra, the notion of *koinonia* was uniquely placed in a broader framework. That is to say, with regard to the world, “the church is called to serve and with regard to the church itself as the foretaste of communion with God” (May 2004:93). This is clearly indicative of the potential of this notion to link ecclesiology and ethics. This potential is already intimated in the Canberra statement’s call to the churches “to recommit themselves to work for justice, peace and the integrity of creation, linking more closely the search for the sacramental communion of the church with the struggles for justice and peace” (Kinnamon 1991:174)”.

### **3.2.9 Brief summary of initial attempts at linking ecclesiology and ethics**

From the foregoing discussion, it may be observed that the linking of ecclesiology and ethics was steadily emerging, although not as yet comprehensively spelled out. On this point, reference has already been made to Kässmann’s (1992) assessment in which she has argued that there was an absence of a comprehensive concept(s) for relating ecclesiology and ethics in the WCC’s history in the period 1948 to 1983. Although attempts at linking ecclesiology and ethics were not comprehensive enough during this period, they led to a series of initiatives that stirred further discussions on the interrelation between ecclesiology and ethics. In the post Vancouver period, attempts at connecting ecclesiology and ethics began to appear in increasingly unequivocal terms. In this regard, one may argue that *Church and World* represents the latest attempt at linking ecclesiology and ethics before that task was explicitly sought in the Ecclesiology and Ethics study project (1992-1996). Of special significance for the linking of ecclesiology and ethics is the notion of *koinonia*, which was strongly put forward in the Canberra statement on the unity of the church.

## **3.3 A critical analysis of the of the Ecclesiology and Ethics Study Project (1992-1996)**

### **3.3.1 Introductory background on the Ecclesiology and Ethics study project**

The preceding discussion has shown that the search for the interrelation between ecclesiology and ethics has indeed been present in the ecumenical movement since its beginnings. During the early 1990’s, the central committee of the WCC proposed to “continue and strengthen work on the question of the interconnectedness of ecclesiology and ethics” (WCC 1990b:157). As will be shown in the following sections, this question came to be the sole focus of the ecclesiology and ethics study project, which was jointly conducted by FO (Unit I) and JPIC (Unit III) from 1992 to 1996. The study was aimed at building a ‘bridge’ between ecclesiology and ethics. In this regard, it attempted to give sufficient expression to the interrelation and inseparability of the search for unity and the search for justice. As briefly intimated in chapter 1 (above), the study was carried out in the form of three intra-WCC consultations held in Rønne (1993), Tantar (1994) and Johannesburg (1996), leading to three published reports, namely *Costly Unity*, *Costly Commitment*, and *Costly Obedience*,

respectively. Given these titles, the project has been dubbed the “litany of costlies” and “echoes Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s contribution to the ecumenical movement via theological reflections in the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa” (see Robra 2004:87). The reports are also published together in a concluding report entitled *Ecclesiology and Ethics: Ecumenical ethical engagement, moral formation and the nature of the Church* (1997). In what follows, I will offer a detailed summary and cursory analysis of these reports. While I am aware of the significant contributions of background documents to the reports, I will only refer to these in passing. The section will be concluded with a brief discussion on the relevance of insights derived from this study for the ecumenical movement in Africa. As will become clear in subsequent sub-sections, the ecclesiology and ethics study project explored further some key insights of the FO study on *The Unity of the Church and the Renewal of Human Community* from 1982 to 1989 (see § 3.2.7 above), the Canberra statement on unity and of the JPIC process from 1986 to 1990 (see § 3.2.6.a. above).

### 3.3.2 The Rønne Consultation: Costly Unity

#### (a) Costly Unity

At its central committee meeting in 1992, the WCC made the decision to hold a consultation on the ecclesiological implications of the JPIC process between the WCC’s then Unit I (Unity and renewal) and Unit III (Justice, Peace and Creation). The consultation took place in February 1993 at Rønne, Denmark under the theme “Koinonia and Justice, Peace and Creation.” At Rønne the context of the ecclesiology and ethics study was established. Participants in this study reviewed the history of ecumenical attempts to relate ecclesiology and ethics, and highlighted the tension between ecclesiology and ethics (see Best & Granberg-Michaelson 1993). In their introduction to the essays from this consultation, Best & Granberg-Michaelson (1993:v) observe that the consultation “took the perspectives of the JPIC process as its starting point.” The several presentations that were made at the Rønne consultation highlighted the difficulty of finding the appropriate language to connect ecclesiology and ethics. In the final report of this consultation, *Costly Unity*, it was observed that the “being (*esse*) of the church is at stake in the justice, peace and integrity of creation process” (*CU* par 5). The title of the Rønne report derives from a comparison of cheap unity and costly unity in a manner reminiscent of Bonhoeffer.

The point of departure for the Rønne consultation had much to do with what *koinonia* means in a world stamped by injustice and threats against peace and creation. At this consultation, an attempt to link ecclesiology and ethics by means of the notion of *koinonia*. This focus was partly inspired by the Canberra statement on the unity of church and the preparatory document for the FO meeting in Santiago (1993), both of which took *koinonia* as a central concept to describe the unity of the church (see § 3.3.2.b below). Rønne was thus not dealing with a new concept. As briefly alluded to in the preceding sections of this chapter, the notion of *koinonia* had already entered ecumenical discussions within the WCC, as well as in bilateral dialogues (see 3.2.8 above).

In much ecumenical literature, the Latinate communion or *communio* is often used interchangeably with the Greek *koinonia*, although the two have differing resonances. Generally, most commentators present the Greek notion of *koinonia* (κοινωνία) as connoting participation, togetherness, solidarity, community, communion, fellowship, mutuality and sharing (see Reumann 1994). In this sense, the term *koinonia* is a comprehensive category that brings together all these different images. This integrating character of *koinonia* makes its use in describing the church and its unity very attractive. Commenting on this, Enns (2007:43) describes *koinonia* as an “integration-engendering concept.” Meyer (1999:67) has also

underscored the integrative power for ecumenical thought of the notion of *koinonia* when he argues that the notion of *koinonia* is “a categorical connection of *church and its unity*.” In his view, the “concept “koinonia,” or “communion,” does not require such an attribute as “unity”; it carries it within itself. For a “communion” that is divided or includes division within it stands in contradiction to itself” (Meyer (1999:67). It is also integrative because it keeps faith and ethical action together. For Meyer (1999:68), “Church as *koinonia* of human beings certainly lives *from* faith, but it also lives *in* active responsibility and *in* service one to the other.”

The Santiago FO meeting too, highlighted the integrative power of *koinonia*, especially in its final message. “This word (i.e. *koinonia*) describes the richness of our life together in Christ: community, communion, sharing, fellowship, participation, solidarity” (Best & Gassmann 1994:225). This meeting reflected on the implications of *koinonia* for faith, life and witness, as well as its biblical witness. In his survey study of the biblical perspectives of the notion of *koinonia*, which was read at Santiago, Lutheran theologian John Reumann (1994:62) argued that in the New Testament, *koinonia* must be properly understood as an aspect of the church and its unity. He further notes that the ecclesiological appropriation of this Greek notion (*koinonia*) was a later development in ecumenical theology (cf. Suggs 1984:351). Such appropriation has immense significance for understanding the church and its unity.

But how was *koinonia* interpreted at Rønde? The notion of *koinonia* was explored by emphasizing its ecclesiological and ethical implications. The Rønde participants regarded *koinonia* as an apt term for describing both the experience of the JPIC process and the nature of the church itself (CU par 7.2). In his reflections on the ecclesiology and ethics study project reports, Conradie (2013a:42) underscores this point when he observes that “the struggle for both unity and justice is indeed best captured in the term *koinonia*, given its connotations such as communion, sharing, fellowship, participation and solidarity.”

The Rønde consultation report described *koinonia*’s primary reference in the New Testament “to be to the interaction or sharing of believers within the local Christian Community” (CU par 22). Paul’s usage of *koinonia* in reference to “gentiles” was thus seen as an extension of its common usage. In Paul, *koinonia* extends “beyond ethnicity and family to a community which exists on the basis of the gospel” (CU par 23). Following this understanding of *koinonia*, *Costly Unity* spoke of *koinonia* as “a communion in which we share, in Jesus Christ, a common vision for a newly just, peaceful and responsible world, despite imperfect communions and still – structured relationships” (CU par 23). In this way, *Costly Unity* illumines the insight that this understanding of *koinonia* may well provide the connection between ecclesiology and ethics. Thus, with this understanding of *koinonia*, we begin to be grasped by the imperatives of unity and catholicity in a new way (CU par 24).

The Rønde consultation further explored the concept of *koinonia* and its relationship to the notion of Christian ethics, the concepts of covenant, conciliar fellowship, unity and diversity, the local and the global, and relationships with unofficial movements inside and beyond the church as such (see CU par 12ff). With regard to the relation between *koinonia* and ethics, one of the central affirmations of *Costly Unity* was that “the community of disciples rather than the individual Christian is the bearer of the tradition and the form and matrix of the moral life” (CU par 18). The Christian community is “the place where ... the Gospel tradition is probed permanently for moral inspiration and insight” (CU par 19). *Koinonia* provides the context for such. In this perspective, Christian ethics “becomes the reflection on the life of the community in the context and the perspective on the problems of human life in general” (CU par 18). As such, ethics is not something foreign to the faith. It is integral to the nature of the

church.

In view of the foregoing, *Costly Unity* spoke of the church as a “moral community”. In this way, a further dimension was added to the understanding of *koinonia* with regard to faith, life and witness. A fundamental insight in this regard is Rønne’s assertion and qualification of both the church and the JPIC as “moral realities” (see *CU* par 7.1-7.6). After the American ethicist Stanley Hauerwas (1984:99), the Rønne participants affirmed that “the church not only has, but is, a social ethic, a *koinonia* ethic” (*CU* par 6). As “moral community”, the church should foster a “sacramental” orientation to life. According to the report, this begins with the moral meaning of the sacraments themselves. Baptism and the Eucharist as person-shaping rites should lead to sacramental living (*CU* par 7). They point to the “sacramental” relatedness of all life. Within this context, it is in the experience of worship and spirituality that a bridge between ecclesiology and ethics is to be found.

In light of the above, it may be argued that the church as a “moral community” was vigorously underscored at Rønne. However, such a description of the church precipitated much debate that the expression “moral community” had to be clarified further at the next consultation of the ecclesiology and ethics study project (see § 3.3.3 below). In anticipation of such criticisms, *Costly Unity* already noted that the church as “moral community” is neither constituted by, nor dependent “upon the moral activities of its members” (*CU* 7.2). The origins and ongoing life of the church rests on grace of God. In a sentence which has opposite implications in the German translation of the report, *Costly Unity* goes on to state that “it is not too much to say that the holiness of the church means the constant moral struggle of its members” (*CU* par 7.2).

The church as “moral community” does not imply uniformity on ethical matters. Given the complexity of moral challenges, *Costly Unity* noted at many points the need for ethical diversity: for to arrive at the same moral decision in each particular situation is not to be expected (*CU* par 7.3, 38-41, 51). The need for ethical diversity was well captured in the expression that “Christian freedom encompasses sincere and serious differences of moral judgement” (*CU* 7.3).<sup>7</sup> According to the Rønne consultation, this was not to be understood as opening the door to moral relativism. *Costly Unity* pointed out some sort of “limit” to ethical diversity, given that there are cases where “certain decisions and actions are in contradiction to the nature and purpose of the church and the central teaching of the church” (*CU* par 7.4). In such situations, serious moral struggle over life issues is “always required of the church by its very nature” (*CU* par 7.4). The Rønne report thus contrasted “cheap” unity, which “avoids morally contested issues because they would disturb the unity of the church” and “costly” unity, which is the discovery of the churches’ unity in struggles for justice and peace (*CU* par 7.6). Indeed, the later is often acquired at a price. In this regard, the struggle for independence in Namibia and the anti-apartheid campaign in South Africa are cited as examples of costly unity.

The report speaks of an experience of unity in common struggle and cites the apartheid struggle and the JPIC as examples. The experience of JPIC “has been that people have been gathered into a fellowship which can be described as *koinonia*. Involvement in these struggles of human community generates this *koinonia*. The pursuit of justice is seen as *koinonia* generating activity” (*CU* par 5). *Koinonia* in common moral struggles is also ecclesio-genetic. American theologian Michael Root (1994:201) finds difficulty with this assertion. In his view the “being and unity of the church are not constituted by our coming together around any cause, be it moral, liturgical or theological” (Root 1994:2002). He insists that it is the word

<sup>7</sup> American theologian Michael Root (1994:197) however, has argued that some sections of the report raise concern about whether this commitment to diversity is adequately safeguarded in the Rønne report itself.

and sacrament which are uniquely generative of the *koinonia* that is the church. In my view, the response of Roman Catholic theologian William Henn (1995:15) to Root's argument casts proper light on Rønne's assertion on the ecclesio-genetic power at work in common moral struggles. Henn argues that what one misses in Root's objection is attention to

The possibility that the promotion of justice, peace and the integrity of creation can be seen as essential to precisely what he does propose as ecclesio-genetic, that is, as an integral part of the proclamation of the word or as the logical consequence of the celebration of the sacraments.

Further, I think that Rønne's assertion is plausible, given that while the ecclesial significance of moral struggles was underscored, it was also argued that "to participate in a particular moral cause does not necessarily signify entry into or belonging in the church" (CU par 7.1).

To sum up my analysis of *Costly Unity*, it may be argued that the Rønne consultation argued for the inter-relation between ecclesiology and ethics by means of the notion of *koinonia*. For the Rønne participants: "The ecumenical movement suffers damage so long as it is unable to bring the justice, peace and the integrity of creation process and the unity of the church into fruitful interaction" (CU par 53). The Rønne report ended with suggestions to the FO meeting at Santiago de Compostela and the WCC on how the process to explore the linkage between ecclesiology and ethics could be carried forward. It is instructive here to take note of the outcome of Santiago meeting at which the report was later served.

(b) *Costly Unity in light of Santiago de Compostela (1993)*

The Santiago meeting may be said to be representative of a comprehensive explication of the notion of *koinonia* with reference to the church and its unity. The significance of this meeting in the analysis of the *Costly Unity* concerns the question of how the Rønne proposal of linking ecclesiology and ethics by means of the notion of *koinonia* was addressed at Santiago. Nevertheless, it would be untenable to expect a comprehensive treatment of the Rønne proposal at the Santiago meeting. This is untenable given the nature of the Santiago meeting whereby participants expressed their opinions in small group discussions. Nevertheless, one can infer from the final report of the meeting, *On the Way to fuller Koinonia*, that there were a variety of opinions on *Costly Unity*. There were on one hand those who were favourable to *Costly Unity* (Best & Gassmann 1994:133, 151) and on the other hand, those who saw the Rønne text as a last minute effort to influence the Santiago conference and thereby shift its traditional agenda from unity to social activism (see Henn 1995:17).

In its final report, the Santiago meeting affirmed the connection between ecclesiology and ethics, particularly in its report on sections I (on *koinonia*) and on section IV (on common witness for a renewed world). Section IV notes thus:

The being and mission of the Church... are at stake in witness through proclamation and concrete actions for justice, peace and integrity of creation. This is a defining mark of *koinonia* and central to our understanding of ecclesiology. The urgency of these issues makes it manifest that our theological reflection on the proper unity of Christ's Church is inevitably linked to ethics (Best & Gassmann 1994:259).

The report further observed that *koinonia* is both generated and shaped by our engagement in moral issues. The interconnectedness of ecclesiology and ethics was further underscored in final message of the Santiago conference by calling churches "to consider the implications of *koinonia* for a responsible care of creation, for a just sharing of the world's resources, for a special concern for the poor and outcast" (Best & Gassmann 1994:227). In Raiser's (1996:9) view, however, the Rønne proposal "was dealt with only marginally in Santiago". He adds: "The concept of *koinonia* proved to be too problematic, especially when it came to linking trinitarian and ecclesiological interpretation, to carry the added burden of linking ecclesiology

and ethics” (Raiser 1996:9; cf. Best & Gassmann 1994:231). This notwithstanding, it is plausible to argue that the Rønne consultation had some impact on Santiago, at least in two ways. First, as Henn (1994:17) observes, one can document a certain “reception” of the Rønne consultation in the final redaction of the Santiago discussion paper “Towards Koinonia in Faith, Life and Witness”. This is evident in the emphasis on the JPIC (see Best & Gassmann 1994:266). Secondly, some impact may also be seen in some section reports, particularly in the report on section IV, in which a serious consideration of JPIC concerns is clearly discernible (see Best & Gassmann 1994:259-266). It is also significant that the Santiago meeting nevertheless recommended that the study on ecclesiology and ethics should be directly linked to local experiences of the interconnectedness of faith and action (Best & Gassman 1994:261).

### 3.3.3 The Tantur Consultation: Costly Commitment

After Rønne, a second consultation on ecclesiology and ethics was held at the Tantur Ecumenical Institute in Jerusalem, Israel in 1994. At Tantur, the context of the Ecclesiology and Ethics study was further clarified. The first sentence of the Tantur final report – *Costly Commitment* – describes the outcome of the consultation as “work in progress”. This is significant given that a third consultation was yet to be held in Johannesburg, South Africa, the following year. The Tantur report begins with a brief descriptive history of efforts to foster the churches’ common witness and action within the ecumenical movement. The report notes that the ecclesiology and ethics study is not a mere theoretical exercise because it “touches issues of life and death, of deep conviction and commitment” (CC par 10). Echoing the Canberra Assembly call to the churches “to recommit themselves to the work for justice, peace and integrity of creation, linking more closely the search sacramental communion of the church with the struggles for justice and peace”, the report highlighted the need for mutual commitment and action in the ecumenical movement. Thus, for the Tantur participants, “the road to a *costly unity* leads necessarily through a *costly commitment* of the churches to one another” (CC par 10). This was well captured in the form of a series of questions thus:

Is it enough to say... that ethical engagement is intrinsic to the church *as church*? Is it enough to say that, if a church is not engaging responsibly with the ethical issues of its day, it is not being fully church? Must we not say: if the churches are not engaging these ethical issues *together*, then *none of them individually is being fully church*? (CC par 17c).

Underlying these questions are fundamental ecclesiological questions. More so, these ecclesiological questions further open up the ecumenical dimension that undergirds the effort to inter-relate ecclesiology and ethics. Hence, while affirming the quest for unity and justice as integral to the life of the church – already argued for in *Church and World* and *Costly Unity* (see 3.2.7 above) – the Tantur report was calling for mutual commitment and action of the churches in their quest for this integral vision. The Tantur participants saw this ecumenical dimension as a basic conviction in their reflection on ecclesiology and ethics. Other basic convictions in this regard included (1) the nature of the ecumenical journey, (2) issues of grace and discipleship, (3) the distinctive resources for Christian engagement in ethical issues, and (4) the relation of Christian ethics to ethical reflection (see CC par 14).

On (2) grace and discipleship, *Costly Commitment* attempted to clarify some misunderstanding of the idea of moral community that was proposed in *Costly Unity*. It was noted that the “church does not rest on moral achievement, but on justification, on God’s justice and not our own” (CC par 21). Affirmation was made of the intention of *Costly Unity*’s (par 7.2) observation that “it is not too much to say that the holiness of the church means the constant moral struggle of its members” (CU par 7.2). Yet, in its reference to *Costly Unity* here, the paragraph from *Costly Unity* was slightly paraphrased to read; “the holiness of the church

calls for their struggle” (CC par 21).

Further clarification of some insights raised in *Costly Unity* was worked out in the section on “Ethics, Church and Humankind” (CC par 31 – 34). While the nature of Christian ethics was not clearly worked out in *Costly Unity* (see CU par 13 – 19), *Costly Commitment* goes a step further when it notes that “Christian ethics can define itself fully only in relation to both the Eucharistic community and to the wider creation, on the basis of the nature of the church itself” (CC par 32). In this sense, the earlier assertion of *Costly Unity* that ethics belongs to the *esse* of the church was reaffirmed at Tantar. The authors of the Tantar report affirmed moral engagement, common action and reflection as intrinsic to the very life and being of the church.

The primary contribution of the Tantar report is expressed in the last section of the report, in which an attempt is made to relate ecclesiology and ethics by means of the notion of “moral formation”. Here, one notes again an explicit attempt to clarify some misunderstandings that the *Costly Unity* language of “moral community” engendered (see Mudge 1996:12-13). In their reflections on *Costly Unity*, as Mudge (2008:619) notes, some feared that “seeing the church as moral community could open the door to a new Pelagianism, undercutting confidence in salvation by grace alone.” Others cautioned against drawing too ‘essential’ a bond between the unity of the church and social responsibility of the church (see Root 1994:200-202).

The Tantar participants were well aware that difficulties had arisen through the term ‘moral community’ being heard “as a full description of the ethical character of the ekklesia”. In clarifying these misunderstandings, the *Costly Commitment* document noted thus:

Certainly Rønne did not intend any reductionism of the church, leading to moralism or a self-righteous triumphalism. For Rønne the identity of the church as a “moral community” is a gift of God, a part, though not the whole, of the fullness of the church. The term “moral” has also been misheard as “moralistic”, thus confusing our understanding of the ekklesia with such movements as Moral Rearmament or with the “moral majority”, or as representing the ethical character of the ekklesia as an individual or “ghetto” morality (CC par 55).

While the *Costly Commitment* document authors did affirm the Rønne notion of ‘moral community’ as shown above, they nevertheless proposed the “language of ‘moral formation’ and ‘discernment’ to carry forward the discussion of the ethical nature of the church, and its implications for the life of the church in the world” (CC par 56).

The *Costly Commitment* document thus notes that in the church, as *koinonia*, a constant process of ‘moral formation’ takes place. Moral formation, as part of the churches’ overall task of spiritual formation, is described as essential to the life of the church. At the same time, the church is expected to contribute to the moral well being of society (CC par 52). This emphasis on moral formation is especially reminiscent of several ideas from a paper presented at Tantar by American ethicist Larry Rasmussen (1995). The *Costly Commitment* document further points out that moral formation includes discernment. That is, “helping church members to analyse ethical issues from the perspective of the gospel” and to judge how best to participate in the moral struggles of the present day (CC par 52, 61). From the above, one could affirm with the *Costly Commitment* (par 57) document that attention to “moral formation and discernment is a promising way to explore dimensions of the church’s very nature and mission.” Indeed, the process of “moral formation and discernment – and the moral inquiry which belongs to it – can provide a language for the churches to speak both amongst themselves and to society (CC par 57). In their discussion of “moral formation” and “discernment” the Tantar participants considered in detail the concept of “the household of faith” as a metaphor to describe the ethical dimension of being church (CC par 65). More

specifically, they spoke of the “*ethos* of the household of faith” to refer to “a way of life, the distinctive patterns of thinking, feeling and acting, which characterise those who live within that “household”” (CC par 65).

The concept of “household” has its root in the Greek *oikos*, which means household. This term entered ecumenical discourse most chiefly through the reflection of Ernst Lange (1971:8). It was later extensively used in its ecumenical applications in several reports by Philip Potter then general secretary of the WCC (see Potter 1973:416-417). Konrad Raiser (1991:79-111) further developed this idea in his *Ecumenism in Transition* and spoke of *oikoumenē* as the one “household of life” created and preserved by God. According to Raiser (1991:90), this metaphor links, in the closest way possible, the “ecological, social, political and ecclesiological dimensions of the *oikoumenē*”. The notion of the “household of life” is further nourished in Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz’s work *God’s Spirit: Transforming a world in Crisis* (1995), in which he developed the notion of “ecodomy”. Derived from the Greek word *oikodomé*, Müller-Fahrenholz utilises the term “ecodomy” to mean the art of inhabiting instead of dominating the earth, our house. He pleads for Christian congregations to become “ecodomical” centres and form “ecodomical” networks in which a new balance of life can be learned (Müller-Fahrenholz 1995:108-109).

In his *The Church as Moral Community* (1998), Lewis Mudge, one of the participants in the WCC ecclesiology and ethics study, drew on the earlier use of the household metaphor by Raiser and Müller-Fahrenholz to propose a concept of the household of life within the context of the debate on ecclesiology and ethics. He argues that “an economic interpretation of the *oikoumenē* has become the master metaphorical context for understanding human behaviour for our times” (Mudge 1998:56). Mudge (1998:63) thus offers a description of global economic activity as implicit interpretations of the *oikoumenē* (global economic system) and proceeds to argue that there is need for another *oikoumenē* “based not on the economics of the world” but on the “economics” of God.” He underscores the potential of the household metaphor to offer a new language to talk about the churches as moral-ecclesial communities.

The household metaphor has also found expression especially in recent debates on ecotheology (see Conradie 2011a:115-121; Rasmussen 1996:90-97, 1994:118). For many scholars in this field, the household metaphor offers a promising way of understanding human beings in relation to one another, as well as their relation to the rest of nature. In view of this insight, Rasmussen (1996:90) explains:

all things belong to an all-inclusive form upon which the life of each depends. Humankind and otherkind are fit together in an undeniable, if not precarious and sometimes mean, unity of life and death. We are not so much at home on earth as we are home as earth.

Proceeding from the understanding of *oikoumenē* as “the whole inhabited world”, Rasmussen (1996:91) highlights the etymological link between ecology, economics and ecumenical fellowship. He further notes that the word *oikos* “is the root and common unity of economics, ecology, and ecumenics” (cf. Rasmussen 1994:118). This understanding is well acknowledged by several thinkers (cf. Conradie 2013a:54, 2011a:115; Mudge 1998:52; Raiser 1991:90). In Conradie’s view, for instance, the power of the household metaphor lies in its ability to integrate especially three core ecumenical themes, namely economic justice, ecological sustainability, and ecumenical fellowship. Conradie (2011a:116, 2009:31) thus argues that the notion of household may well serve as a theological root metaphor for current discourse on a wide range of theological themes. Theologically speaking, Conradie (2009:31-41) is of the view that the ecumenical discourse on the “whole household of God” is best understood within the context of the whole work of God (creation, providence, redemption, completion) traditionally described as the “economy of the triune God (*oikonomia*).

But how was the notion of household understood in the discussion on ecclesiology and ethics at Tantor? According to the Tantor participants, the ecclesiological image of household may point to a number of understandings. First, it may refer to local congregations, monastic communities or base communities. At a larger scale, it may point to the ecumenical movement, the universal church and the *oikoumenē*. Secondly, it may point towards ethical considerations. Seeing as both economy and ecology have their root in the Greek *oikos*, the household image also relates the witness of the church to economic and ecological realities of our world (CC par 65c). In this regard, it points to how the church “in each place” manages its life in relation to its witness in the world. For the Tantor participants, the concept of household therefore embraces various ways of expressing faith in the world. It further expresses, in a significant way, the connectedness of life economically, ecologically, and ecumenically. Thus, according to the *Costly Commitment* document, reflections on the “moral formation” of Christians ought to be a priority within the household of faith.

In his reflections on the *oikos* image as discussed at Tantor, Raiser (1996:9) observes that from the terminological point of view, the term *oikos* “has the added advantage of not having been moulded or loaded by use in either ecclesiological or ethical discourse in the past.” The conviction that neither concepts from ecclesiological discourse nor concepts with roots in the ethical sphere are capable of building the bridge from ecclesiology to ethics lay behind Raiser’s appreciation of the Tantor proposal. For Raiser, the gap between ecclesiology and ethics may perhaps not be bridged by concepts, but rather by a new way of describing reality. In his view, it is exactly this that the Tantor participants attempted to do when they utilised the symbolic biblical concept of *oikos*. Nevertheless, one may ask whether or not the notion of “household” clarifies the distinct nature of the church itself.

Taking further the image of “household”, the *Costly Commitment* document employed an example of moral inquiry as an ecumenical language for understanding the ethical dimensions of the church. This was understood in terms of the relation between moral formation and discernment and the various ways in which churches are ordered. “Such inquiry assumes that the ordering of a church is already both a creation of, and a reflection on, its ethos and way of life: a polity *is* already an ethic” (CC par 68a). On moral inquiry, the document authors concluded thus:

... *how* church is ordered has consequences for spiritual and moral formation and discernment, and thus is subject to scrutiny of the kind we propose. Practices, structures and roles (like moral exemplars and like catechesis) are morally potent (CC par 68).

The document does highlight that there are other reasons apart from moral ones for the various ordering of the church, such as the understanding of scripture and historical experience. They nevertheless underscore the need for moral assessment of *how* the church “is” a way of life of its own, and a way of life within the world. Accordingly, the Tantor report presents moral formation as being bi-directional given that “the church is not yet, in its empirical historical manifestation, fully what it is in God” (CC par 71). From this observation, it follows that as historic institution the church forms and is itself undergoing a process of moral formation under the guidance of God. An implication of this is that “the boundary between moral formation in the church and moral formation in the world is fluid” (CC par 72).

In light of the foregoing, it may be argued that Tantor explored how the language “moral formation” and “discernment” can carry forward the discussion on ecclesiology and ethics. Moral formation later became the subject of the third and final consultation on ecclesiology and ethics.

### 3.3.4 The Johannesburg Consultation: Costly Obedience

The third and final consultation of the ecclesiology and ethics study project was held in Johannesburg, South Africa in June 1996 and produced the report *Costly Obedience* (hereafter cited as *CO*). At Johannesburg, the results of the first two consultations were reviewed and some new insights were added, particularly from the experience of churches involved in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa (see De Gruchy 1997:356-365). In the report of this consultation, the language of moral formation was further explored and more explicitly pursued.

Moral formation was defined as “a nurturing process in which a certain sense of identity, a certain recognition of community, and a certain pattern of motivation, evolve” (*CO* par 17). This process was seen as both organic and intentional. It is organic in that such formation can be the gradual work of culture and upbringing. That is, there are some aspects of moral formation that we inherit such as language. Moral formation may also be intentional in the sense that community members are oriented to the world in a certain way, by encouraging certain kinds of behaviour, and discouraging others.

The *Costly Obedience* document places its reflection on formation to focus on actual communities or on what anthropologist Clifford Geertz calls the complex “thickness” of life actually lived. Formation as such is seen “as irreducibly concrete and local” (cf. Rasmussen 1997:106). It takes place in congregations and parishes. The Johannesburg report appropriates the idea of “thickness” to refer to the full and multi-layered complexity of cultures (see *CO* endnote 3). In this regard, the document links moral formation with spirituality by describing spirituality as the “depth dimension of daily existence cultivated by both meditative and moral practices” (*CO* par 18). The assertion is then made that “Christian spiritual-moral formation in today’s world needs not only to draw upon the riches of the great traditions of Christian faith but also to meet, understand, grasp its differences from, and perhaps learn from, spiritual traditions outside of Christianity” (*CO* par 19).

After an apparent multivalent description of formation, the *Costly Obedience* document ventures to discuss moral formation in the church. Christian moral formation takes on a distinctive kind and engenders certain ways of seeing the world, primarily by being the kinds of communities that they are. The process of moral formation in the church takes the form of discipleship. The resources for discipleship are to be found in the many elements of churchly life. Liturgical formation, in the Lord’s Supper and baptism, is seen as fundamental to all other kinds of formation (*CO* par 21). For the authors of this document, such formation in the Christian community goes on whether intentional or not. The ways in which the church is ordered and its interaction with the world inevitably have moral implications. For to “be in the Christian community is to be shaped in a certain way” (*CO* par 22). In this regard, the *Costly Obedience* document maintains a central insight already emphasised in *Costly Unity* and *Costly Commitment* namely that ecclesiology and ethics belong together.

Moving away from a discussion of moral formation in the church to moral formation in the world, the *Costly Obedience* document notes that moral formation is not an exclusive responsibility of Christian congregations. The world too, forms us through the shaping influence of its principalities and powers (e.g the global economy). It is thus not possible to separate the Christian narrative from the concerns of the world or from the world’s story. “Most of us exist in a multiplicity of cultural environments, and engage in several different occupational and familial practices, each with its own symbolism, logic, customs and the like” (*CO* par 27). We are thus formed in different ways by our lives in the church, in our families, in secular occupations and may be even in our political, recreational and other activities.

On the interaction between churchly and worldly formation, the *Costly Obedience*

document reiterates the observations of the Tantor consultation, namely that the churches learn from moral formation in the world as much as they teach. Accordingly, such moral formation in the world is seen as having ecclesial significance (cf. *CC* par 72, 73). The document also discusses the churches' moral failure in the face of ethnic, nationalistic and economic violence.

The document grounds the church's moral formation within the contexts of the Eucharist and baptism. The heart of Christian moral formation is seen to lie in worship, "through which the story of salvation is re-enacted in the modes of prayer, proclamation and sacrament" (*CO* par 52). Clearly, the formative role of liturgy is underscored. Liturgy is described in terms of discipleship. It "is the churchly continuation and fulfilment of the original formative process we call discipleship" (*CO* par 53). Liturgy is immanently practical for Christians in the process of moral formation and discernment. It is "not something added to moral and political endeavour but its nourishing ground" (*CO* par 54). In this way, the document relates worship and witness in terms of liturgy.

While underscoring the formative role of the liturgy in the Christian community, the document acknowledges that the church is not immune from moral *mal*formation. Liturgy can "mal-form" the church rather than forming it in the faith if not properly understood and acted out (*CO* par 57). For instance, devotion to liturgy may lend itself to a ghetto mentality by sanctioning unjust arrangements or legitimising ethnic conflict. Christian moral awareness may thus sometimes purify the liturgy. In this sense, moral formation and liturgy affect each other. Although the document presents moral formation as grounded in liturgy, it nevertheless "does not equate liturgy with moral formation." Moral formation is at the heart of liturgy but it does not exhaust the liturgy's whole meaning.

*Costly Obedience* then describes baptism as the process of initiation through which a person enters into membership of the body of Christ and thereby into "a transformative moral process" (*CO* par 62). Quoting the BEM document, the *Costly Obedience* report notes that "... baptism, as a baptism into Christ's death, has ethical implications which not only call for personal sanctification, but also motivate Christians to strive for the realisation of the will of God in all realms of life" (*CO* par 63). It has both local, as well as ecumenical implications, given that through the rite of baptism one enters into membership of the local congregation and the universal church.

The *Costly Obedience* document makes its significant contribution to the ecclesiology and ethics study, most notably in section IV, "Towards Communion in Moral Witnessing." In this section of the document, the implications of the ecclesiology and ethics study for the ecumenical movement are explored. The consultation attempted to work out a new vocabulary for talk about moral formation transcends the institutional languages of *Faith and Order* and *Life and Work*. "The point is to break away from the artificial division of perspective [the] two distinctive vocabularies have represented" (*CO* par 68).

The document further refines moral formation by calling it ecclesio-moral formation. This notion is presented as a clue to the distinctive formation in the faith that is described as "a discipleship in a formation that is simultaneously liturgical and moral. Such a formation "compels us to a bodily form of witness, a moral positioning, an engagement intrinsic to the persons we have become in the community" (*CO* par 76).

One clear conclusion from this perspective on moral formation is that Christian moral formation is "irreducibly concrete and local. But the document goes further to ask; "Can a distinctive, shared ecumenical formation come to exist under specific local circumstances? Can it come to exist globally" (*CO* par 34). "Does this localism mean that no general guidance can be given about what to look for?" (*CO* par 83). The document strikingly accords

importance to the ecumenical dimension of Christian moral engagement. To highlight this ecumenical dimension from the perspective of local congregations, the document appropriates Michael Welker's ideas of "resonance and recognition" (see *CO* note 16). The document thus observes that through the action of the Holy Spirit, we are able to recognise the "resonance" of Christ's presence in the world. The moral resonance implicit in Christ's life has been, and continues to be, known and appropriated by those who follow him. While each context of discipleship forms us and thereby generates a community with recognisable character, it is the "Holy Spirit [who] instigates an energy-field of resonance" allowing us to recognise each other as disciples (see *CO* par 88). For *Costly Obedience*, the *oikoumenē* occurs where such recognition occurs. The notion of *oikoumenē* is thus:

... not to be understood as a globalizing, even imperial, concept appropriated from the ancient world as an instrument of subjugation by powerful churches of the West. It is rather to be seen as a conscious mutual recognition of the resonating patterns and configurations of activity that follow from the Spirit's working (*CO* par 89).

From this discussion, the document reflects on communion as a network of relationships, such that the Spirit's resonance is shared and recognisable messages are given and received. The document provides a new definition of communion by describing the communication of the Christian story through the lens of moral formation. "Communion means recognition that we are living the same stories in forms, both liturgical and moral, which manifest the mystery, the transcending ground, of what is historically manifest" (*CO* 95). Echoing the language of Vatican II, the document notes that the communion we have with one another today is "real but imperfect". One may argue that this discussion of communion was somewhat falling in the trap of asking where communion resides. That this is so is clear in the concluding discussion on the WCC as marker and space-maker for an ecumenical moral communion.

The document denies that any "ecclesiastical jurisdiction exists as a place where the universal church ... comes to expression" (*CO* par 98). The need is thus expressed for some form of visible expression of the "real but imperfect" moral communion. The document then suggests that the WCC may well come closer than any other entity to mark the possibility of moral communion (*CO* par 99), to maintain and indeed *be* a space where "ecclesio-moral communion" come to expression (*CO* par 102). Further questions ensue as a result of such proposals.

Given that the *Costly Obedience* document has closely connected moral formation with the Eucharist and baptism, a question emerges regarding whether or not there can be an ecclesio-moral communion when the reality in most churches despite the existence of cordial relationships is one in which sacramental communion not practicable. The response of *Costly Obedience* is that "the notion of moral communion, despite its connection with the sacraments, need not stand or fall with the degree of our unity in the Eucharist" (*CO* par 104).

Further theological and ecclesiological questions emerge regarding the identification of the WCC as a space marker for moral communion. Some raise the question of the relation between the WCC as "an organisation making space for such communion" and "the reality it enables to foster". While the Johannesburg consultation report contentiously denies the ecclesial status of the WCC, it nevertheless notes that the WCC "is *of* the church, even if not churchly in the fullest sense" (*CO* par 107). The report concludes with a call to the WCC to continue to promote "mutual upbuilding of ... a visible moral communion, towards a vision of the church as moral "household of life"" (*CO* par 115). In this regard, the report introduces the notion of *oikodomé* or mutual upbuilding.

A critical point is made when the document notes that "the whole matter of communion in moral witness is moot if we cannot find enough agreement about the content of that witness"

(CO par 108). Thus, it is what the Johannesburg consultation highlighted as moral formation as an essential dimension of individual churches' ecclesial life and the wider ecumenical movement. The consultation report concludes by noting that the process of moral formation must continue. It "must be sought in every congregation, in every confessional family or communion, in every place, in every morally perplexing situation across this deeply threatened but beloved planet our home and the home of all living things we know" (CO par 116).

### 3.3.5 Post-Study Reactions on Ecclesiology and Ethics Study Project

#### a) Brief Summary of Key Insights from the Ecclesiology and Ethics Study Project

In the foregoing historical overview of the ecumenical tension between ecclesiology and ethics and the ensuing discussion and cursory analysis of the WCC study on ecclesiology and ethics, it was pointed out that the conviction that the call to unity (ecclesiology) and the call to witness and service (ethics) are inseparably interrelated. It was further argued that this conviction has indeed been central to the ecumenical movement from its very beginnings. In my analysis of the ecclesiology and ethics study it was shown that in the course of the study, discussions came increasingly to focus on the role of the church in "moral formation". On this basis, I am of the view that the central contribution of the ecclesiology and ethics study is arguably its emphasis on moral formation.

The report of the first consultation, *Costly Unity*, made an attempt to comprehend the relationship between ecclesiology and ethics on the basis of an understanding of the church as *koinonia*, emphasizing that the church not only has but is an *ethic*. *Costly Unity* thus proposed the contentious view of the church as 'moral community'. The report of the second consultation, *Costly Commitment*, made responses to the misunderstanding of the moral community by proposing the language of "moral formation" and "discernment" to describe the ethical nature of the church. It highlighted the ecumenical dimension of mutual accountability, thus the title *Costly Commitment*. *Costly Commitment* utilised the concept of the "household of life" as a description of the ethical dimension of being church as a supplement to the notion of *koinonia* already utilised at Rønne. The report of the final consultation at Johannesburg, *Costly Obedience*, highlighted ethical and moral formation as dimensions of church life and ecumenical communion. This consultation highlighted the formative significance of the liturgy. It further pointed out the fact that moral formation is concrete and local yet at the same time highlighting the notion of an "ecumenical communion of moral witnessing."

In light of the above insights, one may ask whether there should be a tension between ecclesiology and ethics. That ecclesiology and ethics belong together is both biblically and theologically plausible as the discussion of the moral implications of the ecclesiological notion of *koinonia* suggests. The same conclusion may be made with reference to perspectives on the ethical dimensions of liturgy and baptism. Indeed, the concepts of *koinonia*, moral formation and household of life as proposed in the ecclesiology and ethics study may indeed provide a language for speaking about the relation between ecclesiology and ethics. These observations notwithstanding, one may ask whether or not the ecclesiology and ethics project was a success. In addressing this question, I will briefly explore both the post participant and post non-participant reactions to the study.

#### b) Participant Post Study Reactions

Post participant reactions to the project are available in the form of post-study essays published in the final report of the ecclesiology and ethics study (see Best & Robra 1997:92-

121), a few published articles in the *Ecumenical Review* and two monographs (see Mudge 1998, Forrester 1997b) by some participants in the process. In his *The Church as Moral Community* (1998), Mudge develops further insights from the Ecclesiology and Ethics study and introduces a new element in the discussion, namely of God's mission to humankind. Having being part of a committee that drafted the *Costly Obedience* document, Mudge (1998:125-139) extensively refers to the report and revises some paragraphs especially from Part IV of the said report. Mudge is clearly a defender of the idea of the church as moral community. Nevertheless, he is critical of the "ecclesial ethics" of Stanley Hauerwas – from whom the phrase "the church not only has an ethic but is a social ethic" was borrowed – for seemingly lacking in sociological realism in its view of the church as though it were a "total cultural environment" (see Mudge 1998:77; cf. Gustafson 1985:83-94). For Mudge (1998:78), "[e]cclesiology' maps only part of the setting for the faithful." Accordingly, Mudge (1998:70-76) affirms the view in the *Costly Obedience* document of moral formation in the church and amongst and by the powers of the world.

Regarding the overall assessment of the ecclesiology and ethics project, Mudge observes that the effort of the project to bring together the two streams of ecumenical thought had been accompanied by some misgivings. He writes:

Some misgivings have had to do with a fear of moralism, of losing force of the gospel of grace. Others have grown out of worry about losing each movement's traditions, achievements, and critical focus. Others have grown out of worry about losing (Mudge 1998:68).

Nevertheless, Mudge (1998:68) observes that the "shape of the ecclesiology and ethics study as a discussion between the traditions of the Faith and Order and Life and Work has surely been fruitful." Be that as it may, one may still argue that some proposals from this study project may well be described as unsatisfactory. One such unsatisfactory aspect is best highlighted by Rasmussen in his interpretative essay on the study with particular reference to the Johannesburg consultation. Rasmussen (1997) notes a somewhat sudden turn towards a concern for "common discourse" and common "moral substance" in the sacraments away from a quest for a new approach of moral formation understood from the perspective of a process and round table methodology (cf. Robra 2004:93). He writes:

... the most promising way forward is not that of finding the language of normative common ground as that might be offered by theologians and agreed to by the heads of communions. This understanding of ecumenical formation is essentially doctrinal and jurisdictional. The most promising way is arranging a common table, open to participation by the whole people of God, to see what emerges as living church when faith is freely shared on the burning issues we face. Ecumenical formation here is more inductive than deductive, the outcome of a shared experience of engaged church. Here ecumenical formation happens by way of testimony to the moral life as the life of faith as churches face their own pressing issues, opportunities and problems (Rasmussen 1997:107).

In his view, in the end, *Costly Obedience* forecloses on its own process. Its "bias is finding common ecumenical discourse and voice, not as the outcome of ecumenical process but as initial common ground" (Rasmussen 1997:109). He notes that *Costly Obedience* is right when it asks: "How do we make room on earth for this *oikoumenē* of mutually recognized resonance among our ways of concrete moral-ecclesial being-in-the-world?" It is also right in its description of the WCC's task as "marker and space-maker for an ecumenical moral communion." "But it crimps the process rather than affecting it, when it tries to anticipate what we should find" (Rasmussen 1997:109). Rasmussen's (1997:110) plea is for a process of moral formation that adopts a "common table" approach that is open to high levels of participation by all, rather than stipulating agreed-upon common ground as a prerequisite for entering ecumenical space. He thus notes that in addition to the three costlies – of unity,

commitment and obedience – a new cost has emerged from the process namely, “the cost of arranging a process that risks the *discovery* of the visible unity of the church in open-ended exchange, rather than asserting it normatively as a condition of sincere participation” (Rasmussen 1997:110).

### c) *Non-Participant Post Study Reactions*

Apart from the participant post-study essays and the few monographs by some participants in the study process, there appear not to have been widespread non-participant reaction to the study project. According to my research findings, post participant reactions range from positive appreciation of the ecclesiology and ethics study project to sharp criticisms of its proposals. According to one commentator, Melanie May (2001:49), the ecclesiology and ethics study “ended rather precipitously, having perhaps posed more questions than pressed to conclusions.” May concludes that the “troublesome divide” at the heart of the “twentieth-century ecumenical movement has not been healed.” Others, such as Swedish theologian Arne Rasmusson, affirm several elements of the WCC study project but are nevertheless critical of the emphases of some participants in the project. For Rasmusson, the idea of a close relationship between ecclesiology and ethics is related to developments in contemporary theology and ethics. In his view, “much of the recent concern with ecclesiology and ethics is an attempt to liberate Christian ethics from [a] captivity to the “modern ethical project” (Rasmusson 2000:180). He argues that theologians like Stanley Hauerwas radically question the modern ethical project, which, in his opinion, led to the separation between theology and ethics (2000:184). Hauerwas’s phrase that the “the church does not have a social ethic; the church is a social ethic” – also quoted in the WCC study project – imply that “the church does not just provide an ethical theory, perspective or set of pronouncements. It is in its own life an ethics and a politics.” It follows then that ethics is nothing else than discipleship, sanctification, or spiritual life.

Within the African context, some theologians have intuitively recognised the tension between ecclesiology and ethics both as a consequence of the WCC project, as well as in the context of some experiences such as the church struggle against Apartheid in South Africa and the post-apartheid debates on the role of the church in society. This is especially the case for some notable South African theologians such as Dirkie Smit, John de Gruchy and Ernst Conradie. In his reflections on the WCC study project, Smit (2003:430) argues that it “is still an open question whether the attempts to integrate ecclesiological and ethical concerns have been successful.” Mindful of the various criticisms and achievements of the study process, Smit suggests that more “attention to the relationship between identity and responsibility is needed.”

Significant recognition of the tension between ecclesiology and ethics in the South African context has been well captured by De Gruchy, who also took part in the Johannesburg consultation that produced the *Costly Obedience* document. De Gruchy observes that the tension between *Faith and Order* and *Life and Work* issues was not just experienced at that high level of ecumenical engagement within the ambit of the WCC. It “reached down deeply into the life of every congregation and synod often resulting in acrimonious debate and even schism” (De Gruchy 2002:87). He cites the church struggle against apartheid in South Africa as one such experience in which this tension came to the fore. In his essay on “Becoming the Ecumenical Church”, De Gruchy (1995b:12) underscores this point when he notes that “during the years of apartheid... we found our unity in that struggle. Indeed, we became the ecumenical church in South Africa.” However, he laments the later separation of ecclesiology and ethics within the South African context and explains why with the ending of apartheid there is a decline in ecumenical commitment (1995b:14). According to De Gruchy

(1995b:14), “the unity during the struggle was based on a common social praxis without paying much attention to the theological and confessional issues which divide us.” Thus it is that De Gruchy laments the widespread ecumenical apathy in the South African context post the apartheid struggle.

In his paper read at the Johannesburg consultation of the WCC project on *Ecclesiology and Ethics*, De Gruchy (1997:361) notes that “[a]fter all, the struggle against apartheid was essentially a moral struggle, yet one which was also profoundly theological.” In light of South Africa’s democratic transition from apartheid, De Gruchy (1997:364) comes to the conclusion that the “ongoing search for unity and the never-ceasing task of pursuing justice have to proceed together.”

Another South African theologian who has made reflections on ecclesiology and ethics is Ernst Conradie. His contribution to discourse on ecclesiology and ethics from the (South) African perspective may be understood within the context of a research project on ecumenical theology and social ethics which has been part of a recent research focus in the department of religion and theology at UWC (see Conradie 2015:522). This study is also situated within the context of this larger framework at UWC. Within this broader framework, a series of think tanks on the interface between ecumenical theology and social ethics in the (South) African context were held over a period of three years from 2012-2015. The first of these think tanks on ecumenical theology centred the discussion on “notions and forms of ecumenicity”. Conradie (2013a:13-71) offered a leading essay, at this think tank, in which he discussed some 23 distinct ways in which the term ‘ecumenicity’ can and has been understood. While acknowledging that a tension between ecclesiology and ethics may be addressed with the concepts proposed by the WCC study project, Conradie (2013a:43) argues that the deeper theological problem is perhaps an inability to situate the tension “in the larger narrative of God’s work of creation, sustenance, salvation and consummation.” He thus notes the need for continued discourse in this regard.

The UWC project on ecclesiology and ethics culminated in a conference on the theme of “Ecclesiology and Ethics: The State of Ecumenical Theology in Africa” that was hosted by the Department of Religion and Theology and the Desmond Tutu Centre for Spirituality and Society at UWC (3–5 June 2015). Although the stated aim of this conference was “quite simply, to assess the state of the current debate in ecumenical theology in the African context and to engage the current generation of African theologians and ecumenical leaders on this theme”, it is my considered view that it was rather disappointing that none of the papers presented at the conference explicitly engaged with the focus of the conference. The exception was Conradie’s (2015) paper in which he gave a historical background to the project and highlighted some of its outcomes, including publications and postgraduate research around the theme within the department of religion and theology at UWC.

In light of my analysis of the WCC project and the varied responses to the project as highlighted above, it is my considered view that the several insights from the project have immense value for reflection on what the church *is* (ecclesiology) and *does* (ethics). It contributes to meaningful language to express the conviction that ecclesiological and ethical reflection are inseparable. While the project placed emphasis on primary formation in the life of faith as the work of the local church, it still highlighted the ecumenical dimension of ecclesial-moral formation. In this regard, I agree with Fernando Enns (2007:43) that “the potential for this project lies in finding a form of language or “space” that can encompass a plurality of expressions and make the discussion communicable.” The project further provides a conceptual framework that makes possible talk of ecumenical perspectives on ecclesiology and ethics.

### 3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the history of the polarisation of two ecumenical traditions, namely *Faith and Order* (read: ecclesiology) and *Life and Work* (read: ethics). It specifically provided an analysis of the ecclesiology and ethics study project. What then can be concluded from such a historical survey of the ecumenical movement's handling of ecclesiology and ethics and the analysis of the WCC ecclesiology and ethics study project?

I think that two main insights which have implications for how we understand what the church *is* (ecclesiology) and what it *does* (ethics) may be drawn from the foregoing. The first is that ecumenical ethical reflection and action are intrinsic to the nature and life of the church. Therefore, ecclesiology and ethics should not be separated; they belong together. The second insight follows from the first. Given that ecclesiology and ethics belong together, the polarisation of ecumenical efforts aimed at unity and those on social witness must be abandoned through dialogue and mutual learning. Put together, these insights illumine the idea that struggle for peace and justice in the world is not an addendum to the Christian faith; it is rather an essential expression of the faith and connected to the life of the church.

Further, one may argue that the first two consultations of the ecclesiology and ethics study attempted to find appropriate language to describe and theologically ground the interrelation between ecclesiology and ethics by proposing a number of concepts. From the ethics point of view, the Ecclesiology and Ethics study project proposed the controversial concepts of “moral community” and “moral formation” to describe the church. From the ecclesiological perspective, participants in the study project further explored the notion of *koinonia* and highlighted its integrative character as description of the “church and its unity” and the ethical implications thereof. At the final consultation, an attempt was made to reflect on moral formation through a language that transcends the institutional languages of *Faith and Order* and *Life and Work*.

However, the foregoing begs the question whether or not concepts from the ecclesiology and ethics study project have relevance for the ecumenical movement in Africa. Can one, in light of the WCC project, meaningfully speak of the tension between ecclesiology and ethics within the African context? Is discourse on ecclesiology and ethics not a luxury within the African context, given the urgency needed to respond to the many social challenges facing the continent? On the contrary, an overview of the African ecumenical agenda since the founding of the All Africa Conference of Churches in 1963 to its most recent General Assembly in 2013 proves otherwise (see Chapters 5-7 below). Additionally, one may argue that the historical developments of the various African theologies, most especially the inculturation type, the liberation type and reconstruction type, reveal the tension between ecclesiology and ethics within the African context.

In my view, insights from the WCC ecclesiology and ethics study project are indeed relevant for the ecumenical endeavours of the AACC. They hold immense potential to contribute towards a conceptual framework and an ecumenical theological language that may be appropriated for the African context. For instance, the notions of moral community and household of life may resonate well within the African context, given the emphasis on the principle of life as the core of ethics and on the fundamental value of community and relatedness in discourse on African Christian ethics (see Bujo 2003:73-79; Magesa 2005:77).

It may be asked, however, whether such appropriation does not entail an introduction of “foreign” concepts into ecumenical discourse in Africa. In my view such appropriation is plausible for historical, theological and ecumenical reasons. Historically, a close reading of the history of attempts to link ecclesiology and ethics within the framework of the WCC were indeed at several points prompted by questions and concerns arising from the experience of

Christians in Africa. Examples of these include amongst others; the struggles against apartheid in South Africa (cf. WCC Programme to Combat Racism), the struggles of the poor (cf. the CCDP trilogy on “The Church and the Poor”), the problematic on development (cf. the work of the WCC Commission on the Churches’ participation in Development- CCDP) and justice issues especially around economic globalisation - JPIC etc).

How this is so will be addressed in subsequent chapters, as indicated above. Given the ecumenical dimension of the gospel, I think that contextual theological reflection is at the same time glocal (see Sakupapa 2012:422). Accordingly, it is plausible to argue that theological insights developed in one context may enrich theologies developed in other contexts. Ecumenically, this illumines the idea that a renewed catholicity<sup>8</sup> underlies the need to ask how the unity of the church in each place is related to the unity of all. This study’s appropriation of insights from the WCC project on ecclesiology and ethics is thus a posture of a critical ecumenical horizon.

While the following chapters will endeavour to offer a historical investigation of the AACC’s handling of the tension between ecclesiology and ethics, the constructive aspects of my investigation may be described as contextual theological reflection, albeit with intercultural nuances. With regard to the later, I am in agreement with German theologian Volker Küster (2005) who has proposed three criteria for contextual theological reflection, namely relevance, identity, and dialogue. The criterion of relevance seeks to answer the question about the text’s relevance to a particular context. The second criterion of identity has to do with the continual examining of the context in the light of the text in order to ensure congruence with the Gospel. The last criterion of dialogue deals with the recognition that contextual theology is at the same time glocal. Therefore, it calls on a particular contextual theology to engage in dialogue with the wider ecumenical fraternity. According to Küster (2005:423), “the criterion of dialogue necessarily presupposes the development of an intercultural theology.” By Inter-cultural theology, Küster (2005:429) refers to theology that “explores the inter-confessional, inter-cultural and inter-religious dimensions of the Christian faith.” It is in light of these convictions that insights from the WCC study will be especially appropriated in the concluding chapter of this dissertation.

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<sup>8</sup> Best (1992:146) describes this renewed catholicity in terms of “diversity within the wholeness of the people of God”.

## **Chapter 4: A Brief Institutional History of the AACC**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In order to adequately discuss the AACC's handling of the tension between ecclesiology and ethics from 1963-2013 and to further engage with the insights of the WCC study on ecclesiology and ethics as discussed in the preceding chapters, the present chapter is an attempt to unravel the historical background of the AACC, its institutional structures and programmatic focus. Given the nature of the AACC as a fellowship of churches, I will argue in what follows that the history of the ecumenical movement in Africa is intertwined with mission history. It will further be argued that the tension between ecclesiology and ethics is already implicit in the institutional history of the AACC.

Methodologically, since history typically examines "texts", whether oral or written, in order to understand the past, this chapter will draw on official documents of the AACC, as well as relevant publications on African church history and the ecumenical movement in Africa. Structurally, the chapter begins with a discussion on methodological issues in writing African ecumenical history as part of an African church historiography. This is followed by a discussion of factors that contributed to the birth of the ecumenical movement in Africa. A discussion then ensues on the formation and further institutional development of the AACC. It will be argued that the AACC is indeed a very significant ecumenical structure on the African continent, which has contributed positively to the life of its member churches and in addressing pertinent social issues affecting both church and society in Africa since its inception in 1963. The chapter will also offer a brief survey of the achievements of the AACC in its quest to fulfil its vision of "churches in Africa together for life, truth, justice and peace."

### **4.2 African Church Historiography: An Ecumenical Perspective**

As argued in chapter 2 of this study, the history of the ecumenical movement in Africa is intertwined with mission history on the continent (see §2.2.1 above). Put differently, the origins of the ecumenical movement in Africa cannot be told apart from the history of "missions" on the continent. Such a view presupposes the necessity of an investigation into methodological issues regarding mission history. On deeper reflection, such investigation shows that recent discourse on mission history in Africa has paralleled wider tendencies in studies on African nationalistic historiography in general. This is especially evident with regard to the emphasis in both discourses, on the encounter between the so called African subjects and the Western agents.

#### **4.2.1 Missionary Historiography**

Admittedly, the bulk of literature that one finds on the history of Christianity in Africa often accentuates the role of Western missionaries in the planting of Christianity (see Groves 1948, 1955, 1958). Much of such writings hailed from missionary historiography. This historiography erroneously presented the history of Western missions in Africa as the history of African Christianity as a whole. Further, such historiography projected a very negative view of the African. Africans were variously described as pagans, heathens, savages, superstitious, and as 'a child in need of a tutor' and the continent was described as "dark continent" (see Hastings 1994:299-301). Baur succinctly depicts the colonial view of Africans thus:

In the eyes of colonising Europe, the Africans were "savages" to be civilised, "cursed sons of Ham" to be saved, "big children" to be educated. For them there existed no African culture, only tribal customs, no religion, only foolish superstitions and devilish cults.

To a great extent, these negative conceptions of everything African were largely informed by the dominant Enlightenment principles of the time (see Stanley 2001:1-21). In practice, this meant that missionaries understood their task of spreading the Gospel as a civilising mission of the African. This view of mission can in a way be attributed to missionaries' failure to distinguish between the Gospel and the vehicle through which it was expressed, namely Western culture. Being Christian was thus presented as marking a discontinuity with the 'pagan ways' (African religion and culture). The above depictions of the African is hardly absent in literature on missionary historiography.

#### 4.2.2 African Church Historiography: The Retrieval of African Agency

In more recent contributions such as the several single-volume histories of Christianity in Africa, one begins to notice a shift in the writing of African church history (see Baur 1994; Hastings 1994; Isichei 1995; Sundkler & Steed 2000). In his *The Church in Africa 1450-1950*, Adrian Hastings (1994:338-609) has devoted significant sections of his study to the contribution of Africans to the spread of the Christian gospel from the early periods of missionary encounter with Africa to the late colonial period (1950). Sundkler and Steed (2000:100) make clear the thesis of their volume *A History of the Church in Africa*, namely, that the book "deals with the African response to the Christian message and with African initiatives in the conversion of the continent." In *Trail-Blazers of the Gospel* (1991) – an edited volume comprising several essays on black pioneers of the South African missionary history – the story of the role of black pioneers in the establishment of the church in South Africa is told. Another significant earlier attempt at underscoring the scope of African leadership and initiative in the history is Gerdien Verstraelen-Gulhuis' study *From Dutch Mission Church to Reformed Church in Zambia* (1982), in which she stresses the role of African initiative in the building of the Reformed Church in Zambia. Adding his voice to the discourse on African initiatives in African church history, eminent scholar of world Christianity Andrew Walls (1996:86) argues that:

Modern African Christianity is not only the result of movements among Africans, but it has been principally sustained by Africans and is to a surprising extent the result of African initiatives. Even the missionary factor must be put into perspective.

The retrieval of African initiative (the African factor) evident in the above studies were most overtly heralded by Nigerian historians Ajayi and Ayandele in their influential essay, "Writing African church history", published in 1969. These Nigerian historians spelt out some of the implications that colonialism had on the writing of African church history. To a large extent, the pioneering works of Ajayi (1969, 1965, 1961) and Ayandele (1966) therefore set the pace for a new African church historiography. In *Christian Missions in Nigeria, 1841-1891: The Making of a New Elite*, Ajayi (1965:206-232) emphasised the African contribution to the planting of Christianity in Nigeria. Ajayi and Ayandele have argued, for instance, that West African mission history was a joint European-African undertaking. This has especially been demonstrated in their reflections on Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther, the first African to be consecrated Bishop.

Underscoring the significance of these earlier studies for African Church historiography, Nigerian historian Ogbu Kalu (1988:14-21) has distinguished different approaches in this regard, namely missionary historiography, nationalistic historiography, and the ecumenical perspective. The last of these is his proposal of the ecumenical perspective in the writing of Africa church history. Kalu considers missionary historiography as histories of missions written by missionaries and their protégés (e.g. Lautorette 1937-45, 1971; Neil 1964; Groves 1965). He further distinguishes different categories of missionary historiography, depending on who wrote and why they wrote. Missionary historiography focussed on the Western

missionaries' 'heroic' efforts to the total neglect of the role of Africans in missions. It neglected the African *dramatis personae* in the establishment and growth of the church in Africa (Ajayi & Ayandele 1969:93). One could therefore argue that missionary approaches to African church history tended to emphasise the *etic* perspective to the exclusion of the *emic*. The *etic* perspective often painted Africans merely as supernumeraries on the stage of history.

The Nationalistic perspective in African church historiography may be understood as a reaction to a pervasive missionary historiography and it emerged during the 1950's and 1960's.<sup>9</sup> It unravelled the well known fact of the undermining of the cultural self-confidence of the African converts by missionaries, explicit as it was in their historiography. Most significantly, this new historiography highlighted and reconstructed the role of the "native agents" who often bore the brunt of missionary work yet remained nameless. Drawing on such historiography, Ghanaian theologian John Pobee (2004:243) reconstructs this role thus:

Despite the presence of western missionaries, the true agent of Protestant mission in Africa is the peculiar African creation of the local catechist. The unsung hero of African church history prepared the ground for the missionary/priest, nursed the congregation, won souls for the church, and stayed with the people at the grassroots.

In this way, Pobee underscores the important but neglected role of the African in mission. Earlier, Sanneh (1983b:167) emphasised the role of Africans in the transmission of the Gspel by pointing to the comparatively small numbers of missionaries who were often concentrated on a mission station and thus found themselves "isolated from the events they would have liked to control." On this basis, he argues that:

African agency in the dissemination of Christianity is a major category in the transmission of the religion. This suggests that even the historical process of transmission was properly got under way only after local adaptation had been fully initiated.

Clearly, Sanneh proposed the subordination of the process of the historical transmission of Christianity under Western missionary agency to that of local assimilation and adaptation under African agency (cf. Sanneh 1983a:244). Elsewhere, Sanneh (1993:16) captures this view succinctly by insisting that "in so far as modern Africans have become Christian, they have done so with a Christianity mediated by the West, but in so far as Christianity has successfully penetrated African societies, this is largely because it has been assimilated into local idiom". This is better understood in light of Sanneh's idea of translation, which he

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<sup>9</sup> Within the broader discourse of African historiography, African historians had already begun to challenge the imperial historiographical hegemony by the 1950's. In this regard three influential schools of thought on African nationalistic history emerged during the 1950's and 1960's, namely the Ibadan school under E.A Ayandele, Jacob Ajayi, and K.O. Dike; the Dakar school under Abdoulaye Ly and Ki-Zerbo and the Dar es Salaam school under Terence Ranger. Generally, African nationalistic historiography as it was practiced in these schools generally had as its aim the vindication of the African past (see Falola 2001:228-254). According to Ajayi (1969), for instance, colonialism was only an episode in the long history of Africa; it was a parenthesis in the "black African experience" (Mudimbe 1988:73). That is, it must be set within the perspective of African history as a whole. By implication, Ajayi held that Africa really did have a history and that history was a history of African initiative. Clearly, this discourse challenged the subject problematic within colonial historiography in which the African was regarded as the object of the historical enterprise rather than its subject. It was a counter-discourse to Eurocentric perception of Africa. To counter colonial historiography, African nationalistic historiography asserted the 'African factor' in the making of history. The book *Aspects of Central African History* edited by Terrence Ranger is one such example of an attempt to give an account of "the specifically African side of central African history" (Ranger 1968b:xi). For an analysis of the rise and institutionalisation of Africanist history, see Arnold Temu and Bonaveture Swai's book *Historians and Africanist History* (1981:18-53). This work by Temu and Swai also represents one of the sharpest critics of African nationalistic historiography. For a detailed discussion on the development of nationalist historiography as espoused in the Ibadan and Dar-es-Salaam schools of thought, see Toyin Falola's *Nationalism and African Intellectuals* (2001:227-260).

extensively dealt with in his 1989 study *Translating the Message*. Therein, he spoke of “mission as translation” (Sanneh 1989:31). In a later publication, Sanneh laid stress on African agency as a neglected aspect in African church history. He thus suggested that a new historiography should be guided by the principles of local agency and indigenous cultural appropriation (Sanneh 2002:99). In this regard, he reinterpreted African historiography through the touchstone of translation (cf. Sanneh 1989:88-182). Adding his voice to the new perspectives on African church historiography, Kalu (2006:580) observes that “agency is a tool for analysing both the patterns of insertion of the gospel and the modes of appropriation.” By the latter, Kalu refers to how the “agents responded in the process of culture-encounter.”

Illustrative of this emphasis, some nationalistic historians have argued, for instance, that much of the early Christian expansion was the work of African mission agents rather than of missionaries (Temu 1972). In similar vein, Kalu (1978b:318) has argued for instance that “Christianity was spread throughout Igboland mostly by the agency of Igbo people.” The same may be said of the history of Christianity in the Niger Delta (see Kalu 1978b:324). Thus, in 1865, the Christian mission station in the Niger Delta began under the missionary agency of Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther, the first African Bishop of the Church Missionary Society (CMS).

Likewise, Kobia (1978:164) underscores African agency in mission when he asserts that Africans opened missions in the immediate hinterland and succeeded where the European missionaries had failed. In view of the emphasis on African agency by African historians such as Temu and others, Kobia posits that in the mid-1880’s, those Africans who had worked so hard in the so-called mission field began to express a new negative attitude from white missionaries (cf. Maluleke 2002:22). In this regard, he cites the attacks on the bishopric of Crowther, the first African Bishop (see also Ayandele 1966:216). Kobia attributes this negative attitude to social Darwinism, which was widespread in Britain at the time and this had a profound effect on a number of missionaries. This meant that Africans were to be regarded as generally inferior to the Anglo-Saxons. The rediscovery and emphasis on indigenous agency (the ‘African’ factor) which has been discussed above does not mean, however, the nullification or negation of Western missionary agency, at least as understood by critics of missionary historiography.

Returning to Kalu’s view of nationalistic historiography, it is interesting to note the irony which he points out regarding such historiography, namely that it remained trapped in a Western missionary institutional understanding of African Christianity, albeit highlighting the activities of the African agents during the colonial era. Using Frantz Fanon’s phraseology, Kalu notes that many of the agents highlighted in its approach would have worn the label “Black Skin White Mask” with pride!!

Kalu’s own proposal of the ecumenical perspective of church history stresses the view of African church history as “the study of the past and present experiences of the people with the gospel, both during and at the end of the missionary period” (Kalu 1988:19).

As will become clear in what follows, the AACC emerged during a period when African agency was becoming a central theme amongst African historians. This was brought into sharp focus given the nationalistic ferment that characterised the 1950’s and 1960’s. It is in this regard that one may note an underlying relationship between these concerns and the general developments related to the genesis of African theology, the ground breaking study of African religions by African scholars, as well as the reciprocal influence between African nationalism and the AACC. These connections notwithstanding, it is ironic that despite the pious pretensions of its historiography the missionary movement had an impact on the unity of the church in Africa.

### 4.3 The Missionary Movement as a Springboard for the Ecumenical Movement in Africa

This section will discuss the contribution of the Protestant missionary movement to the quest for the unity of the church in Africa against the background of the widely affirmed view of the missionary origins of the ecumenical movement (see §2.2.1 above). It makes the point that the 19<sup>th</sup> Century – described by Latourette (1971) as the “Great Century” of Christian missionary movement – was soon followed by a century of ecumenical growth and achievement (20<sup>th</sup> Century). That the history of the ecumenical movement is intertwined with the history of Christian missions has thus been a central intuition for most ecumenical theologians. On deeper reflection however, the impact of the missionary movement on church unity in Africa reveals an irony, owing to its contradictory role in this regard. That is to say, the missionary movement was both largely responsible for the introduction of denominationalism into Africa, as well as having played an important role in nurturing unity and cooperation amongst the churches.

#### 4.3.1 The Planting of Denominationalism

The introduction of denominationalism in Africa has often been blamed on the missionaries (cf. Crafford 1980:5). According to Vidier (1964:253-4), the missionary movement, “...transplanted not only Western Christianity, but Western denominationalism.” Indeed, Christianity arrived divided in sub-Saharan Africa and later became even more divided.<sup>10</sup> It may therefore not be farfetched to argue that the church in Africa was divided right from the beginning. The disunity of churches itself however goes as far back as the early centuries of Christian existence. With specific reference to Protestantism, a product and legacy of the 16<sup>th</sup> century schism within the Latin Church, it may be argued that the Protestant missionary movement carried within itself seeds of schism. As such, the splitting of the *Una Sancta* was replicated in Africa. To this day, Christianity in Africa remains disunited and the recent proliferation of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches has further complicated the quest for the unity of the church.

##### (a) Mission and Colonialism

Within the context of the 19<sup>th</sup> century missionary expansion, the “scandal of Christian disunity” became more apparent for missionary actors. This was acutely manifest in the rivalry for spheres of influence in the mission field between missionaries from different missionary societies and between Roman Catholic missionaries and Protestant missionary societies (Ekechi 1972:82; Isichei 1995:93; Neil 1964:385).

Further, it can be argued that the Berlin Conference of November 1884 - February 1885, at which the scramble and partition of Africa was worked out, had implications for the missionary agenda and denominationalism in Africa. Furthermore, these implications were

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<sup>10</sup> Historically, Christian missions in Africa emerged out of the missionary movement, which characterised the history of churches in Europe and America in the 18th and 19th centuries. It follows that much of the Christianity that flourished in many parts of Africa in the first half of the 20th century was a product of the modern missionary movement (Mugambi 1998:6). Nevertheless, the European missionary enterprise in sub-Saharan Africa dates to the Portuguese who already blazed the missionary trail in Ethiopia and the kingdom of Kongo in the 15th and 16th centuries. This does not, however, include North African Christianity with its Coptic (Egyptian) and Ethiopian Orthodox churches. For as theologian Thomas Oden (2007:72) argues, North African Christianity is nearly as old as Christianity itself, and predates much of European Christianity. Oden further suggests ways in which Africa has distinctly shaped the Christian mind. His core argument is that Africa shaped the Christian mind of the Western church in the very earliest centuries after Christ by being the seedbed of Western Christianity. In what follows, references to Christianity in Africa will therefore be most specifically used with reference to sub-Saharan Africa.

also inextricably linked with colonialism. For instance, a missionary society often went to a country where her home country exercised political control (see Pobe 1978:155-156). A related outcome of the Berlin Conference on missionary endeavour was that henceforth, “the missionary never depended on African hospitality or protection” (Kobia 1978:163). Permission to go where the missionary wished to go was now to be given by fiat from the governor’s office. Thus, more often than not, missionary work tended to be divided along European national interests. In French Africa for instance, there was extensive collaboration between the colonial officials and the Roman Catholic missions. To use the Belgian Congo as a case in point, Belgian missions received subsidies from the colonial officials. In 1940, the Catholic Church negotiated an agreement with Portugal, which saw Catholic missions obtaining privileges and salaries in return for control by the Portuguese State in Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique.

In retrospect, missionary endeavours thus became difficult to disengage from colonial intent. That is to say mission and colonialism were to a great extent inextricably linked. For this reason, it is plausible to argue that mission history provides a key into a deeper understanding of colonialism in Africa. Inversely, one could argue that rather incongruously, the colonial period somehow “precipitated an unparalleled era of mission” (Bosch 1991:227). However, according to Baur (1994:109), colonialism may be called a concomitant factor rather than an initiating factor given that the missionary enterprise was well on the way when the colonial occupation of Africa began.

By 1900 for example, most Africans could not tell the difference between the missionary and the coloniser. In Kenya, for instance, the entanglement between missionaries and colonialism was popularly expressed in a Kikuyu saying, *Gutiri Muthungu na Mubea*, which literally means ‘there is no difference between the missionary priest the colonial settler’. This proverb illustrates that the Kikuyu found the motives of the missionaries suspect because they found their behaviour close to that of the white settlers. In Kenya, this was further problematised by the sad history of the use of missionary land (see Hastings 1994:426-427). Given that Europeans settlers were no more than seizers of land, “it was inevitable that in those places where missionaries behaved in the same manner they would be identified with settlers”; *Gutiri Muthungu na Mubea*.

The debate on the relationship between missionaries and the colonial has been a subject of many hypotheses and counter hypotheses (see Taiwo 2010:50-54). On the one hand, there are those who portray all missionaries as nothing more than agents of colonialism (see Dachs 1968; 1972:653-655; Mudimbe 1988:47).<sup>11</sup> In the view of Dach (1972:658):

For all the difference in their objectives, the missionaries were as much agents of alien political expansion as traders, consuls and concession-hunters. By their settlement they threatened independence; by their methods they eroded custom, integrity and authority; by their connexions they invited the imperial replacement of resistant African rule. This was missionary imperialism sui generis-the product of practical experience in African circumstances.

For his part, Mudimbe (1988:47) depicts the missionary as the best symbol the colonial enterprise, devoted sincerely to the ideals of colonialism, namely the expansion of civilisation and the advance of progress. In similar vein, some scholars, such as Walter Rodney, have depicted missionaries as agents of imperialism. He writes: “The Christian missionaries were as much part of the colonizing forces as were the explorers, traders and soldiers ... missionaries were agents of colonialism in the practical sense, whether or not they saw

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<sup>11</sup> For instance, Dachs postulates the thesis about missionaries as agents of imperialism. He shows how the Reverend John Mackenzie of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society pushed vigorously for British intervention in Bechuanaland in the 1870’s.

themselves in that light” (Rodney,1972: 277).

On the other extreme end are scholars more sympathetic of missionaries. In his study *Religion Versus Empire? British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700-1914*, historian Andrew Potter (2004) has, with a specific focus on the British Empire, challenged the idea that missionaries were empire builders or agents of imperialism. He presents a picture whereby the relationship between missionaries and the colonial officials was one fraught with tension rather than warm partnership and collaboration (Porter 2004:316). In his conclusion to this significant study, Porter (2004:330) argues:

Aggressive crusading was far from representing the only evangelical approach to the missionary task. The variety and nuance of missionary standpoints, their detachment from empire and the measure of anti-imperialism, all associated with Britain’s Christian missionary enterprise, have an important place in the history both of empire and of missions.

Kalu (1980:7) offers a tempered analysis of the relationship between missions, traders and administrators in colonial Africa when he notes thus:

The missionaries depended on the merchants for transportation, supplies and ... protection but they were constantly embarrassed by the morals of the merchants and their brutal exploitation of African societies... The colonial government needed missionaries as civilizing agents and offered them grants-in-aid and protection. But the two allies differed over attitudes towards ‘pagan’ cultures, the goals of education and the future of the colonies... The government aimed to use the traditional order as a basis for administrative restructuring while the missions wanted to pull down everything.

Kalu understood missionary ideology as one that was full of paradoxes. He argues, for instance, that while sharing the racist theories of the age, and supporting the official programme to transform the political and economic structure of the colonies, missionary ideology “realized higher values in the biblical conception of the dignity of man ... the missionaries colluded with the colonial government when it suited their interests and yet would also at times unleash virulent attacks on certain styles and purpose of government” (Kalu 1980:183).

Although there is no academic consensus on the precise nature of collaboration between missionaries and imperialists, it is generally agreed that such collaboration did not always take the same shape or presented in a uniform manner across the continent. As Hastings (1994:428) has shown, the range of models in the relationship between missionaries and the early colonial state remained considerable; ranging from “fawning subservience to deep distrust and open disagreement.” In my view, it is plausible to argue that missionaries colluded with colonial intent whether wittingly or unwittingly. As Ulrich Duchrow (1999:146) has argued, the “nineteenth century missionary movement cannot be understood apart from the colonial policies of the European powers.” Nevertheless, it is highly doubtful that missionaries conceded subordination of their project for imperial purposes. I thus agree with Taiwo (2010:52) that “the straight identification of Christianity with colonialism is at best mistaken and at worst wrong.”

Granting colonialism and mission were intertwined; the one cannot simply be explained by the other. As Isichei (1995:92) rightly observes, “no one became a missionary with the conscious intention of furthering imperialism, and often there were serious sources of friction between missionaries and colonial officials.” For there were indeed cases when missionaries were prepared to fight the colonial administration if it seemed that the rights of the African were being infringed or betrayed (see Neil 1966:309; cf. Meebelo 1971:27). When the settlers in Kenya pushed for forced labour culminating in the promulgation of the policy of forced labour by Governor Edward Northey in 1919, the alliance of missionaries criticised it as being

cruel to Africans (Park 2014:94). There were also exceptional missionaries such as Henry Venn, then secretary of the Church Missionary Society, who demonstrated “a positive idealism of trust”, exemplified in Bishop Crowther’s election as the first African Bishop within the CMS (see Baur 1994:422). Nigerian historian Ade Ajayi (1965:174-175) portrays Venn as the leading exponent of the belief that the most effective way of planting the church in Africa was through the establishment of native churches that would be “self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating.”

In other respects also, such as that of the so-called African tribal society, the missionary held a much more optimistic view than that of the governments (see Roland 1952:180). For instance, Placide Tempels, a Belgian Franciscan missionary who served amongst the Baluba of present day Democratic Republic of Congo, pleaded with colonial authorities to appreciate the basic principles that influenced Bantu life and behaviour as a first step towards their civilisation. As his text *Bantu Philosophy* makes clear, Tempels attempted to valorise African thinking (see Maluleke 2001:29). Tempels was seeking, in part, to find a conceptual framework on which the evangelisation of the Luba people could be based. In his view, vital force is the unifying notion that underlies Bantu cosmology, ethics and ritual. He opined that the notion of vital force as found amongst the Bantu includes of necessity all beings, namely: God, the living dead, humans, animals, plants and minerals (Tempels 1959:36). Operating as he did from within the framework of the then prevalent Neo-Thomistic philosophical framework, Tempels argued that Bantu ontology perceives being as *force* or *power* (cf. Schreiter 1985:9). He thus came to the conclusion that “the fundamental notion under which being is conceived, lies within the category of forces” (Tempels 1959:33). For Tempels therefore, the Bantu conceive force as being more than a necessary attribute of being. They “speak, act, live as if for them, beings were forces ... Force is the nature of being, force is being, being is force” (Tempels 1959:35). Tempels thus claimed the inseparability of force from being in Bantu thought. Moreover, he compared the European conception of being with that of the Bantu and concluded that what Europeans call being, the Bantu conceive as force (Tempels 1959:35). Accordingly, Tempels argued that the Bantu concept of being is essentially dynamic while that of Europeans is static.

There were also instances where some African traditional leaders enlisted the support of missionaries to their own advantage. Such was the case of King Moshesh of Basutoland (present day Lesotho), who utilised the Paris Missionary Evangelical Society representatives as agents of his own consolidation and expansion (Robinson & Smith 1999:54-55). To this end, when the relationship between the King and the missionaries was very close during the 1940s, the King appointed the missionary Eugene Casalis as his minister for “foreign” of European affairs.

From the foregoing, it is plausible to affirm with Brian Stanley (1990:18) that there is need for an “even handed appraisal” of the missionary enterprise in relation to colonialism. Be that as it may, missionaries during the colonial period remained reactive rather than proactive in regard to African concerns.

#### *(b) Rivalry in the “Mission Field”*

With reference to the Berlin Conference that has been highlighted above, the missionary movement embellished the outcome of this conference with denominational stripes, resulting in a situation where certain denominations predominated in some areas. As different missionary societies advanced towards the same geographical areas, competition and rivalry emerged. Ironically, such competition also “forced the pace of missionary expansion”, as was the case between the Roman Catholic Holy Ghost Fathers and the Protestant Church Missionary Society (CMS) in Igboland (present day south-eastern Nigeria) towards the end of

the 19<sup>th</sup> century (see Kalu 1978b:311). Denominationalism and rivalry between missionary societies later led to the introduction of the comity system. The comity system was a principle whereby particular geographical areas were allocated to particular missions.<sup>12</sup> It was an attempt to delimit areas of operation for each denomination. Very often, such areas coincided with ethnic boundaries as was the case in Zambia and Kenya. Comity arrangements were necessary to avoid the rivalry and duplication of work that ensued from situations where several missionary societies worked in the same area (see Beaver 1962:42-68). For various reasons, rivalry was most prevalent between Roman Catholic and Protestant missions (see Kalu 1978a). Isichei (1976:170) captures such rivalry in captivation words when she observes the following within the context of West Africa; “to evangelical Protestants, the Catholics brought a religion tainted with idolatry. To the Catholics, the Protestant missions were simply converting pagans into heretics.”

Given this antagonistic relationship, Protestants did not expect comity arrangements with Roman Catholics unless imposed by government. According to Kalu (1978a:3), the Roman Catholics rejected the principle of comity because by implication, the principle of comity repudiated exclusiveness in mission. That is to say, a church that left a certain territory to another religious body was implicitly admitting that the command to preach the gospel to every creature is not addressed to itself exclusively.

Comity arrangements continued the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio*, thus ensuring that missions were bound to create both local churches and an area church. The idea of comity was certainly well intentioned as a tool for cooperation amongst missions. In some cases, the comity principle was also convenient for colonial administrators as it helped to evenly distribute the social benefits of mission work such as schools and hospitals (see Fiedler 1994:190; M’ Passou 1983:2-3). From this perspective, missions could be said to have been viewed as proxies for those areas of colonial government responsibility. The principle of comity, however, was not always seen in positive light by the local people. In the Zambian context for instance, the legacy of this policy can be seen in how provincial some denominations in Zambia are (see Sakupapa 2013:159). In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Protestant denominations were established according to regions and tribes (see Mulunda-Nyanga 1997:67). According to Onwubiko (2001:230-233), the comity principle fortified tribal sentiments and antagonism. In a similar vein, Kenyan theologian Philomena Njeri Mwaura (2009:22) has spoken of ethnicity as “a by product of a divided Christianity and its collaboration with colonialism is the issue of ethnicity.” In the South African context, Maluleke (1993:243) speaks of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in South Africa that was established in 1875 as a “Tsonga church” and describes how the introduction of Christianity amongst the Tsonga also forged also a new sense of ethnicity. He opines that the homogeneity of the Tsonga was in fact a product of Swiss Presbyterian missionary activity and that this was later exploited in the apartheid homeland system (1993:245-247).

Without doubt, missionaries of the modern missionary movement felt the weight of the tragedy of divisions in the “mission field” in a more direct way (cf. §2.2.1 above). Ironically, mission rivalry also had a positive aspect to it. As Ogbu Kalu (1978a:3) writes, “the exigencies of the mission field bred cooperation and comity... the various field missions informed one another of expansion moves, they accepted one another’s advice even when in blunt terms and they used conferences as a means to discuss, resolve and minimise competition.”

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<sup>12</sup> The comity idea was first put on the missionary agenda by the ‘Centenary Conference on the Protestant missions of the World’ held in London in 1888. In practice however, comity arrangements were much earlier. For a comprehensive discussion on comity see Beaver (1962).

### 4.3.2 Growing Missionary Cooperation

From the foregoing, one may argue that in a number of places, the recognition of disunity and rivalry in the mission field led to the search for avenues of cooperation. Apart from the comity principle, another significant initiative towards cooperation was the development of missionary conferences. In several countries, these missionary conferences later gave way to National Christian Councils. In light of the appearance of missionary conferences in the early 1900s, Malawian theologian James Amanze (1999a:154) has perceptively argued that “the call for church unity in Africa preceded the Edinburgh Conference.” In light of this assertion, Amanze (1999a:154) argues that “the ecumenical movement in Africa was both a catalyst for the launching of the 20<sup>th</sup> century ecumenical movement in Edinburgh as well as the brainchild of the initiatives taken at the Edinburgh Conference.”

Already in 1900, the Nyasaland United Missionary Conference was held in Malawi (then Nyasaland) at Livingstonia. All missions in Malawi attended this conference except for the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches (see Amanze 1999a:155). Elsewhere in Africa, other initiatives at unity were underway. The Christian Churches in Congo (now DRC) formed the Congo General Conference of Protestant Churches in 1902. In South Africa, the General Missionary Conference was formed in 1904 and first met in Johannesburg. In East Africa, the Kikuyu Conference was held in 1913 and has been described by many as an important highlight in the development of ecumenism in Eastern Africa (see Byaruhanga 2015:145; Mugambi et al 1982; Smedjebacka 2002:12). This meeting brought together about nine missionary groups amongst which included representatives from the Church Missionary Society (CMS), the Methodist Church, the Gospel Missionary Society (GMS), the Church of Scotland Mission (CSM), and the Africa Inland Mission (AIM), amongst others.

The general missionary conference of North-Western Rhodesia was formed in 1914 and later became the General Missionary Conference of Northern Rhodesia (present day Zambia) in 1922. In West Africa a proposal for church unity – which did not materialise unfortunately – was made at the Conference of Missions in 1928 involving Anglicans, Methodists and Presbyterians. Several other ecumenical initiatives were underway in different parts of Africa. Amanze (1999a:214) has helpfully catalogued a list of such ecumenical efforts in several African countries. Suffice it to note that most of such initiatives gained their impetus from within missionary circles. Other ecumenical efforts such as collaboration in education were a later development. Understandably therefore, the missionary movement may be rightly described as having served as the spring board for the ecumenical movement in Africa. Unarguably, during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, ecumenical endeavour in Africa could be best described as a missionary affair.

### 4.3.3 African Agency and the Ecumenical Movement

It is recognisable from the above discussion that there was a strong foreign missionary influence on mission cooperation as opposed to African agency. In most of the cases cited above, the initiative often lay with the Western missionaries. For instance, the Kikuyu Conference mentioned above was a conference of mission societies and not of churches. This conference spurred discussion on mission cooperation and later shifted the focus to church unity. These talks, initially amongst mission societies and later between churches, did not eventually lead to a united Protestant church in Africa, despite much hope for such an outcome. The search for unity collapsed in the 1970's.

The usual critique of the Kikuyu Conference was that it was a conference of white missionaries and therefore lacked the necessary African dimension. The African participation was indeed very low. In an informative study on *The Search for Church Union in East Africa*,

Henrik Smedjebacka (2002:257) has argued that “the main weakness in the search for church unity was no doubt the strong European dominance at the expense of African influence.” This was further compounded by the ensuing debate between Episcopal and non-episcopal churches stirred by Frank Weston (1871–1924), then Bishop of Zanzibar (see Oliver 1952:223-230). The above criticisms notwithstanding, the Kikuyu Conference (1913) has been hailed as a forerunner of contemporary ecumenism in the east African region (see Mugambi 1998:11).

From the above, it may be argued that a lacuna with regard to African agency in the birth of the ecumenical movement within the African context is clearly discernible. For even at the Edinburgh Missionary Conference, the lack of African participation does not appear to have been a matter of concern. As Brian Stanley (2010:18) notes, very few of the delegates at Edinburgh 1910 had any sense of the pre-eminent role that Africa was to play in the Christian growth of the next century. The immense Christian significance of Africa was indeed still not possible (see Walls 2002:58). The realisation amongst some within missionary circles of the fact that Edinburgh did not give adequate attention to Africa partly resulted in the decision to convene the ‘Africa’ missionary conference held at Le Zoute, Belgium, in September 1926. Held under the auspices of the IMC, the theme chosen for this conference was “The Christian mission in Africa”. Unlike Edinburgh, Le Zoute had a significant number of African participants. About thirteen non-African nations were represented, while nearly all African territories sent representatives to the conference. In its recommendations and resolutions, the conference touched on pertinent issues of concern within the African context such as on evangelism, education, language and literature, health and native welfare, economic questions, and the racial problems in South Africa (see Smith 1926). Given the breadth of subjects dealt with at the conference, Efiiong Utuk (1991:175) has argued that “Le Zoute became at once a ready and continuing reference source for later Conferences” in as far as African questions were concerned. In similar vein, Latourette (2004:395) has described Le Zoute as a “landmark in Protestant effort for Africa”.

The above observations notwithstanding, it seems implausible to claim that the birth of the ecumenical movement was entirely without African impulse. In fact, the 1910 Edinburgh Missionary Conference, which is generally regarded as the birth place of the ecumenical movement, was in essence a reaction to developments and impulses from the so-called mission fields in the non-Western world. It is in this regard that one may argue that in his study *From New York to Ibadan: The Impact of African Questions on the making of Ecumenical Mission Mandates, 1900-1958*, Utuk (1991) makes a good case regarding the place of African questions in the birth of the ecumenical movement. He has shown how Africa has had a determinative effect on the development of ecumenical mission mandates and that this effect is particularly related to the formation and growth of the IMC. Utuk (1991:1) puts it succinctly when he argues that

the decisive and more determinative factors which brought about the necessity for ecumenical mission thinking and acting were not missionary personalities or their agents but missionary questions or problems.

This is significant, given the roots of the formation of the IMC in the Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910 and the subsequent contribution of the IMC to the emergence of institutional ecumenism in Africa during the 1950’s (see 4.5.1.b below). What then was the specific African contribution to the birth of the ecumenical movement in Africa?

#### 4.3.4 Early African initiatives in Ecumenism

In some places in sub-Saharan Africa, stories of local ecumenical initiatives were not completely absent. The case of the establishment of the Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation (MEF) and the formation of the United Church of Zambia (UCZ) are instructive in this regard. Mindolo originally started as a venue for inter-denominational worship by African mine workers who came to the Copperbelt from various parts of Zambia (then Northern Rhodesia) and neighbouring countries, while the UCZ was a union church whose origins may be traced to the ecumenical endeavours of these mine workers (see Bolink 1967:178). These African miners soon gathered into what came to be known as the United Church on the Copperbelt (UCC). Quite clearly, the story of these African migrants is integral to the story of Christian mission on the Copperbelt. It stands as a unique case of an African initiative in ecumenism. Taylor and Lehmann (1961:33-35) observe that by 1931, several such churches were reported to have been established in most towns of the Copperbelt, purely out of the initiative of the African miners. Commenting on the UCC, Rev A.J Cross (1929:412 – 414) of the South African Baptist Missionary Society observed as follows:

A self-supporting, self- governing, Native Church has grown up and it is daily gaining strength and experience. A very vigorous evangelistic work is carried on by the church on its own initiative and responsibility, not only among the mining employees, but also in the unevangelized villages of the circumjacent Native district. A body of elders ably governs the church. ... Not only are these natives drawn from varying tribes but their spiritual history is associated with Missions of various denominational connections; but they give objective proof of their one-ness [sic] in Christ Jesus.

Anticipating a cooperative move as a result of this local initiative, the London Missionary Society soon seconded a missionary whose work laid a firm foundation for what would later become the Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation formally inaugurated on 6th May 1959 (see M' Passou 1983).

Meanwhile, the birth of UCZ had to wait for 16<sup>th</sup> January 1965, when the union of the United Church of Central Africa in Rhodesia (UCCAR), the Church of Barotseland, and the Methodist Church was formally inaugurated, thus bringing together Congregational, Presbyterian/Reformed, and Methodist Christian traditions (UCZ 1965:9; cf. Chuba 2005:143). The UCCAR, one of the uniting churches to form the UCZ, was itself an outcome of an earlier union. Part of this earlier union was the UCC, a church that may be said to have been catalytic for the cause of church union in Zambia. Underscoring the ecumenical ramifications of the birth of the UCZ, Gifford (1998:183) has described this church as “a remarkable ecumenical venture that is almost unique in Africa.” The UCZ thus emerged as the first church union resulting from African initiative (cf. Baur 1994:325). A similar development took place in Kenya in the early 1960's when Methodists, Anglicans and Presbyterians formed a united congregation, namely the Lavington United Church. Attempts for church union were also undertaken in Nigeria involving Anglicans, Methodists and Presbyterians, but this did not materialise, despite efforts at union reaching as far back as 1905 (Kalu 1978c:165-175, 1980:340-364; Sundkler & Steed 2000:949-950). Discussing the reasons that led to the failure of this effort, Kalu refers to disagreements regarding the kind of a united church that was envisaged and that concern over organisational issues rather than issues to do with mission and worship eventually led to the foundering of such a brilliant ecumenical effort.

The formation of the UCZ and the related development of the establishment of MEF as a pan-African ecumenical centre is indeed a story of the ecumenical movement in Africa born of African initiative. MEF was itself originally founded with the aim of serving the Christian

church and the community as a centre of study and worship and for consultation on the unity and renewal of the church and its responsibility in society (see M' Passou 1983:26-28). Mindolo later grew into an ecumenical training centre for Christian leadership. It later initiated the Africa literature centre, whose main focus was to train Christian writers and Journalists. The housing of the nascent All Africa Conference Churches (AACC) headquarters on the grounds of Mindolo, as well as the presence of other institutions such as the then UCZ Theological College, the Africa Literature Centre, and the Young Women's Christian Association further highlight the significance of Mindolo as an ecumenical centre. In sub-section 4.5.3 below, it shall be pointed out that the period after the inauguration of the AACC in 1963 witnessed to a variety of ecumenical initiatives across the African continent. Suffice it to note here, however, that the ecumenical movement in Africa can be said to have been an African missionary incentive if not initiative.

#### **4.4 African Nationalism and the emergence of the Ecumenical Movement in Africa**

The history of the ecumenical movement in Africa is integral not only to mission history as discussed above, but also to the rise of nationalism in most parts of the continent. This section will therefore discuss the contribution of African nationalism to the emergence of the ecumenical movement in Africa. While a detailed discussion of African nationalism is reserved for the next chapter, I will in what follows offer brief preliminary remarks on African nationalism in as far as this relates to the emergence of the ecumenical movement in Africa. I will also argue that mission activity contributed to the rise of African nationalism and that in the long run, the peak of African nationalism preceded the formation of the AACC.

##### **4.4.1 African Nationalism: A brief descriptive analysis**

An adequate understanding of African nationalism necessarily begs the question of the meaning of the notion of nationalism. According to most commentators, nationalism eludes precise definition (Okoth 2006:1). One explanation for such difficulty relates to "the problem of finding adequate and agreed definitions of the key concepts, nations and nationalism" (Hutchinson & Smith 1994:3-4). Benedict Anderson (1983:6), for instance, has defined a nation as "an imagined political community". He suggests that as an imagined community the nation exists within the realm of ideas within people's minds as an image. It is imagined because "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion." Cognizant of the difficulty related to the precise meaning of nation and nationalism, sociologist Anthony Smith (2001:9) has defined nationalism as "an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity for a population which some of its members deem to constitute an actual or potential 'nation'." This definition notwithstanding, Smith (1998:223) finds the expectation of a unified approach in the field quite unrealistic. On that basis, he concludes that scholars in the field "are as yet far from any theoretical convergence". How are we then to understand African nationalism?

While a more detailed discussion of African Nationalism is offered in the next chapter (see § 5.2.2a), it is helpful here to provide the general sense in which African nationalism is used in this study. In his *Nationalism in Colonial Africa*, Thomas Hodgkin (1957:23) broadly described nationalism as "any organisation or group that explicitly asserts the rights, claims and aspirations of a given African society (from the level of language group to that of 'Pan Africa') in opposition to European authority, whatever its institutional form and objectives." Others, such as the American Africanist scholar James Coleman (1958:425), defined African nationalism in a more restricted sense to refer to political movements that revolted against

European colonisation. Some limitations may be inferred from these two definitions. Hodgkin's view seems to postulate revolt against European colonial theory and practice as the solid basis for African nationalism. He advances a view of African nationalism as a revolt against European colonisation and its attendant theories and myths regarding the African. His definition situates the meaning of nationalism in the various forms anticolonial protest. While this may be understandable, it would appear that pushing this view further may imply a denial that Africa has a history. On the other hand, Coleman's definition appears to limit African nationalism only to the political dimension. In view of the foregoing, African nationalism may be broadly described as that movement in recent African history that sought the creation of independent nation-states by the transformation of colonies into independent states.

#### **4.4.2 Missionary Contribution to the Rise of Nationalism**

The role of missionaries in the rise African nationalism is hardly negligible. Mission education was particularly instrumental in this regard. Given the evangelistic focus of missionary education, those who attended mission schools in the early periods of the introduction of such education in many parts of Africa often became Christians. Similarly, those interested in Christianity went to the mission school. From this perspective, mission education is portrayed as having been initially concerned with teaching the local people how to read the Bible so that they could in turn assist facilitating the spread of the Gospel to their fellows as catechists and evangelists (Etherington 2005:261; Eshiwani 1993:15). In Sierra Leone, for instance, church and school were inseparable (Walls 2002:157).

The influence of Christianity through missionary education was very significant, given the missionaries' virtual monopoly on education during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Mission education also promoted Western values and norms, given that it was probably the major agent of socialisation to European ways amongst Africans. One may thus argue that while not intentional on the part of missionaries, mission education was a European institution at the service of colonialism. There was, of course, a struggle between the missionaries and other Europeans during the colonial period on what the goal of education was (see Anderson 1970). With respect to the education work in Lovedale and Livingstonia, Hastings (1994:593) has for instance shown that the civilising mission of education was often vitiated by caution. In his case study of the education work of the CMS at Kaguru in East Africa, Beidelman (1982:169) argues that some missionaries bitterly regretted the changes which secular education brought, "replacing the bad old things with the bad new things."

This debate notwithstanding, it was the case that mission education served as a medium of African acculturation of Western values. Consequently, mission schools produced an African elite that could no longer completely identify with African traditional society. Therefore, as many writers on both African colonial history and the history of Christianity in Africa note, missionary education undoubtedly served the colonial agenda in that it had a profound "civilising" effect on Africans. From a postcolonial perspective, one may even argue that the colonisation of the African mind was at the heart of Western education.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, this is not to suggest that Africans were passive receivers in this process of cultural exchange (cf. §5.2.2b below).

Ironically, it was the African educated and modernizing elite - generated through mission

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<sup>13</sup> This notwithstanding, it is debatable whether missions used education to plug into modernity. Here, it is necessary to distinguish mission education from secular Western education in colonial times as intimated above. Kalu (2005a:349) identifies the difference in terms of differing goals and curricula of education and cultural policies that betrayed the ideological cleavages and competing visions between missions and colonial government.

education - who eventually brought down the colonial system that had spawned them. Here, a connection may be noted between mission activity and the rise of African nationalism. Ayandele (1970:43) has underscored the contribution of missionary Christianity to the rise of African nationalism as follows:

In several ways the church was the incubator of African nationalism. It was in the church that the talents of the educated elite were first detected and developed; it was in the church that they first began to imbibe the concept of equality of all men [sic] and of all races.

Although the church taught the equality of all humans, it soon began to dawn on some Africans that this teaching on human dignity was at variance with colonialism, given the entanglement of the later with mission activity (cf. Sithole 1968:85). Many Africans who had received mission education soon discovered discontinuities between precept and practice amongst white Christians. They realised that they were not regarded equals. Therefore, as John Baur (1994:425) argues, “African nationalism had its very origin in the disappointment of the African elite, who had adopted the white man’s God and his ways of living but still were not accepted by his society.” Put differently, what Africans had learned from the missionaries helped foster the rise of demands and expectations for dignity, equality and independence by the educated African elite (cf. Hopkins 1966:562). In the words of Lamin Sanneh (1983a:128), “missionary education achieved the unintended result of stiffening the African resolve and directing it on the path of political and cultural emancipation.” In significant measure, the missionary movement therefore helped shape the goals and norms manifested in the growth of nationalist movements.

As a matter of fact, many in the first generation of African nationalists benefited from missionary education. For instance, Kwame Nkrumah attended a Roman Catholic elementary school and after a stint as pupil teacher he later obtained a bachelor’s degree in theology from Lincoln University in the United States of America. Zambia’s first republican President, Kenneth Kaunda, who was born to an African teacher and later ordained minister of the Gospel, David Buchizya Kaunda, who served at Lubwa mission of the Church of Scotland in Chinsali, Zambia, also benefitted from missionary education. The influence of Christianity amongst the first general of African nationalists is quite discernible in their respective political ideologies. One could thus speak of Kaunda’s Protestant humanistic ethic, Senghor’s religious philosophy and of Nyerere’s radical Catholicism, amongst others.

From the perspective of those educated African elites, nationalism may be seen as a quintessential creation of the African elite. This, however, does not imply that African nationalism did not take other forms (see §5.2.2b below). In time, African self-assertion soon found expression through philosophical notions such as *la negritude* and African personality. Theologically, the theme of human dignity provided a theological foundation for African Christian involvement in nationalism (see §5.3.2 below).

#### **4.4.3 The role of Nationalism in the Development of the Ecumenical Movement in Africa**

The above sub-section has unravelled the irony of the missionary contribution to the rise of African nationalism via education. It is ironic, given the entanglement between mission and colonialism, which in all fairness had proved difficult to disentangle (§4.3.1.a). It was within such a milieu that the first generation of African leaders were formed. As the next chapter will show, these African leaders soon began to question both mission and colonialism as far as the question of human dignity was concerned. Thus, colonialism soon gave way to independence and out of mission grew the church. Nurtured within such a milieu, African nationalism later had implications on the African Christian religious sphere. In view of this, Oduyoye

(1981:71) has argued that nationalism played a role in the development of African ecumenism. She has shown how the quest for political independence, which was widespread in most African countries during the 1950's and 1960's paralleled the quest for the Africanisation of the church in ecclesiastical circles. According to Oduyoye (1981:71), "as colonies were to become nations, missions were to become churches." At close analysis, it would appear that nationalism and religious independency were more or less simultaneous rather than sequential. Although Oduyoye did not extensively show how this was so, it is the Zimbabwean theologian Gwinyai Muzorewa who was amongst the earliest to explicitly note the link between African nationalism and the ecumenical movement in Africa.

In his *The Origins and Development of African theology*, Muzorewa (1985:52) has argued that any theological developments within institutional ecumenism in Africa as represented by the AACC "can really be regarded as emanating from the general spirit of African solidarity which is also the spirit of African nationalism." Clearly, what Muzorewa had in mind here is a specific Pan-African perspective on African nationalism.

Without discussing in detail the roots of African nationalism, suffice it to note in more broad terms what has generally been considered as external factors that contributed to the growth of African nationalism. These include inter alia, a period of residence overseas by African thinkers, and Pan-Africanism. In a way the two are to some extent intertwined, as will become clear in what follows. Davidson (1994:65-74) has defined Pan-Africanism as the idea and programme of an envisaged continental unity. Esedebe (1982:3) has offered a more comprehensive definition of Pan-Africanism as

a political and cultural phenomenon which regards Africa, Africans and African descendants abroad as a unit. It seeks to regenerate and unify Africa and promote a feeling of oneness among the people of the African world. It glorifies the African past and inculcates pride in African values."

Similarly, Toyin Falola (2001:144) has defined Pan-Africanism as

an idea and a movement for creating unity among blacks in Africa and the entire African diaspora so that they are better able to liberate Africa from imperial domination, speak with a common voice on matters of interest, and uplift all the peoples of African descent from their marginalised position in radicalised environments.

From these definitions, Pan-Africanism may be said to be mainly a geo-political concept. They further show that it is both a movement and an ideology. Nevertheless, its historical rise has been captured variously by different scholars. Esedebe, for instance, has traced its origins as far back as 1796, thus identifying it with the American Revolution. For some, however, the history of Pan-Africanism may be traced back to the 1900 when the first Pan-African congress was organised in London by Henry Sylvester William (see Thompson 1969:3-6). Amongst such scholars, it has been common to regard the Afro American thinker W.E.B. DuBois as the father figure of Pan-Africanism. However, this must be seen in its larger picture. Zeleza (2003b:415-418) has argued that there are at least six versions of Pan-Africanism, namely the transatlantic, Black Atlantic, continental, sub-Saharan, Pan-Arab, and global pan-Africanism. Each of these developed its own advocates, discourses and movements. Zeleza notes that in organizational terms, trans-Atlantic Pan-Africanism predominated in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, while continental Pan-Africanism became most influential for most African leaders and intellectuals from the second half as decolonization bloomed. In this connection, it can be argued that the thinking of DuBois soon influenced a number of emerging African leaders such as Jomo Kenyatta (Kenya), Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana) and Nnamdi Azikiwe (Nigeria), who would later chart the course for the movement in Africa. This is critical given the discussion on Pan-Africanism within the

context of this study centres on the ways Pan-Africanism manifested in Africa.

Kwame Nkrumah especially reflected this influence at the first All Africa Peoples Conference, which was hosted by Ghana at his initiative in 1957. The Ghana meeting was significant, given there had not been much activity on Pan-Africanism between the years 1946-1957, which have been described as the lull period of Pan-Africanism. It is understandable then that the resurgence of Pan-Africanism after 1957 is often attributed to the work of Nkrumah.

Nkrumah's famous dictum "seek ye first the political kingdom" would soon place him amongst the most radical advocates of Pan-African unity. The initial national triumph associated with Nkrumah, which saw Ghana become the first sub-Saharan African country to gain political independence, had significant consequences for the cause of African nationalism in general. From a practical side therefore, the African nationalist movement may be said to have drawn its strength from Pan-Africanism. The radical Pan-Africanism of Nkrumah, which advocated for the unity of Africa, did not materialise, however. Nevertheless, it was significant that Pan-Africanism resulted in the creation in May 1963 of a statist intergovernmental organisation, the Organisation for African unity (OAU), present day African Union (AU). Heads of State from 31 of the 32 independent African states then (Morocco was not in attendance), signed the Charter of Unity of the OAU at Addis Ababa, thus launching the newly formed continental wide body. The initial mandate of the OAU was the liberation of the continent.

What then is the relationship between African nationalism and Pan-Africanism? From the above discussion, Pan-Africanism may be understood more broadly as a wider project than that of neo-colonial state formation. In fact, the Pan-African vision of political independence was a strong reaction against the European colonial project, which was perfected at the Berlin Conference (1884-1885). Much to the disappointment of Nkrumah, with his vision of African unity, most African nationalist leaders tended to focus on the attainment of independence within the context of colonial territories crafted at the Berlin Conference. In fact, the African leaders legitimised the legacy of the Berlin Conference when they enshrined the principles of non-interference and inviolability of national boundaries in the OAU charter. The various nation-building policies in fact contributed to some kind of naturalization of the territorial nation (see Chapter 6 §6.2.1 below).

Most of these first generation African nationalists asserted African agency yet affirmed European "liturgy" and insisted on European forms of politics under African control. With regard to the Pan-African vision, it may be argued that feelings of continental unity were often subordinated to 'nationalism' (see Rotberg 1966:38). This tenuous relationship between the two was best captured by Julius Nyerere in his speech at the inauguration of the University of Zambia on 13<sup>th</sup> July 1966. Nyerere et al (1967:1) noted:

Indeed I believe that a real dilemma faces the Pan-Africanist. On the one hand is the fact that Pan-Africanism demands an African consciousness and an African loyalty; on the other hand is the fact that each Pan-Africanist must also concern himself with the freedom and development of one of the nations of Africa. These things can conflict. Let us be honest and admit that they have already conflicted.

For Nyerere, a gradualist approach to continental political unity appeared attractive, given the apparent tension between nationalism and Pan-Africanism. Clearly, the relationship between African nationalism and Pan-Africanism is an ambiguous one. At times, African Nationalism reinforced Pan-Africanism, while at other times it was evidently subverted. Given Pan-Africanism's emphasis on continental unity, it is understandable that the movement proved attractive for those who sought the unity of the church in Africa. This can be discerned in the

remarks made by Henry Makulu at the All Africa Youth Assembly held in Nairobi in 1962. Makulu echoed his support of Pan-Africanism, while at the same time expressing wariness regarding nationalism and nationalist governments on the basis that the later could all too easily become a new sort of tribalism (All Africa Youth Conference 1963:10). For Makulu, Africans must press forward until they are one Africa and the Church in Africa is one Church.

Arguably, the success of some nationalistic and pan-African movements of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Africa stimulated the quest for church unity, as well as theological developments in much of Africa (see chapter 5). It is within this framework that theological perspectives on Africanisation and indigenisation and the development of African liberation theologies flourished.

#### **4.5 The Formation of the AACC**

From the foregoing, it has been argued that the missionary movement and the Pan-African movement were significant factors in the emergence of the ecumenical movement in Africa. The irony that underlies both influences has equally been highlighted. How these factors contributed to the processes that eventually led to the formation of the AACC as a Pan-African church organisation is a task which I now turn to. To do so, however, it must be pointed out that the history of the ecumenical movement in Africa cannot be isolated from international developments at the time. In this section, I will therefore begin with a very brief discussion of the role of global ecumenical developments in this regard and then proceed to a discussion on the formation of the AACC.

##### **4.5.1 Institutionalisation of Ecumenism in Africa**

The institutionalisation of the ecumenical movement in Africa benefited from impulses that arose from international ecumenical structures such as the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), the International Missionary Society (shortly before the latter merged with the WCC) and the WCC.

###### *(a) The All Africa Lutheran Conference Marangu 1955*

Strictly speaking, the LWF Conference which was held in 1955 on the slopes of Mt Kilimanjaro in Marangu, Tanzania, represents the first attempt to initiate an all African effort within the context of missionary work. According to Schjöring (2008:61), this conference marked a renewal of the resolution coming from the Edinburgh Missionary Conference, “calling for ecumenical cooperation as an indispensable precondition for a successful effort to evangelise the world in the present generation.” Although this conference was confessional (Lutheran), it instigated a new way of thinking in the minds of African church leaders. It is significant that out of a total of 150 participants at this conference, 100 were Africans (see Fueter 1956:289). Two further All Africa Lutheran Conferences were held at Antsirabé, Madagascar and Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in 1960 and 1965 respectively. These conferences were intended to be a forum for joint exploration of issues of concern for Lutherans in Africa.

###### *(b) The All Africa Church Conference, Ibadan 1958*

Wider ecumenical developments soon followed and were to a large extent closely linked with the work of IMC. The IMC held its World Assembly in Africa for the first time at Accra in Ghana from 28<sup>th</sup> December 1957 to 8<sup>th</sup> January 1958. The holding of the Assembly in Africa provided a good occasion for organising the first All Africa Church Conference (hereafter Ibadan meeting) which met at Ibadan, Nigeria, in January 1958 (see Weber 1970:76). Although the Christian Council of Nigeria hosted and contributed much to the organisation of the Ibadan meeting, the initiative had mainly come from the IMC.

In his opening address at the Ibadan Conference, Francis Akanu Ibiam, then president of the Christian Council of Nigeria and chairman of the Ibadan meeting, recalled how the then secretary of the IMC, George Carpenter had discussed the idea of holding an All-Africa Church Conference somewhere in Africa already in 1956 (IMC 1958:9). That the meeting was held under the auspices of Christian Council of Nigeria was indeed very significant. This was critical. For, as Greaves (1958:257) observes: "Some Christian Councils might have felt unable to accept an invitation from the IMC itself, but this difficulty was overcome by the magnanimity of the Christian Council of Nigeria, which thereby, in the words of a conference resolution, 'earned for itself a proud place in the annals of the emergent Church in Africa'."

The Ibadan meeting is reckoned to have been the first largest continent wide meeting of representatives of Protestant churches in Africa. It significantly gave expression to the desire by African Christians for an Africanised church (see chapter 5 below). Utuk (1991:247) observes that at Ibadan, the churches "announced that they were no longer *objects* of, but interested *participants* in mission". It was indeed the first ecumenical conference at which Africans were the majority. The conference attracted about 195 participants from 25 African countries and was held under the general theme "The Church in Changing Africa". The programme at Ibadan included lectures and discussions on several topics that were reflective of common African concerns at the time.

The Ibadan Conference left such a deep impression on the participants that they could not see it as an end in itself. As such, one of the main resolutions at Ibadan was the appointment of a ten (10) member provisional committee which was tasked to consider the implementation of the report of the meeting, as well as the appointment of a continuation committee and a regional secretary. The South African Z.K. Mathews was one of the guiding geniuses behind under whose leadership the conference appointed this 10 member committee. Dutch missiologist Johannes Verkuyl (1978:249) has hailed Mathews as a pioneer "in ecumenical relations, in the African quest for self-expression, and in the relations between church and society."

With the South African Dr Donald M'Timkulu as its secretary, the continuation committee stimulated and facilitated the holding of several consultations and conferences on various issues such as Urban Africa (Nairobi 1961), Youth (Nairobi 1962), Education (Salisbury 1962), Independent Church Movements (Mindolo 1962), Home and Family Life (Mindolo 1963), and Women's Status and Responsibility in Church and Society (Kampala 1963). The work of the continuation committee culminated in the holding of a major meeting in Kampala in 1963 at which the All Africa Conference of Churches was formally inaugurated. Since its formation as a provisional committee and its eventual inauguration as a continental conference of churches, the AACC - then known as the All-Africa Churches Conference - had been housed within Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation until 1965 when the AACC headquarters was moved to Nairobi, Kenya. The decision to move the headquarters to Nairobi was arrived at during the first General Committee of the nascent AACC as a follow up to Kampala's affirmation of the sitting of the AACC as a temporary measure. One of the main reasons cited for the change in location was that the headquarters needed to be in a city that has direct access to an international airport that has frequent flights of a number of main airlines at the time.

#### **4.5.2 The Birth of the AACC: Kampala 1963**

It has been pointed out in the foregoing that the idea of an All Africa Conference of Churches was conceived at Ibadan (1958) and born on 20<sup>th</sup> April 1963 in the amphitheatre of the Arts Faculty at Makerere College in Kampala. At Kampala, representatives of 100 churches from 42 countries in Africa gathered for the inaugural Assembly of the AACC. The delegates

resolved to establish the AACC as a fellowship of churches for consultation and cooperation within the wider fellowship of the universal church. The birth of the AACC was signalled by the reverberating sounds of the African drum beats (AACC 1963:11). This was significant given that the use of African drums for Christian religious purposes had been long proscribed by missionaries on the pretext that it was ‘demonic’.

Although largely a Protestant affair, three official Roman Catholic observers were in attendance at the Kampala Assembly. The delegates at the Assembly also agreed on the constitution and therein set out three functional organs for the new institution. These were namely, the General Assembly, the General Committee, and the Commissions (see AACC 1963:73). The initial commissions established were on “the life of the Church”, “social, national and international responsibility of the church”, “youth”, “education,” and on “literature and mass communication”. In order to make the AACC a more effective instrument for the churches in Africa, these commissions have undergone considerable change and modification over time (see §4.5.4 below).

The newly founded AACC initially established its headquarters at the Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation in Kitwe, Zambia, but was later moved to Nairobi in 1965, following concerns on accessibility to an international airport, as well as matters of geographical convenience for its constituency. The vision for Christian unity embodied in the AACC did not only benefit from the missionary movement, Pan-Africanism and global ecumenical developments of the time. Protestant thinkers such as Z.K. Mathews (South Africa), Francis Akanu Ibiam (Ghana), Donald M’ Timkulu (South Africa), Gabriel Setiloane (South Africa), and Jean Kotto (Cameroon) helped kindle the African ecumenical vision.

#### **4.5.3 Other Ecumenical Developments Post Kampala 1963**

It must be pointed out that in the years following the inauguration of the AACC, several continent wide structures of cooperation amongst churches emerged. The African Independent Churches Association (AICA) was formed in 1963 but soon collapsed owing to financial challenges. The AICA was initially set up to assist in educational programmes for its members. In 1966, 192 representatives of evangelical churches gathered in Limuru, Kenya, and formed the Association of Evangelicals in Africa and Madagascar. Another significant institution to be formed was the Organisation of African Instituted Churches (OAIC), which was established in 1978 in Cairo, Egypt. Pope Shenouda was instrumental in the conference that led to the formation of the OAIC.

Other cases of ecumenical cooperation in Africa include, for instance, the cooperation between the Roman Catholic Church and Protestant denominations in Nigeria in the creation in 1971 of the National Institute for Training in Moral Education (TIME), which soon led to further collaboration under a new body the Christian Health Association of Nigerian (CHAN). Writing in 1969, just a few years before the above development materialised, Akinsola Akiwowo (1978:394) noted that the spirit of ecumenism could be discerned between the Anglican Church and the Roman Catholic Church albeit at the grass-roots level. Cooperation within CHAN culminated in the formation of the Christian Association of Nigeria which was inaugurated in 1980.

Apart from these institutions, collaboration in theological education has also been a central feature of ecumenical cooperation in Africa. Joint theological schools were formed in a number of places. Ecumenical theological cooperation in black theological education existed for instance at the South African Native College of Fort Hare in South Africa since the 1920’s. When the South African government took over the running of Fort Hare, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Congregationalists and Methodists formed the Federal Theological Seminary

(FEDSEM) at Alice near Fort Hare as an ecumenical theological institution in 1960 and was later moved to Pietermaritzburg. In 1942, the Methodist, Presbyterian and Evangelical Presbyterian churches in Ghana founded Trinity College in Kumasi as an ecumenical venture in ministerial training. By 1959, the college was re-establishment as an ecumenical theological training centre from Kumasi to a location near the University of Ghana in Legon (see Sundkler & Steed 2000:716). The Christian Council of Ghana played a critical role in this process.

In 1948, the Methodists, Anglicans and Presbyterians together established Trinity College in Umuahia as a post-Secondary higher institution of learning in eastern Nigeria (see Taylor 1996:208). Already in 1955, St. Paul's United Theological College in Limuru Kenya was formed symbolising the quest of the Protestant churches at cooperation in theological education. St. Pauls, which has since been transformed into St. Pauls University, was initially established to train pastors for the Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian and Reformed Churches in Kenya (see Nthamburi 1991:23). Other significant ecumenical venture was the establishment of the Immanuel centre in Ibadan, Nigeria by Anglicans and Methodists in 1958. In 1962, the Cameroonian Protestant churches started a United School of Theology in Yaoundé. With the support of the WCC's Theological Education Fund and the Protestant Faculty of Geneva, this institution soon developed into the *Faculté de Théologie*.

Related to ecumenical collaboration in theological education was the birth of theological associations in several regions of the continent. Organisations such as the Association of Theological Institutions in Eastern Africa (ATIEA) founded in 1960, the Association des institutions d'enseignement Théologiques en Afrique Centrale et Occidentale (ASTHEOL) formed in 1966, the West African Association of Theological Institutions (WAATI), and the Association of Theological Institutions in Southern and Central Africa (ATSCA) formed in 1986, facilitate collaboration in theological education, as well providing space for the exchange of ideas. The WCC Theological Education Fund (TEF 1958-1977), which was established at the IMC meeting in Accra, Ghana, in 1958 for the advancement of theological education in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, played the role of mid-wife in a number of such initiatives (Pobee 2010; Werner 2011:97). More specifically, TEF was midwife of Associations of Theological Schools such as ATIEA, ATISCA, WAATI, ASTHEOL central, ASTHEOL OEST, and the continent-wide Conference of African Theological Institutions (CATI). Another significant development was the formation of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) formed in 1976 (see §5.3.2b below). Under the leadership of John Pobee, TEF also supported the creation of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians in 1989.

Within Roman Catholic circles, the churches are united in the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Madagascar and Africa (SECAM), which was established in Kampala, Uganda, in 1969 on the occasion of the first papal visit to Africa. SECAM was formed as a body for liaison, study and consultation amongst the Bishops conferences in Africa and Madagascar. Its headquarters are in Accra, Ghana. Although the practical implications of the statement on ecumenism from the Roman Catholic Church are yet to be seen,<sup>14</sup> it is significant that in his Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Pope John Paul II emphasised ecumenism thus:

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<sup>14</sup> For useful studies on Roman Catholic Ecumenism in the African context, see Obi (2015) and Onwubiko (2001:254-300). The *Directory on Ecumenism for Southern Africa* (DESA) – issued by the Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference in 2003 – is another significant development on ecumenism within the Roman Catholic Church in its African constituency. For a helpful evaluation of the ecumenical potential of DESA, see Uzochukwu (2009:65-76).

Catholics are invited to develop an ecumenical dialogue with all their baptised brothers and sisters of other Christian denominations, in order that the unity for which Christ prayed may be achieved, and in order that their service to the people of the Continent may make the Gospel more credible in the eyes of those who are searching for God (*Ecclesia in Africa* 1995:65).

Beginning in the 1980's, there was a new development in the ecumenical fraternity in the form of sub-regional ecumenical fellowships that would later provide linkages between the churches of Africa and official ecumenical structures such as the AACC. The first to be established was the Fellowship of Councils of Churches in Eastern and Southern Africa (FOCESSA) in 1980 and later as FOCCISA in 1999. The Fellowship of Christian Councils in Western Africa (FECCIWA) was formed in 1994. In 1999 the Fellowship of Churches and Councils in the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa (FECCLAHA) established. The latest of these was the Fellowship of Christian Councils in Central Africa (FOCCOCA), which was founded in 2002. Other developments also followed in the forms of ecumenical organisations addressing specific issues, such as the Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (EDAN).

#### **4.5.4 Organisational Structure and Programmatic Thrusts of the AACC**

Given the focus of this study, it is worth considering the organisational structure of the AACC. The AACC operates at two levels comprising of a policy structure and the general secretariat, respectively. The policy structure consists of the General Assembly and the General Committee. The General Assembly is made up of representatives from all member churches, while the General Committee comprises of elected officials, namely the President, four vice presidents, and church representatives drawn from various regions. Being the highest policy making organ of the AACC, the General Assembly provides the mandate for the institution and it meets every four years. In between assemblies, the policy matters are handled by the General Committee. In turn, the executive committee acts on behalf of the General Committee in managing the AACC. The General Secretariat, on the other hand, is responsible for the implementation of the mandate received from the General Assembly. Under the leadership of the General Secretary, the General Secretariat may be said to be the hub of the institution. In this sense, it also serves as the nexus between national, regional and continental, and global agenda of the ecumenical movement.

The organisational structure of the AACC has been restructured at several points in the history of the AACC in a quest to make the organisation more viable amidst pressing economic and societal challenges. The need to amend the constitution in view of necessary changes in the structure and administration of the AACC was strongly pointed out at the 5<sup>th</sup> General Assembly held in Lomé, Togo (see AACC 1988:107, 111-112). It was at the Yaoundé (2003) Assembly, however, where more concrete steps were taken to restructure the AACC in order to operationalise a new strategy (see AACC 2006:214). To that effect, a two year restructuring period was endorsed (see AACC 2006:214-217). Following the Maputo Assembly (2008), the AACC revisited its programmatic priorities leading to a new organisation structure which has come to focus on six strategic areas or departments. These are namely “Empowerment and Capacity Building”, “Theology, Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations”, “Peace, Healing and Reconciliation”, “Finance, Administration and Resource Mobilisation”, the “Lomé Office in Togo”, and the “African Union Liaison Office” in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

The Lomé office was officially inaugurated in 1978 following a decision made at the Lusaka General Assembly (1974) to open a sub-regional office in Togo that would provide services to its francophone constituency. The *raison d'être* of the Lomé office has in recent times transcended the initial mandate to include hosting designated continental programmes of the AACC. The office has since been granted a diplomatic status by the Togolese

government and in addition to its initial mandate it. Meanwhile, the creation of the AACC-AU liaison office started in earnest and culminated in the appointment of an ecumenical envoy to the AU and to the Pan-African Parliament in Addis Ababa in 2007. This was a crucial political and diplomatic move intended to serve the sole purpose of both advocacy and monitoring of important decisions made in the two pan-African institutions and filtering such information to AACC member churches.

From a careful analysis of the General Assembly reports, as well as the yearly reviews of AACC work, it appears that the programmatic thrusts of the AACC are most likely to undergo changes or restructuring depending on the mandate of a particular Assembly. Most recently for instance, one can note differences in the programmatic thrusts arising out of the Maputo and that of the recent Jubilee Assembly in Kampala. By the time of the General Assembly in Addis Ababa (1997) for instance, coordination of the various activities of the AACC was undertaken through three units namely the General secretariat (Unit I), Selfhood of the church (Unit II) and Service and witness (Unit III). The unit on Selfhood of the church included the youth desk, women's desk, Christian and family life, education, theology and interfaith. Unit III on service and witness covered emergency and refugee services, research and development consultancy service, and communications centre. Following the mandate of its Kampala Assembly (2013), the AACC is organised around four programmatic thrusts namely "Theology, Ecumenical & Interfaith Relations", "Empowerment, Diakonia & Development", "Family Life and Gender Justice", Peace and Advocacy", and "Finance/Administration & Resource Development (see Appendix 2).

#### **4.5.5 Membership of the AACC**

##### *a) Membership Criteria*

According to the basis of the AACC (1963:63), the AACC "is a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and only saviour according to the Scriptures and therefore, seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit." Accordingly, membership into the AACC is open to all churches in Africa that accept its basis (see AACC 2008c:3). National Christian councils are eligible for membership as associate members. When the AACC held its General Committee meeting in October 1964, the very first after the inaugural Assembly at Kampala, it had a membership of 49. This figure comprised of 33 churches and 6 Christian Councils from English speaking Africa, and 10 churches from French speaking Africa. By 2008, the AACC membership had grown to 169 full and associate members in 40 African countries (AACC 2007d:25). In 2013, its membership comprised 134 churches representing 39 countries in Africa and a total number of 23 National Christian Councils.

According to the 7<sup>th</sup> General Assembly report, through the AACC, member churches seek to do those things that they cannot do efficiently on their own (AACC 1997:58). From this perspective, the AACC may be seen as a channel of action by the churches. This notwithstanding, some have questioned whether the AACC would best serve as a facilitator, enabler or as an implementer (cf. AACC 1975a:123). Consequently, some have argued that the AACC must assume a role of being an instrument for support and provision of expertise to its constituency. The Lomé Assembly (1987) was categorical when it resolved that AACC "become an enabling body to the Churches for an effective ecumenical witness and action" (see §6.6.3c below). This role appears to have taken centre stage, especially during the tenure of the Rwandese theologian Andre Karamaga (2009-date) as General Secretary. This has seen the AACC organise several consultations, conferences and institutes aimed at the capacity building of leadership and young people in its constituency.

## *b) Relationship with the Roman Catholic Church, Evangelical Churches and African Independent Churches*

The relationship between the AACC and the Roman Catholic Church, conservative Evangelicals, and African Independent Churches (AICs) received considerable attention at the Abidjan Assembly in 1969 (see AACC 1970:122-124). Abidjan proposed guidelines for the search for more creative inter-confessional relationships.

With regard to the RCC, historical relations with the AACC may be traced back to Abidjan Assembly (1969), when the Roman Catholic Church sent four representatives to attend an AACC Assembly for the first time. The RCC has since often sent observers to the meetings of the AACC. In 1976, the AACC and the RCC collaborated on a research project on 'Attitudes and Initiatives towards Christian Unity in Eastern Africa'. In essence, this was a joint project between the AACC and the East Africa Episcopal Conference. This resulted in the publication of a book titled *Ecumenical Initiatives in Eastern Africa* (1982). More formally, it was at the Addis Ababa Assembly that the AACC resolved to develop relationships with the RCC directly with the Vatican, as well as with continental (African) Catholic structures and institutions (AACC 1997:225). Although not a member of the AACC, the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) was, by the time of the AACC General Assembly in Addis Ababa (1997) a full member of some (9) nine National Council of Churches, which are associate members of the AACC. Most recently, the AACC in collaboration with SECAM (the umbrella organisation of the Roman Catholic Church in Africa) organised the EU-Africa Strategy Consultation, which was held in Accra, Ghana, from 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> November 2007, at which a joint study by these two organisations was presented.

The AACC has also over the years made efforts towards strengthening its relationship with Evangelical Churches. The seeming political agenda of the AACC in the 1970's attracted sharp criticism from evangelicals to the effect that members of the newly formed Association of Evangelicals in Africa and Madagascar (AEAM) required its members to have no connection with the AACC. Some saw the birth of AEAM as a reaction against the AACC. Nigerian theologian Byang Kato, who was appointed General Secretary of the AEA in 1973, thus becoming the second general secretary of the organisation, was particularly critical of what he described as the WCC supported AACC. According to Breman (1996:40), Kato was the first evangelical theologian who took a doctor's degree. In his *Theological Pitfalls in Africa*, Kato (1975:139-146) argued that these two organisations promoted theological liberalism. Kato polemically contended that the AACC represented a rising tide of universalism and syncretism. On its part the AACC has, since the Abidjan Assembly (1969), expressed openness to dialogue with Evangelicals (AACC 1970:123). Both the AACC and the WCC extended their ecumenical hospitality to the AEA by inviting Kato to attend their assemblies at Lusaka (1974) and Nairobi (1975) respectively.

The Abidjan Assembly described AICs as movement of both schism and renewal. With a positive view on AICs, delegates at Abidjan welcomed membership of AICs in the AACC but suggested criteria for such membership to include the requirement that AICs seeking membership "should be seeking to transcend loyalties of tribe, race, nation or culture and be willing to be taught by Christians of other traditions." Some AICs have since become members of both the AACC and national Christian councils (see §5.6.3 below).

### **4.5.6 Assemblies of the AACC 1963-2013**

During the period covered in this research project, the AACC has held ten General Assemblies, with the most recent being the Jubilee Assembly in Kampala in 2013. These Assemblies have each been held under a carefully selected theme. In his report to the 6<sup>th</sup>

General Assembly of the AACC, then General Secretary Jose Chipenda observed that “previous General Assembly themes were chosen in response to the challenges dictated by the socio – political and economic realities of the past three decades” (AACC 1994:72). Apart from the business aspects of assemblies, these gatherings have significantly served the need for inspiration and collective action amongst member churches.

The brief summary of these Assemblies offered below contributes to highlighting the efforts of the AACC through its highest policy making organ to work towards the achievement of its vision for “churches in Africa together for life, truth, justice and peace.” The first Assembly was held in Kampala (Uganda) 1963 under the theme “Freedom and Unity in Christ”. Issues of central importance at this Assembly included the selfhood of the church, African Christian family life, cultural identity, and nationalism. This Assembly was held at the height of nationalist ferment in most African countries.

Abidjan (Ivory Coast) was the venue of the second General Assembly held in 1969. Gathering under the theme “With Christ at Work in Africa Today”, Abidjan had a focus on building the African nation and on the questions regarding indigenisation of theology in Africa. It met at a time when a significant number of African countries had gained political independence from colonial rule. There were at the same time upheavals in some African countries. Some of these manifested in the form of civil wars, such as the one’s that took place in Africa’s populous nations of Nigeria and Sudan. Further, given that the late 1960’s were characterised by widespread discourse on development, the Assembly devoted a section on the role of the church in development (cf. Chapter 6 below). In this regard, sections 1 and 2 of the Assembly recommended that churches consider the need for training and involvement of the church and its members in development and that the AACC continue to stimulate African theological thinking with regard to the development of authentic African theology (AACC 1970:111, 115-116).

The third Assembly in Lusaka (1974), Zambia was held at a time when liberation wars were underway in such countries as Rhodesia, Namibia, South Africa, and Mozambique. This Assembly met under the theme “No Longer Living for Ourselves but For Christ”. The Lusaka Assembly accordingly placed before the churches in Africa the issues of liberation, self-reliance, evangelism and justice. This was inevitable given the political developments at the time in Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe. The holding of this Assembly in Lusaka was also very significant, given Zambia’s determination to see Southern Africa liberated. Lusaka’s catchphrase was thus *a luta continua* (the struggle continues). This Assembly has been famously known for its call for a moratorium on the receiving of money and personnel from abroad (see AACC 1975a:53). In light of the moratorium debate, the Lusaka Assembly inaugurated a special emphasis on self-reliance within the AACC (see §5.7.1b below).

In 1981, the AACC held its fourth General Assembly in Nairobi under the theme “Following in the Light of Jesus Christ”. The situation of the AACC at the time is best described as a crisis. Similarly, the general African situation at the time of this Assembly was characterised by several socio-economic challenges coupled with drought and unstable governments in a number of countries. The pertinent issues central in the deliberations of delegates at Nairobi included concerns with regard to the issues of the involvement of youth, lay people and women in the church, militarisation, the food crisis and human development, the refugee problem, and the conflict in Sudan.

The fifth General Assembly was held in Lomé, Togo in 1987 under the theme “You shall be my Witnesses”. At the time of this Assembly, the AACC was going through serious institutional challenges. In his report to the sixth AACC Assembly, the then President of the

AACC, Archbishop emeritus Desmond Tutu, described the AACC situation at the time of the Lomé Assembly as being “on the brink of a disaster and bankruptcy and the morale of the staff was dangerously low” (See AACC 1994:57). It met without the General Secretary, Maxime Ranfransoa, who had been asked to step down in 1987 and also without its President, Walter Makhulu, who had resigned from his position in 1976. The Lomé Assembly undertook a vigorous reassessment and reorganisation of the AACC secretariat. According to the report of this Assembly, the secretariat had to be transformed from “an instrument to become an enabling body to the churches for an effective ecumenical witness and action” (AACC 1988:126). The Assembly elected Archbishop emeritus Desmond Tutu as President of the AACC and the Angolan ecumenist Jose Chipenda was appointed as the new General Secretary. The Lomé Assembly also pondered on the issues of urbanisation, human rights violations, poverty, development, Africa’s debt, hunger, and the refugee crisis. The hunger problem had especially intensified in the period 1984-1985 when Africa suffered one of the worst food crises ever, affecting about 26 African countries.

The sixth General Assembly was originally planned to take place in Cairo (Egypt) but had to be held in Harare, Zimbabwe, in 1992 due to adverse political conditions which would have made its being hosted in Cairo problematic. It was the briefest Assembly hitherto. Furthermore, distinct from previous assemblies, Harare did not send the usual message to the churches. Instead, it chose to send quite strongly worded letters to some political and national leaders (AACC 1994:37-38). With a focus on the theme of “Abundant Life in Jesus Christ”, central issues of discussion at the Assembly included the apartheid issue in South Africa and the quest for peace and reconciliation in Rwanda and Burundi. Most significantly, the Harare Assembly was held a time when the AACC had regained financial stability and restored the confidence of its members churches in the organisation (see AACC 1994:ii). With Tutu as President of the AACC at the time, its leadership has been said to have represented his kind of “liberal, socially-involved and structurally aware-Christianity” (Gifford 1998:314).

The seventh General Assembly was held in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) in 1997 at a time when the AACC was under dire straits. The Assembly met under the theme “Troubled but not destroyed”. Central issues at this Assembly were interfaith relations, conflict resolution in the great lakes region, church expansion, and political liberation. The various addresses and reports of the four sections of the Addis Ababa Assembly (1997) discussed the various aspects of the need for the reconstruction of Africa given the diverse challenges faced by many African countries at the time.

Yaoundé (Cameroon) was the venue of the eighth General Assembly of the AACC held in 2003. The theme of this Assembly was “Come Let Us Rebuild” derived from the Old Testament text in the book of Nehemiah (2:17-18). The various papers and reports presented at the Assembly addressed a wide array of issues, including peace and justice in Africa, globalisation, gender issues, democratisation, and the African Union’s pan-African socio-economic development programme “the New Partnership for Africa’s Development” (NEPAD). Given that this Assembly was held at a time when the AACC was facing financial and organisational challenges, the delegates took the decision to restructure the AACC and to that effect agreed on a transition plan (see AACC 2006:56-60). Prior to the Assembly, the WCC seconded one of its most senior African staff, Mr Melaku Kifle, to act as General Secretary of the AACC for a year in order to assist stabilise the institution and to prepare for new staff leadership.

The ninth General Assembly took place in Maputo (Mozambique) in 2008 under the theme “Africa Step Forth in Faith”. The Assembly’s plenary sessions and workshops discussed various topics, mainly focussing on moral regeneration and human rights in Africa, peace,

democracy, and governance. The key issues discussed found solid expression in the document “The Maputo Covenant”, in which the AACC covenanted for moral regeneration of the continent, global Pan-African solidarity, human health (within the context of HIV/AIDS) and environmental stewardship, amongst others (see AACC 2012:173-178). It was also significant that as part of a continued commitment to nurture future African church leaders, a theological institute for young theologians (mainly from Africa) took place a week prior to the Assembly and continued parallel to the Assembly was gathered.

In 2013, Kampala - the birthplace of the AACC - was the venue for the tenth General Assembly, which coincided with the AACC golden jubilee celebrations. The Assembly met under the theme “God of Life, lead Africa to Peace, Justice and Dignity”. This theme resonated with that of the WCC General Assembly, which met in Busan (South Korea) a few months after the Kampala Assembly. The WCC theme was “God of life, lead us to justice and peace”. Pertinent issues addressed at the Kampala Assembly (2013) included human dignity, the imperative of unity for promoting peace, justice and dignity, human trafficking, climate justice, the challenge of ethnicity, inclusion, Christian-Muslim relations, and the role of the church in peace building.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

This chapter provided a historical discussion on the emergence of the ecumenical movement in Africa in general and that of the formation of the AACC in particular. The chapter unravelled the ironic connections between the missionary movement, African nationalism/Pan-Africanism and the birth of ecumenical movement in Africa. It was specifically argued that the missionary movement and African nationalism were formative in the development of ecumenical movement in Africa. The contributions made by global missionary and ecumenical structures such as the WCC and the IMC were equally highlighted. Despite the seemingly Western stamp on most of these formative factors, it was argued that the ecumenical movement in Africa was not completely without African initiative. In this regard, the chapter has shown that the emergence of the ecumenical movement in Africa was not only about what the missionaries had done, but also about the responses of the African converts and their attendant initiatives. As such, the history of the AACC was cast against the background of African church historiography. Within this framework, it was argued that given the role of African evangelists in the work of evangelisation, the story of the history of church in Africa cannot be understood as simply an incursion of a foreign religion

In an attempt to trace the history of the AACC, this chapter underscored the significance of the AACC in the quest for the unity of the Church in Africa and the search for authenticity in African Christianity. The brief discussion of the assemblies of the AACC already pointed to an underlying tension between ecclesiology and ethics, given the issues that have dominated ecumenical discourse within the AACC fraternity. If there has been a thread that has run throughout all the assemblies of the AACC, authenticity appears to be most obvious. As will become evident in the following chapters, a critical analysis of the discussions and programmatic emphases of the AACC does show that the tension between ecclesiology and ethics has indeed been at the heart the ecumenical movement in Africa as represented by the AACC. Although this has not appeared in the classic WCC language of *Faith and Order* and *Life and Work*, the tension between what the church is and what the church does has indeed been critical in the history of the AACC. A similar argument can be advanced for local initiatives in ecumenism, as well as in more institutional forms, the level of National Councils of Churches (NCCs). The tension between ecclesiology and ethics has also been recognised within the context of local ecumenism in a number of places in Africa. In his essay on “Inter-church Cooperation in Rhodesia’s Towns, 1962-72”, Norman Thomas (1975:246)

demonstrated how an analysis of the “programme of inter-church bodies in towns in Rhodesia (present day Zimbabwe) showed a greater “activity in areas of the churches’ life and work than on issues of faith and order”.

How the AACC has addressed this tension is the subject to which the next chapters will be devoted. The following chapters will therefore focus on a critical analysis and comparison of the AACC’s handling of ecclesiology and ethics between 1963 and 2013. According to the preliminary hypothesis of this study, the periods of decolonisation (1963-1974), development (1975-1992) and neo-liberal globalisation (1992- 2013) in recent African history correlate with the AACC’s handling of ecclesiology and ethics. In view of this, chapters 5-7 will entail an investigation of how the AACC has addressed the ecumenical tension between ecclesiology and ethics in three distinct periods in recent African history, namely the periods of decolonisation (1963-1974), development (1975-1992), and neo-liberal globalisation (1992- 2013). While this periodization does not follow any standard practice in the periodization of recent African history, it is argued that the proposed periodization is plausible given a close analysis of the events that have characterised sub-Saharan Africa between the years 1963 to 2013. As Isichei (1997:5) has argued, history “refuses to fit neatly into chronological or regional categories.” In any case, it is almost impossible to write African church history or for that matter, a history of the AACC, independently of world history. This is largely accounted for by the fact that ecumenical history is contextual. The ecumenical movement does not develop in a vacuum. That is to say, contemporary political, social, cultural and historical factors have a bearing on the ecumenical movement. Methodologically, the following chapters will therefore follow a broadly linear historical approach, albeit within a thematic structure. Each of the chapters will contain a historical description of the *sitz im leben* of the time in order to situate the AACC’s handling of the tension between ecclesiology and ethics.

In light of the above observations, the periodization adopted in this study follows a pattern that corresponds with the general assemblies of the AACC held during the period under investigation. My discussion of the period of decolonisation will thus focus on the era from the inaugural Assembly in Kampala Assembly (1963) to the Lusaka Assembly (1974). The period of development will centre on the period from the Assembly at Lusaka (1974) to the Harare (1992). The third and final period in this scheme will be that of neo-liberal globalisation running from the period between the Harare (1992) Assembly to the jubilee Assembly held in Kampala (2013).

## **Chapter 5: Decolonisation as Nexus for the Authenticity Quest in African Theology: An Analysis of the History of the AACC (1963-1974)**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter primarily examines how the AACC has addressed the tension between ecclesiology and ethics in the period 1963-1974. On the basis of an analysis of the official reports of AACC Assemblies, consultations, and conferences, and secondary literature on the AACC, it is argued that how the AACC addressed the ecumenical tension between ecclesiology and ethics correlates with the process of decolonisation. To show how this was so, the chapter begins with a historical excursus on the process of decolonisation and how this provided the nexus for the authenticity quest in African theology in general and the AACC in particular. This will buttress the view that the decolonisation process, which resulted in the creation of new independent states on the continent, had a domino effect on the Christian landscape in Africa. Therefore, through an investigation of the history of the development of African theology as reflected in the history of the AACC, the chapter will explore how the arrival of the African nation-state forced the pace of the decolonisation of Christianity in Africa and thus stimulated the quest for African theology.

Accordingly, I will unravel the unique contribution of the AACC towards the process of the decolonisation of Christianity on the African continent (read: Africanisation), which is evident in, amongst others, its support for African nationalism through the launching of an authenticity quest (Kampala 1963), the call for an African theology (Abidjan 1969), and its emphasis on the selfhood of the church illustrated by the moratorium debate (Lusaka 1974). It will be argued that within the ambit of the AACC, the theme of decolonisation found expression in the AACCs emphasis on African identity (read: authenticity). As Sindima (1995:60) has argued, the African struggle for decolonisation was “a struggle for authenticity and identity; a fight against different modes of domination”. The chapter will conclude with observations pointing towards the recognition of the fact that although the AACC appears to have privileged the social agenda of the church (read: ethics) in the period under consideration, its understanding of the social responsibility of the church has at several points in its history being prompted by deeply theological considerations (read: ecclesiology).

Structurally, the chapter commences with a brief historical background on decolonisation. This will be followed by a discussion on the Africanisation of Christianity and theology in Africa, with specific reference to the contribution of the AACC in this regard. After this, a discussion will be offered on the AACC’s handling of ecclesiology and ethics at three of its assemblies, namely the assemblies at Kampala (1963), Abidjan (1969), and Lusaka (1974). The chapter will conclude with the argument that although the AACC has never in its history deliberately addressed the question of the relationship between ecclesiology and ethics, this ecumenical tension has been at the heart of the AACCs engagement with social issues and in its various unitive visions that have emerged at several points in its history.

### **5.2 Decolonisation: A Brief Historical Analysis**

Debate has ensued amongst historians and post-colonial scholars on the nature, process, limits and consequences of decolonisation. In a study of this nature, a discussion of the relationship between nationalism and decolonisation on the one hand, and that of the ecumenical movement and the decolonisation of the continent on the other is indeed necessary. An excursus on African nationalism becomes germane in this regard. Conceptually, I follow the view of historian Henry Wilson (1994:3), who observes that

... the analysis of decolonization from an African ... standpoint has shifted through three stages ... The first approach was essentially concerned with the specific process of ridding Africa of alien rule. The second searched for the precise origins of the successor regimes in the colonial state and decolonization ... Lastly attention has returned to the development of African civil society outside the control of colonial and postcolonial bureaucratic state...

According to Wilson (1994:6), t<sup>15</sup>hese three elements, namely the ending of European rule, the construction of the postcolonial regimes, and the simultaneous transformations in African civil society, were hardly cumulative. Following Wilson's perspective, I will first offer a brief discussion of the meaning of nationalism and then proceed to highlight the background to and significance of African nationalism for the ending of colonial rule in Africa. The ensuing subsection will discuss the notion of decolonisation vis-à-vis African nationalism. The final subsection will analyse the impact of the process of decolonisation within the context postcolonial African states. The third element in Wilson's view, namely the development of African civil society outside the control of colonial and postcolonial bureaucratic state will be addressed in the next chapter.

### **5.2.1 African Nationalism: An Analysis of the Background and Significance of African Nationalism**

This section will discuss the rise of African nationalism and the phases that it went through prior to decolonisation. In light of my discussion of African nationalism in the previous chapter, it may be argued here that in its manifestation, the central feature of African nationalism was a common desire to oppose colonial rulers within their frontiers (see §4.4.1 above; Birmingham 1995:6). The precise nature of such opposition took diverse forms and expressions and this may also be understood in terms of the phases of African nationalism. Historian Assah Okoth (2006:12-19) has documented the various phases of African nationalism beginning with the separatist and prophetic movements and ending with the phase of congresses and parties. At a deeper level of analysis, these phases highlight a number of influences that contributed to the emergence of African nationalism. During these different phases, Africans expressed their resistance to colonial rule in a myriad of ways and differed in form from one colony to the other.

Admittedly, conceiving nationalism in terms of phases may appear to assume a necessary connection between movements of resistance and modern nationalism akin to Terrence Ranger's thesis of continuity in "mass emotion"(Ranger 1968a:445). Such a connection can no longer be posited, given as Ranger himself later observed that such a connection is very tenuous (1986:2-5). Suffice it to note here that despite the fact that not all forms of resistance necessary constituted African nationalism or were for that matter precursors to nationalism, taking stock of the forms of resistance to colonial rule is indispensable to an adequate treatment of the history of African nationalism and the related process of decolonisation. Most significantly, a study of resistance movements shows that Africans did not acquiesce placidly in European colonisation (see Boahen 1990:26-29).

In the period after the First World War, many Africans responded by revolt. In this regard, several monographs and edited volumes have explored the theme of resistance and the related themes of rebellion and protest (see Isaacman 1976; Ranger 1967; Rotberg 1971; Rotberg & Mazrui 1970). According to Rotberg (1965:55), the coercive demands and regulations that accompanied colonial rule in Africa during the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century encouraged a

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<sup>15</sup> More recently, Terrence Ranger (2006:8-9) has provided a framework which focusses on Africa's democratic history in terms of three phases namely the first democratic revolution (one party majority rule), the second democratic revolution (multi-partyism) and the third democratic revolution (struggle against third termism).

hostile response from the natives. Although the incidences of rebellion were limited and scattered, they played a critical role in the history of the continent (see Rotberg 1971:xv-xviii). Amongst the various reasons that led Africans in different parts of the continent to protest were issues of land loss to settlers, forced labour, and colonial taxation.

In Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland, for instance, manifestations of indigenous protest manifested through the establishment of voluntary associations such as welfare associations and through these were born the nationalist minded congresses of later days (Rotberg 1965:115-134; Davidson 1994:69-91). Dissatisfaction with colonial rule also found religious expression (Rotberg 1965:136). Studies on the function of religion in resistance to colonial rule have discussed this both in terms of African traditional religion, as well as in terms of political-eschatological Christianity as exemplified, for instance by the “Ndebele and Shona Rebellions” and the watchtower movement in Malawi (led by Elliot Kamwana) or the Chilembwe uprising, respectively (see Schoffeleers & Linden 1972:252). Some scholars have also interpreted the emergence of African Independent Churches as a form of religious anti-colonial protest (see Hodgkin 1957). Following Sundkler’s (1948:53) distinction between Ethiopian and Zionist type African Independent Churches, Hodgkin (1957:99) saw Ethiopianism as an African response to European nationalism and the partitioning of Africa.

These various manifestations of indigenous protest marked what Rotberg (1965:114) has described as incipient nationalism (cf. Okoth 2006:12). In a similar vein, several interpreters of African nationalism who wrote before the 1980’s generally regarded these developments as representing an embryonic stage of African nationalism (Rotberg 1965). Rotberg, for instance, argued that some such manifestations eventually led to the formation of undoubtedly nationalist movements, beginning in the 1940’s (cf. Okoth 2006:17). By the 1960’s, it would appear that African nationalism had the aim of attaining political independence for the former colonies. From this perspective, the question as to whether or not there were important nationalist movements that sprung directly out of an independent church or messianic movement has been a subject of scholarly debate. This notwithstanding, the role of religious movements and the kind of resistance that they represented makes a case for the political significance of religion (see Boahen 1990:25-32; Hodgkin 1957:93-114).

As a matter of importance, most African nationalists envisaged the attainment of political independence as a route that would lead to redressing the economic and social injustices of the colonial era. Therefore, already by the 1960’s, several groups had coalesced to demand self-government. It is against this background that the process of decolonisation advanced in Africa.

### **5.2.2 Decolonisation Process in Africa**

Having discussed the background to African nationalism, this section will offer a brief discussion on the decolonisation process in Africa in order to set the framework for the understanding of how the AACC has addressed the tension between what the church *is* and what it *does*. As will be argued, one of the outcomes of the decolonisation process was the postcolonial creation of African nation-states. Such history preceded the decolonisation of church structures and theology on the continent. The necessity of a detailed discussion on decolonisation in a study of the history of the AACC such as this one is informed by a conviction that the arrival of the African nation-state somewhat forced the pace of the decolonisation of Christianity in Africa. To make better sense of this argument, it is necessary to provide some sort of conceptual clarity on the meaning of the notion of decolonisation. Further, it is crucial to explore factors – both internal and external – that shaped decolonisation in Africa. In this regard, a working understanding of decolonisation theory is necessary.

a) *The Meaning of Decolonisation?*

The term “decolonization” (“décolonisation”) was first coined by a French journalist Henri Fonfrède in his 1836 tract “Decolonization of Algiers”, in which he critiqued the French occupation of Algeria (see Shepard 2006:56). The term disappeared from circulation by the 1850’s and resurfaced in the 1930’s in writings of some social scientists. According to Shepard (2006:55), “decolonization emerged as a structural cause that French people could and did refer to in order to avoid explaining why they now overwhelmingly accepted Algerian independence.” It was the designation *entkolonisierung* in Germany, which was invoked in a neutral way to refer to imperial withdraw. This usage is associated with the German economist Moritz Julius Bonn, who popularised its use in academic discourse after the 1930’s. The term ‘decolonisation’ subsequently gained currency during the 1950’s, when most European political scientists employed it as a technical description of shifts in sovereignty in certain geographical territories.

Although the single word ‘decolonisation’ has been used to refer to the transfer of sovereignty from imperial powers to their former colonies, decolonisation was “not a uniform process with a common set of goals” (Waites 1999:257). Decolonisation may thus also be construed in terms of a series of processes. As a concept, its meaning is much wider than the mere winning of political independence.

The notion of decolonisation presumes that of colonisation. The latter took many forms and shapes. One may trace the roots of colonisation to the European inroads that began with the discovery of America in 1492, spreading later to the so-called non-western world and leading eventually to subjugation and exploitation of people and resources in those lands. Although colonisation was never a monolithic process, in most cases it implied political, economic and military domination of the colonised. Significantly, although much less discussed in the literature, it also took psychological forms. That is to say, colonialism also involved the mental subjugation of the colonial subjects.

b) *The Colonisation of the Mind: Conversion as a Colonisation of the Mind?*

Significant works on the psychological dimension of colonialism have been undertaken, particularly by postcolonial theorists. Pioneering in this regard were studies by Octave Mannoni (1950), Albert Memmi (1957), and Franz Fanon (1961). Amongst postcolonial theorists, decolonisation implies an attempt to escape colonial forms of thinking, be it cultural, intellectual, or philosophical.

As Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (1986:16) explains:

Colonialism imposed its control of the social production of wealth through military conquest and subsequent political dictatorship. But its most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonised, the control, through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world. Economic and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control. To control a people’s culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others.

From the foregoing, one could argue that the psychological dimension of colonialism was quite evident, also within the realm of religion. As Beidelman (1982:6) writes, “missionaries invariably aimed at overall changes in the beliefs and actions of native peoples, at colonisation of heart and mind as well as body.” The identification of missionaries with the colonial enterprise takes new significance when one considers missionary dissemination of Christianity as a civilising mission (cf. Baeta 1968:15). According to A.J. Christopher (1984:83),

missionaries, possibly more than members of other branches of the colonial establishment, aimed at the radical transformation of indigenous society... they therefore sought, whether consciously or unconsciously, the destruction of pre-colonial societies and their replacement by new Christian societies in the image of Europe.

In his analysis of the missionary theology of salvation and the attending perspectives on conversion, Congolese philosopher V.Y. Mudimbe (1988:47) has argued that “missionary speech is always predetermined, pre-regulated, let us say *colonized*.” He explains that missionary orthodox speech evolved from within the framework of what he designates “the authority of the truth”. By this he means “God’s desire for the conversion of the world in terms of cultural and socio-political regeneration, economic progress and spiritual salvation”. Given such a framework, the missionary imposed the law of God and the African non-Christian culture had to undergo a process of reduction to the norms that the missionary represented. On this basis, Mudimbe (1988:47-48) proceeds to demonstrate how “African conversion” was not a positive outcome of a dialogue. For Mudimbe, missionary speech is expressive of an *episteme* characterised by a pervasive evolutionary assumption, resulting in a tendency to see Africans as pagans in need of “a regeneration through both a cultural and spiritual conversion” (1988:49). Missionary discourse in this regard can as well be considered as narratives of *otherness*.

Following the argument of Cameroonian philosopher and theologian Eboussi Boulaga (1981:30-42) on missionary discourse as comprising five major features, namely the languages of derision, refutation, demonstration, orthodoxy, and conformity, Mudimbe (1988:52) proceeded to infer violence in missionary language. Such violence, Mudimbe argues, was linked to the spiritual and cultural process of conversation so much so that mission was oriented towards the cultural and spiritual salvation of “salvages”. In this way, the process of conversion was presented as a path to a civilised life. Both Mudimbe and Boulaga present missionary speech as epitomising colonialist discourse. Mudimbe (1988:52) sums up his argument thus:

Accordingly, the missionary’s language presents three major approaches: derision of so-called primitive religions and their gods, refutation and demonstration to convince the evolving Africans, and imposition of rules of orthodoxy and conformity for converts

While Mudimbe’s thesis on conversion as a form of cultural violence is understandable, given the general focus of his study, it does not seem to capture the fact that missionary encounter was at the same time a two-way process. What Mudimbe makes clear though, is that any attempt at understanding the nature of conversion necessarily requires one to also consider the relationship of the dominant types of religion between which religious change is presumed to be taking place (cf. Gellner 2005:756). Hastings (1976:44) was therefore right when he noted that “no group can conceivably change its deep religious beliefs and philosophy without noticeably changing its culture.” He saw conversion to Christianity as bound to bring that with it. Yet he did recognise that religious conversion also involved a considerable degree of continuity between “the totality of the new religious beliefs and the new” (cf. Ikenga-Metuh 1987:11-16). As the history of the AICs aptly illustrates, conversion does not always entail an absolute break with the past. The observation that the worldview of African Traditional Religions persisted amongst African Christians in mission churches points to this reality and so do views of missionary despair with the “superficial nature” of African conversion (see Maimela 1996:85-86).

My argument here is that it is problematic to suggest that conversion to Christianity implied mere capitulation to Western domination. The impact of missionary speech on the converts notwithstanding, I submit that it is problematic to describe the wider relationship between mission and colonialism the way Mudimbe does (cf. § 4.3.1a above). His analysis

does not appear to sufficiently account for the element of ‘encounter’.

In their seminal work *Of Revelation and Revolution*, American anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff (1991) provide a nuanced discussion of conversion within the context of colonial expansion and cross-cultural contact. They have attempted an explanation of psychological forms of colonialism through an analysis of the encounter between missionaries of the London Missionary Society and the southern Tswana. The Comaroffs rightly question the notion of conversion itself, arguing that ‘the very use of “conversion” as a noun leads, unwittingly, to the reification of religious “belief”; to its abstraction from the total order of symbols and meanings that compose the taken-for-granted world of any people’ (Comaroff & Comaroff 1991:251). They argue,

to pretend, therefore, that [conversion] may be an analytic tool, an explanatory principle, is to dress up ideology as sociology – and to ignore the fact that, in the context of European colonialism, ‘conversion’ has always been part of its apparatus of cultural coercion.

According to the Comaroffs, there was a fundamental disjuncture between what the missionaries called “conversion” and the reasons why the Tswana joined the Protestant mission. To do so, the Comaroffs interrogated the process of translation, from English into Setswana, to show that while missionaries had assumed that Setswana would “yield to the painstaking effort to translate literally and precisely the English message they wished to convey”, the opposite proved true. As Gerbner (2015:141) argues, “the process of translation made conversion impossible – at least on the terms sought by missionaries”.

For the Comaroffs, conversion represented the “colonization of consciousness”. With this phrase, they describe how Protestant missionaries in South Africa during the 19<sup>th</sup> century strengthened European colonisation “not only by introducing new modes and objects of worship, but also new prosaic rhythms of everyday life, in clothing, sanitation, architecture and agriculture, which won over the natives to Western civilisation.” Simply put, the Southern Tswana were “inducted, wittingly and unwittingly into the forms of European discourse” including religious practices and technology introduced by missionaries (Comaroff & Comaroff 1991:213). These habituations that missionaries introduced at the mundane level bloomed into unanticipated behaviour, which according to Paul Landau (2000:502), included “expressions of resistance to subordination.” The Tswana imitated these European forms of discourse and thereby elaborated modes of resistance based on their re-presentations of European forms on themselves (Comaroff & Comaroff 1991:308). For the Comaroffs, the colonised were therefore no mere unresisting victims. Mission “was not only part of a forceful colonisation which left missionaries unaffected, but that this exchange was a reciprocal process, which shaped the consciousness and perceptions of Africans as well as missionaries themselves” (Oermann 1999:21). In the words of the Comaroffs (1991:54):

The missionary encounter must be regarded as a two-sided historical process; as a dialectic that takes into account the social and cultural endowments of, and the consequences for, all the actors – missionaries no less than Africans.

In a way, Africans may not be said to have been passive victims of colonial domination; they were at the same time also active participants in the process. Nevertheless, it must be noted that although a two-way experience, missionary encounter with the indigenous people was rigged or skewed by the fundamental inequalities of the colonial context. Missionaries dominated the terms of conversion (Stanley 2003a:318). Thus, in the second volume of their book, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, the Comaroffs (1997:117) argue that: “The point of colonial evangelism, after all, was to erase what was indigenously African and to replace it with something different.” In general therefore, one may argue that the work of missionaries facilitated colonisation psychologically in as far as Christianity entailed the adoption of

Western culture through the process of conversion.

Consideration of the above perspectives on colonisation is significant given the usual tendency amongst historians to interpret decolonisation only within its political dimension. Nevertheless, a grasp of the factors that led to decolonisation in a political context become necessary for an adequate analysis of how the decolonisation process provided the nexus for the emergence of the ecumenical movement in Africa and the subsequent innovative proposals for the development of African theology.

*c) Factors that Contributed towards the Process of Decolonisation in Africa*

What, then, contributed to various manifestations of the motley process of decolonisation? Historian Assa Okoth (2006:2-10) has discussed several factors in this regard. He presents the Second World War as having marked a watershed in the emergence of nationalism, which movement was in the vanguard of the decolonisation process in Africa. Given the socio-economic and political crises at the end of World War II, a number of European colonial powers were weakened politically and economically. In the case of Britain and France, for instance, it soon became inevitable to gradually be willing to withdraw their political controls and colonial governments in favour of some sort of decolonisation. Within the so-called colonial territories, the war, similarly, took its toll economically and politically. As such, in British Africa, for instance, the post-war period was characterised by riots, strikes and protests in places like Ghana, Southern Rhodesia, and Kenya. Although largely precipitated by the international economic crisis associated with the war, these agitations were largely political. To placate West African British territories for their contribution to the war, the British undertook constitutional reforms in these territories with a view to draw black Africans into the political process. Such an approach was however not employed in southern and eastern Africa due to large settler populations. In both cases though, the British did not envisage leaving the task of government in their colonies to Africans immediately after the end of the war.

The United Nations also contributed to this process, especially through its view of self-determination as framed in its 1945 charter and in subsequent resolutions on decolonisation, such as the 1960 General Assembly “Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples” (see El-Ayouty 1970:462-468). The 1960 declaration called for the immediate transfer of power to the African majorities. Between 1945 and 1990, self-determination soon became almost synonymous with the process of decolonisation.

Decolonisation in Africa also coincided with the ascendancy of two superpowers, not colonial powers like Britain and France, but the United States of America and the Soviet Union. The arms race between these two powers fuelled the Cold War and this had considerable effect on the African continent. The ideological, economic, political and military rivalry between two superpowers and their respective allies had considerable impact on what would be the political future of Africa at the time. With Africa turned into the ideological battleground of the Cold War, the newly sovereign African states were thrust into an ideological battle between the capitalist West and the communist East. The Cold War fostered a competitive bi-polar international environment. In the long run, the Cold War significantly contributed to perpetuating the political legacy of the colonial times. During the Cold War, there was a tendency to combine development assistance with strategic alliances (political), thus leading to a pattern of bilateral state to state assistance. In other words, African leaders adopted foreign development policies that were dictated foreign interests. Several African countries adopted socialist models of development, while others subscribed to the capitalist alternative. In a nuanced manner, historian Bernard Waites (1999) has postulated the view of a political economy in his explanation of decolonisation.

The above factors notwithstanding, it was also the case that Africans themselves forced the pace of decolonisation in its political dimension. In fact, political independence was not handed to Africans on a silver platter; they fought for it. Furthermore, it must be noted that the presence or absence of European settlers in colonial territory greatly influenced the pace and manner of decolonisation. In British West Africa, for instance, decolonisation was less difficult as compared to other parts of the African continent where Britain had colonies, seeing as there was no settler community to stand in the way of the process. Yet, in places like East and Central Africa, which had large white settler minorities, the process of decolonisation was often characterised by violent conflict between Europeans and Africans. From the foregoing, one could argue that therefore that the process of decolonisation in Africa was an outcome of the interplay of events both in the colonies, as well as on the international scene. How then did African nationalists understand the goals of their nationalist struggles?

#### *d) The Illusion of Political Independence*

For many African nationalist leaders, especially during the 1960's, political independence of the former colonies became an overriding aim of their activities. This view was especially central to the pan-African thought of Kwame Nkrumah, who embraced the idea of the primacy of political independence. Nkrumah thus impressed this upon other nationalists when he urged them 'to seek ye first the political kingdom and all other things would be added unto them'. Given that, in Nkrumah's (1967:78) thinking, 'political power is the inescapable prerequisite to economic and social power', economic integration and freedom would remain an illusion without political integration and freedom. Thus, the securing of political independence in many African nations during the 1960's was marked with euphoria, leading some commentators to observe that political independence is the 'proudest moment' of African nationalism (see Zeleza 2003a:iv; Gifford 1998:4).

Whether or not Nkrumah's persuasion was misconstrued is not the focus of this analysis. Suffice it to note here that the overriding confidence that many Africans had in the view that securing political independence would place Africa on a path of economic and social development soon waned amidst the rise of authoritarian regimes across the continent and Africa's growing indebtedness (1970's-1980's). The illusion of political independence is nowhere better expressed than in Ali Mazrui's (1993:105-126) observation that although political power was asserted by African leaders such as Nkrumah to be a prerequisite to economic and social power, the experience in post-colonial Africa has shown that this was indeed necessary but not sufficient. For Nkrumah (1965), however, neo-colonialism was to be blamed for the failure of political independence to deliver on its promise of economic freedom. In his view, postcolonial Africa was trapped by neo-colonialism, which, in his view, was the last stage of imperialism. My argument is that although most African countries gained political independence, it is indubitable that colonialism left a legacy that endured beyond political independence. Therefore, restricting the meaning of decolonisation to the mere winning of political independence is indeed a very limited view of the process of decolonisation.

#### **5.2.3 Decolonisation within the context postcolonial African states: A Very Brief Analysis**

An historical analysis of postcolonial African states leads one to question why they all too soon continued to operate like their colonial predecessors, given the euphoria of political independence. Historians of Africa have identified a crucial difficulty facing postcolonial African states in the form bequeathed them by their colonial forerunners (see Davidson 1994). Those who hold this view argue that the African nations that emerged after the 1960's were in

large measure direct successors of the European colonies which preceded them. Put differently, it is contended that the colonial state formed, as it were, the template for the postcolonial African state. That is to say, the political institutions bestowed to the new African states were patterned on those of the colonial masters. As David Birmingham (1995:7) has observed, “the decolonization of political institutions was often relatively rapid, but the minds of many Africans continued to work on colonial assumptions, making cultural, emotional and intellectual decolonization difficult for the heirs of empire.” It may therefore not be farfetched to argue that with African nationalists at the helm of several new African states, it was only the composition of the state that had changed and not its character. In this regard, some explanations regarding the nature of the legacy of the colonial state have been advanced. One explanation in this regard is encapsulated in Frederick Cooper’s (2002:156) notion of the ‘gate-keeper’ state. According to this view,

African states were successors in a double sense. First, they were built on a set of institutions – bureaucracies, militaries, post offices, and (initially) legislatures - set up by colonial regimes, as well as on a principle of state sovereignty sanctified by a community of already existing states. [...] Second, African states took up a particular, and more recent, form of state project of colonialism: development.

In the view of Cooper (2002:152), what is problematic with the ‘gate-keeper’ state is the focus on patronage systems on the one hand, and the undermining of “alternative mechanisms for influencing decisions and demanding accountability” on the other.

Another explanation is the notion of the ‘bifurcated state’, a theory developed by Ugandan scholar Mahmood Mamdani (1996) in his study *Citizen and Subject*. Mamdani argues that the colonial state in Africa was of a bifurcated nature with different modes of rule for ‘citizens’, in the urban areas, and ‘subjects’, in the rural areas. That is to say, the colonial state was organised differently in rural areas from urban areas (Mamdani 1996:16-26). Accordingly, Mamdani shows that a distinction was introduced between civil power over citizens (in the urban context) and customary power over subjects (mainly rural peasants). He thus sees the two main features of the African context as the rural-urban split and consequences of ethnic division. With regard to the later, Mamdani asserts that fragmentation was made more perfect by ethnic association, thus dividing the state along the lines of local or tribal authority. In his view, this colonial legacy did not disappear, even with the political independence of the postcolonial state. Mamdani (1996:7-8, 290) has argued that post-colonial regimes in Africa failed to break the distinction between citizen and subject. For him, they retained a regime of differentiation while deracializing the colonial state.

In my view, Mamdani’s thesis in *Citizen and Subject* is indeed a bold and clear argument. However, as theologian Elias Bongmba (2006:42) has argued, Mamdani has not discussed the role of religion and theology in the invention of the subject. This is a significant criticism, especially in Africa, given the role of religion in the creation of apartheid ideology. Scholars such as the Comaroffs, whom I have already referred to in the foregoing, have unravelled the basis for a methodological appraisal of different forms of colonisation in their discussion of the “colonization of consciousness” amongst the southern Tswana by showing how missionaries inducted the Tswana into European forms of discourse. In closing this section on decolonisation in the context of postcolonial African nation-states, it must be noted that in addition to the crises of the colonial legacy as articulated by Mamdani, the burden of the nation-state in Africa grew (see Davidson 1992:162-163).

From the foregoing, it may be concluded that decolonisation meant much more than just political independence (Mugambi 2003:89). If so, this suggests asking the question whether or not decolonisation was achieved at the moment of political independence for many African

nations. My discussion of postcolonial state in Africa above indeed suggests that the process of decolonisation went beyond the era of independence. It is precisely with this in mind that I locate the significance of the following discussion on the church and the decolonisation process in Africa.

### **5.3 The Church and the Decolonisation Process in Africa: A Brief Analysis**

Against the background of the foregoing historical account of the decolonisation process in Africa, I will proceed to argue that the postcolonial creation of African nation-states preceded the decolonisation of church structures and theology on the continent. Arguably, it was the emergence of the African nation-state that forced the pace of decolonisation within the churches. That is to say, political independence provided a further spur for Africanisation (see Hastings 1994:609). Put differently, the fact that the state had indigenous leadership raised questions as to why churches had retained foreign leadership and was theologically speaking, 'drinking from foreign wells'. Such an approach to African history echoes in one way Mbiti's (1979:68) consideration of African history to be another source of theological development in Africa.

From the ecumenical standpoint, the birth of the AACC was itself a signal of the decolonisation process in ecclesiastical circles, at least from the Protestant side. This point is best captured by Kalu (2005b:271) when he notes that: "In response to nationalism and the efforts to decolonize the African churches, an outbreak of ecumenism occurred in many African countries." In the view of Uzochukwu, the "socio-nationalistic impetus for church unity has not only made political issues relevant to ecumenical questions, but has also given the ecumenical movement in Africa a socio-political undertone". In what follows, I will therefore offer a review of the search for an African theology as one way of understanding the theme of the church and the decolonisation process in Africa and in that regard the contribution of the AACC in the development of African theology.

#### **5.3.1 The Africanisation of the Church and Theology in Africa**

The decolonisation process, which resulted in the creation of new independent states, had a domino effect on the Christian religious landscape in Africa (Kalu 2005a:347). Nevertheless, it ought to be acknowledged that at the twilight of colonialism (1945-59), missionaries responded with ambivalence to the nationalist insurgence with some opposing the nationalist cause (Kalu 2005a:352; Stuart 2003:183-184). As Mudimbe (1988:59) noted:

Despite the fact that the church had trained most of the nationalist leaders and intellectuals, and also despite widely held doubts concerning the Church's widely commitment to the principles of Western supremacy in Africa, many a missionary did not welcome the outcome of ideologies of otherness and did not at all like doctrines of African independence.

This took a slight twist in the aftermath of nationalist agitation (1960-1975), when most African states attained political independence and African Christians sought religious independence. Political independence did not, however, necessarily imply an automatic end to the subservience of African churches to missionary control (Stanley 2003b:10). In various parts of the continent, the process of decolonisation impacted churches variously and the attending responses were equally varied. In their response to decolonisation, missionaries employed what Kalu (2003a) has described as retooling strategies by initiating a certain form of indigenisation. In view of this, it is germane to discuss Africanisation as a generic theme in order to understand the consequences of decolonisation on church and theology in Africa.

a) *Africanisation under Missionary Tutelage*

The term 'Africanisation' was first used in the African political arena. As will be shown in the next chapter, home grown development approaches by nationalist leaders in the 1960's are illustrative of this fact. The notion of Africanisation only came to be appropriated in ecclesial circles most widely in the 1960's. Like the terms 'Africa', 'African', and 'Africinity', 'Africanisation' is a contested notion (see §5.3.3c below). It has been employed in educational discourse (Africanisation of Epistemologies),<sup>16</sup> theology (Africanisation of Theology), religious studies,<sup>17</sup> philosophy (Africanisation of Knowledge)<sup>18</sup>, and in politics. Given the imprecision of what Africanisation necessarily entails, the notion remains a subject of debate. More broadly however, Africanisation implies an African response to colonial 'genre'. In the South African context, Makgoba (1997:199) has offered a definition of Africanisation that stresses culture and identity, noting that Africanisation is a process of inclusion that emphasises the importance of affirming African cultures and identities in a world community. For some critics, such as Horsthemke (2004), the meaning of Africanisation as asserted by some scholars is lacking in clarity as to the meaning and content of the 'right to be African' and may therefore, lead to a false sense of belonging. He further contends that Africanisation wrongly assumes a monolithic African culture and identity (Horsthemke 2004:580; cf. Maluleke 2006:73).

In much of sub-Saharan Africa, the Africanisation debate featured prominently in theological reflections on African Christianity during the early 1960's. In both Roman Catholic and Protestant circles, the idea of Africanisation was in the beginning quite unclearly defined (see Munga 1998:64-72). Initially, the term Africanisation was used to refer to the training of African leadership to take over ecclesial responsibilities from foreign missionaries in the early stage (Bujo 1992:56). Behind this was a general concern regarding the need to reflect African issues and personnel in church structures and practice (hymns, music etc). This was partly necessitated by the demand for local priests or clergy when most missions were becoming local churches. The phenomenon of local church notwithstanding, foreign missionaries still dominated churches affairs, even at the peak of African nationalism. Within the Roman Catholic Church, for instance, there were more expatriate missionaries in the 1970's than before. In Protestant circles, missionaries were still at the helm of mission

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<sup>16</sup> Such an orientation has been applied in recent discussions on the Africanisation of higher education within the South African context. See, for instance, Amasa Philip Ndofirepi's discussion of Africanisation in his contribution Africanisation of Epistemology in the 21st Century University in Africa (2014). He argues that although African universities have Africanised their personnel, their curricula and pedagogical structures to some extent, this has not been accompanied by tangible Africanisation of epistemologies in the universities (2014:155). See also Crossmann (1999), who conducted a survey of initiatives toward Africanisation of curricula at six universities in Africa including the University of the Western Cape.

<sup>17</sup> Maluleke (2006:72) best captures this orientation when he notes that with regard to theology and religious studies, Africanisation "means that conscious, deliberate ideological choices of teaching style, teaching content and personnel must be made if Africanisation of even to begin." The edited volume African Traditions in the Study of Religion in Africa (2012) by Afe Adogame, Ezra Chitando and Bolaji Bateye represents an attempt by religious studies scholars to grapple with the need to Africanise the study of religion in Africa. As captured in the title of the book, the need to develop and sustain "African traditions" – understood as "the specifically African approaches to the study of religion that have developed over the years" – is underscored. In his essay in the above mentioned volume, Westerlund (1993) proposes that an improved cultural and historical contextualisation and application of the method of source criticism may help in deepening the Africanisation of African religions.

<sup>18</sup> See, for instance, Wiredu (2005:20), who defines Africanisation as domesticating knowledge (including science and technology) in African culture. This also implies knowledge that harmonises the universal and the particular. Elsewhere, Wiredu (2006:291) takes this discussion further by defining decolonisation as "divesting African philosophical thinking of all undue influences emanating from our colonial past."

educational and medical facilities and where they had left that to the Africans, the latter relied much on the former for continued financial support. The reluctance of the missionaries to devolve power implies that for the churches, decolonisation in this sense spanned the broad period 1955-1975 (Kalu 2003a:250).

Related to the foregoing was liturgical renewal in music and the use of native languages. Progress in this regard became evident, especially within Roman Catholic circles. Impetus for the Africanisation of the liturgy within the Roman Catholic Church had come most significantly from Vatican II (1963-65), which was instrumental in effecting a change in Roman Catholic attitude towards other religions and cultures. In subsequent years, Africanisation by means of training local clergy took shape in many churches across Africa in the mid-1970s (see Weller & Linden 1984:52-167; Nthamburi 1991:23-26). Many Protestant churches Africanised their clergy quite promptly, while the Roman Catholic Church did so quite slowly (see Hastings 1979:170-174). Seen together, the indigenisation of personnel and liturgical renewal during this period strictly represents a missionary policy of indigenisation. Within Protestant circles, such a policy was soon challenged. Indigenisation was nowhere better challenged than at the Lusaka Assembly of the AACC in 1974 (see §5.7.1a below). That Assembly's call for a moratorium was expressive of the desire by churches in Africa to break the old pattern of church leadership dominated as it were by Western missionaries (see AACC 1974:53). The result, owing to more factors than the moratorium debate, was the significant decline in direct "mission work" in Africa by foreign mission agencies.

This period also coincided with the attempt in several places to establish national or united-denominational churches (see Hastings 1979:160-165). To a reasonable degree, the growing influence of the WCC at the time also gave impetus to the quest for church union in many places. In the previous chapter, examples of attempts at church union were discussed (§4.3.4 below). This needs to be further understood within the broader context of a changing ecumenical paradigm with its watershed in the WCC Uppsala Assembly (see Raiser 1991:54).

#### *b) Africanisation Predicated on African Cultural Identity*

The second sense in which the term Africanisation was used pertains to the debate on the relationship between Christianity and African culture in light of the legacy of Western colonialism and mission (see Mugambi 2002:8-10). Whereas the Africanisation of African history was a central aim amongst scholars writing about African history during the 1960's, African Christian thinkers pursued the Africanisation of African religious history most specifically with regard to the encounter between Christianity and African culture. It was thus with regard to the field of theology that the Africanisation of the church in Africa became most 'visible'. This had much to do with the discomfiture by African Christians of the Eurocentric nature of theologies brought to Africa by missionaries

Africans soon began to find unacceptable the dominant, albeit mistaken view amongst missionaries, namely that Christian identity was identical with Western cultural and religious heritage (see Mugambi 2002:90). In light of such concerns, African scholars began to question whether conversion to Christianity necessarily involved discontinuity with the pre-Christian past. Underlying these reflections was the recognition that missionaries to Africa imposed their culture in the process of their transmission of the Gospel. Accordingly, African academic theologians had to grapple with what it meant to be African and Christian at the same time and whether one was first African before they were Christian? Or as Mugambi (1997b:34) frames the question, "how can African churches be authentically African and authentically Christian?" Such questions prompted due regard for how context shapes people's response to the Gospel (cf. Schreiter 1985:1), as well as the rejection of missionary versions of indigenisation. Simply put, African theologians were wrestling with the question

of African Christian identity. Consequently, the quest for identity became the womb out of which African Christian theology was born (Maluleke 2001:37). Therefore, the question of identity is indeed a “key to understanding the concerns of Christian theology in modern Africa” (Bediako 1992:1). In this sense, Africanisation was, as will be discussed in what follows, a search for an African theology.

### 5.3.2 Africanisation as New Hermeneutic

In the following sub-sections, I will interpret the history of the rise of African theology as a hermeneutical quest. The intention behind this is not to rehearse the debates on the need for an African theology, but rather to provide an historical account of the Africanisation process in the churches as a quest for a new hermeneutic. Here I am mindful of the warning issued by Bediako (1993a:17):

The era of African theological literature as reaction to western misrepresentation is past. What lies ahead is a critical theological construction which will relate more fully the widespread African confidence in the Christian faith to the actual and ongoing Christian responses to the life-expression of Africans.

Given the historical nature of this study, it is imperative that we trace the background to the emergence of African theology as the hermeneutic of identity. For most pioneer African academic theologians (hereafter African theologians) especially during the 1960’s, Africanisation was a search for a new hermeneutic to interpret not only the Christian scriptures, but also the human condition in which Africans found themselves including their ‘worldview’ (see Antonio 2006:29-59). Africanisation thus emerged as a new form of theological hermeneutics (see Martey 1993:56). To the extent that these African theologians emphasised theological reflection on the Gospel to mirror African ‘reality’ and cultural milieu, the quest also initiated an epistemological break in that regard. Theological reflection would no longer proceed from Western cultural and intellectual assumptions. As a hermeneutical approach, Africanisation accentuated Africa’s religio-cultural history. Although it was never agreed amongst both Roman Catholic and Protestant African theologians in francophone and Anglophone Africa on the appropriate nomenclature of the emerging hermeneutic, the main issue with Africanisation was clearly the search for an “authentic African expression of Christianity” (Mbiti 1980).

Africanisation was thus pursued from various perspectives. In this regard, the question of identity was brought into sharp focus through the writings of many African theologians. In an attempt to express the Christian message in African terms, nuances of the churches’ Africanisation were employed. These came to be variously expressed in such vocabulary as adaptation, localisation, translation, indigenisation, and incarnation (see Orji 2015:144-160). Adaptation and later incarnation were more pronounced in the Africanisation efforts of African Roman Catholic theologians, while their counterparts in Protestant circles favoured indigenisation. In what follows, I will briefly discuss the respective perspectives on Africanisation in Roman Catholic and Protestant circles and in francophone and Anglophone Africa.<sup>19</sup> Being a continental body, the specific ways in which the AACC engaged with these matters can be best understood against such a background.

#### a) *Africanisation in Francophone Africa*

In Francophone Africa, Negritude, a movement that aimed at extolling African cultural

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<sup>19</sup> This distinction is intended to highlight the language the “language divide” in African theology. For as Sindima (1994:153) notes, this challenge makes it “difficult for most African scholars to know what research has been done in one part of Africa on the subject of their inquiry”.

values, contributed to the new orientation in theological thinking amongst African Christian theologians (cf. Dedji 2003:13-19; Martey 1993:9-18). Placide Tempels' *La Philosophie Bantoue*, which first appeared in French in 1949 and in English in 1959, was a pioneering text in writings that valorised African thinking against dominant Western scholarship, which denied the very possibility of an African philosophy, theology and religion. A significant text in the quest for an African Christianity was expressed in *Des Pretres noirs s'interrogent* (Black Priests Wonder), a collection of their writings of black priests who were studying in Europe published in 1956. According to Martey (1993:65), these African priests demanded the adaptation of Christianity in Africa. This publication was soon followed by two significant works of African theological and philosophical reflection that emerged from two francophone Roman Catholic priests, namely Alexis Kagamé (Rwanda) and Vincent Mulago (Congo). Kagamé published his *La Philosophie Bantu-Rwandaise* in 1956. Mulago, who completed a doctoral thesis at the Urban University in Rome entitled "Life Unity among the Bashi, Banyarwanda and Barundi", published part of his study in 1965 as *Un Visage africain du Christianisme: L'Union vitale bantu face à l'Unité vitale ecclésiale*. The famous Tshibangu-Vanesste debate also contributed towards the development of an African theology within the Roman Catholic Church (see Uzukwu 2012:23-27). These developments coincided with the appearance of sympathetic works on African religion such as Parrinder's *African Traditional Religion* (1954).<sup>20</sup> In the field of anthropology, publications by Marcel Griaule (1966) and E. Evans-Pritchard (1956) fell in this category of new writings on Africa (see Mudimbe 1988:56-60).

In his address to the meeting of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Madagascar and Africa (SECAM) at Kampala in 1969, Pope Paul VI vigorously affirmed the need for the Africanisation of Christianity when he said: "You can and must have an African Christianity" (see Okure & van Thiel 1990:35). In later years, SECAM provided the context for the development of an authentic African theology within Roman Catholic circles. At the 1974 Roman Synod in Rome, the African bishops proved quite decisive when they rejected "the so called stepping-stone theology of adaptation" in favour of a theology of incarnation (see Shorter 1975:145-150). In their declaration, the Bishops of Africa considered a theology of adaptation out-of-date and observed the following:

Theology must be open to the aspiration of the people of Africa, if it is to help Christianity to become incarnate in the life of the peoples of the continent. To achieve this, the young Churches of Africa and Madagascar must take over more and more responsibility for their own evangelisation and total development (cited in Shorter 1975:150).

In his reply to this declaration, Pope Paul VI condemned as dangerous all diversified theologies (see Shorter 1988:215). In his words, "the content of the faith is either Catholic or it is not". To the Pope, the declaration of African Bishops with its call for a theology of incarnation was probably perceived to imply an emphasis on pluralism, which was seen as a possible threat to *communio* and in that regard, "a theological diversity that might harm the content of the [Roman Catholic] faith."

The Vatican's response notwithstanding, the rejection of the approach of adaptation in the declaration was indeed plausible. Later research would show that the weakness of the approach of adaptation was that it tended to merely substitute Western concepts and categories in liturgy and theology with local equivalents. As Ngindu Mushete (1983:27) understood the theology of adaptation, the task was "to adapt the practices of the western

<sup>20</sup> Parrinder is credited to have been the first to use the term 'African Traditional religion'. In fact, Parrinder supervised Bolaji Idowu for his doctoral thesis, on which his book, *Olódùmaré: God in Yoruba Belief* was based (see Idowu 1962:viii).

church as much as possible to the socio-cultural life of the African peoples.” It is hardly surprising therefore that Schreier (1985:9-11) located the weaknesses of the adaptation model in the fact that it began with Western presuppositions and then ended up forcing local cultural norms into foreign categories. According to Shorter (1975:150), the concept of adaptation contained within it seeds of perpetual Western superiority and domination. Given this explanation, the decision of the Catholic Bishops to reject the theology of adaptation in preference for an incarnational approach was explicable.<sup>21</sup> These criticisms on adaptation notwithstanding, this theological approach lay behind much thinking around the initial processes of the Africanisation of ecclesiastical personnel, catechesis and liturgy within the Roman Catholic Church in Africa. The new approach proposed by SECAM, namely inculturation, carried the meaning of “immersing Christianity in African culture [so that] just as Jesus became man, so must Christianity become African”, as Ukpong (1984a:27) explains.

*b) Africanisation in Anglophone Africa*

In Anglophone Africa, the movements of Pan-Africanism and African nationalism, and ‘African personality’ played a role in forming a framework for this new hermeneutic. Indigenisation, an approach that emphasised the incarnational approach in Protestant circles, characterised initial attempts at Africanisation within Protestant circles in much of Anglophone Africa. It signifies the attempt to reflect Christianity in African religio-cultural terms. Writing within the context of Nigeria, Idowu (1965:11) used indigenisation to mean that:

... the Church in Nigeria should be the Church which affords Nigerians the means of worshipping God as Nigerians; that is, in a way which is compatible with their own spiritual temperament, of singing to the glory of God in their own way, of praying to God and hearing His Holy Word in an idiom which is clearly 'intelligible to them. She should be a corporate personality, personally discerning what is the will of God for herself and responsible for all requisite steps taken in fulfilling it.

Indigenisation thus implied an encounter between Western and African forms of Christian expressions. According to Ukpong (1984a:25), this meant that the Christian message attained “expression in indigenous forms and idioms”. Arguably, the AACC gave an institutional framework for the development of such approaches in Protestant circles. Chapter three of the AACC Kampala Assembly report documents in which the need for an adequate and clear theology for the Church in Africa is underscored (see AACC 1963:39). These concerns gave impetus to the AACC initiative of organising a consultation of African theologians held at Immanuel College next to the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, in 1966 (see §5.4.1b below). The Ibadan consultation must also be understood within the wider framework of the then budding interest in the study of African Traditional Religion by African theologians, which would later be exemplified by the publications of Mbiti (1969, 1970) and Idowu (1965, 1973). Such studies would soon influence the institutionalised study of African religions in the period of Africanisation resulting into what may be termed an ‘ATR’ - discourse in theological institutions and Departments of Religious Studies of Africa in Anglophone Africa (see Platvoet 2003:135). According to Mbiti (2013:2), the Ibadan consultation “set the stage for the academic study of the relationship between African Religion and Biblical Religion”.

The specific ways in which the AACC contributed towards this endeavour will be discussed in the following sections. Suffice it to note here that the impact that the AACC had

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<sup>21</sup> For a fuller discussion on adaptation, see Kaplan (1986). He discusses a six-fold typology for socio-cultural adaptation, namely toleration, translation, assimilation, Christianisation, acculturation, and incorporation. Kaplan’s discussion, however, focuses less on indigenous responses to Christianity than on missionary responses to African culture.

in this regard owes in part to individual contributions towards such an endeavour by ecumenically minded theologians like John Mbiti, Bolaji Idowu, and Gabriel Setiloane. The theological influence of Bolaji Idowu, for instance, is clearly discernible in the section on “Freedom and Unity in the Church” of the AACC Kampala Assembly report (see §5.5.1 below). In later years, other African theologians such as Jesse Mugambi and Mercy Oduyoye, amongst others, also contributed to stirring theological discussions within the AACC. Setiloane and Oduyoye served the AACC in the capacity of youth executive secretary from 1963 to 1969 and 1970 to 1973, respectively. Mugambi made his significant contribution to the AACC as senior consultant for research and development from 1994 to 1997.

Following further developments in theological thinking on the continent, especially the contribution of the Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians (EATWOT II) held in Accra, Ghana, in 1977, which was instrumental in bringing firmly on the agenda of African theological thinking the idea of inculturation, inculturation came to be popularly associated with Africanisation. The Ghana meeting focussed on African theology and led to the founding of the Ecumenical Association of African theologians (EAAT). A collection of the various papers presented at the consultation was published under the title *African Theology en Route*, edited by Appiah-Kubi and Torres. In their final communiqué, the African theologians at EATWOT II noted that their task was “to create a theology that arises from and is accountable to African people” (see Appiah-Kubi & Torres 1979:193).

Subsequently, in a number of theological discussions on the continent, inculturation came to be used generically to refer to both theological approaches of incarnation and indigenisation in Roman Catholic and Protestant circles, respectively. Nevertheless, much explicit discourse on inculturation emerged from Roman Catholic theologians.<sup>22</sup> In one of the influential books on inculturation, namely Shorter’s *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (1988:77-78), its author lamented that although most African theologians were “actually engaged in a conscious process of inculturation, very few elaborated a theology of inculturation itself”. Shorter traces the first recorded use of the term inculturation as a theological concept to the Jesuit Professor Fr. Joseph Mason of the Gregorian University in Rome, who employed the term in a publication in 1962. However, the exact origins of the term remain unclear (Schineller 1990:21). The appearance of the term inculturation is nevertheless often attributed to the Jesuit Superior General Fr. Pedro Arrupe (1978:2) who, in a letter to the order in 1978, defined the term as

the incarnation of Christian life and of the Christian message in a particular context, in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to culture... but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming it and remaking it so as to bring about a ‘new creation’ (quoted in Shorter 1988:11).

Following such incarnational perspectives, Shorter (1988:75) regarded Jesus Christ himself as the subject-matter of inculturation. In view of such an understanding of inculturation, he suggests that Justin Martyr (d. 165CE) represents one of the earliest clear exponents of inculturation, especially in his definition of the “Spermatic Logos” (Shorter 1988:75-77).

Accordingly to Nigerian theologian Justin Ukpong (1984a:30), the task of inculturation consists in:

Re-thinking and re-expressing the original Christian message in an African cultural milieu. It is the task of confronting the Christian faith and African culture. In the process there is inter-

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<sup>22</sup> Roman Catholic theologians have perhaps published more works on inculturation from the perspective of the catholic faith. The key exponents have been members of the Society of Jesus. Apart from Bujo (1990), Magesa (2004), Schineller (1990), Shorter (1988), and Uzukwu (1988), whom I refer to in this chapter, other works include: Waliggo, J et al (1986) and McGarry & Ryan (2001).

penetration of both. Christian faith enlightens African culture and the basic data of revelation as contained in scriptures and tradition are critically re-examined for the purpose of giving them African cultural expression.

This view highlights the conviction that inculturation is a two way process. As Shorter (1988:11) explains, inculturation “is the on-going dialogue between faith and culture or cultures.”<sup>23</sup> This implies that culture affects how the Christian faith is lived and experienced as reflected in liturgy, church discipline and spirituality, amongst others. Such a description of inculturation, however, begs the question: “What is inculturated?” Is there such a thing as a culture-free kernel of truth? For Mugambi (2003:71), “the gospel remains unchanged, but changes the cultures into which it is introduced.” Such a view is reminiscent of Mbiti’s (1970:438) argument when he argued:

We can add nothing to the Gospel, for this is an eternal gift of God; but Christianity is always a beggar seeking food and drink, cover and shelter from the cultures and times it encounters in its never ending journeys and wanderings.

Although it is not within the scope of this study to deal extensively with such questions, these considerations will illumine my discussion of the quest for identity in much of African theology in general and the AACC in particular in what follows.

In addition to the inculturation perspective, “translation models” soon emerged, especially within Protestant missiology and they covered quite similar concerns to those of indigenisation approaches (see Küster 2001:22). These models were predicated on the translatability of the Gospel and have been developed in the theologies of Kwame Bediako and Lamin Sanneh and in some writings of Andrew Walls (cf. §4.2.2 above). Walls (1981:39) spoke of the Christian religion as being “culturally infinitely translatable”. Building on Walls’ thinking in this regard, Bediako (1995:62,109) has described translatability as signifying the fundamental relevance and accessibility of the Christian religion “to persons in any culture within which the Christian faith is transmitted and assimilated”. He interpreted translatability “to be in-built into the nature of the Christian religion and capable of us subverting any cultural possessiveness of the Faith in the process of its transmission” (1995:110). From such an understanding of translatability of the Gospel, Magesa (2004:148) infers the “transculturality” of the Gospel. Strictly speaking, this is another way of underscoring the universality of the Christian religion.

A further significant development regarding theological discourse on the relationship between Christianity and “culture” is associated with the emergence of the term contextualisation, which emerged from within the circles of the WCC Theological Education Fund (TEF) to train leaders for churches in the so-called third world in the 1970’s.<sup>24</sup> Later, Stephen Bevans expounded on the notion of contextualisation, pointing out that it was a broader concept than inculturation and indigenisation as it encompasses all dimensions of human experience, including social change, in the process of theologising. Discourse on contextualisation has since opined the well accepted view that all theologies are necessarily contextual. However, although the term contextualisation “has advantages of not having many

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<sup>23</sup> In more recent discussions, the recognition that we live with multiple identities has led some missiologists, especially in the Netherlands and Germany, to speak of interculturalisation rather than inculturation (See Hollenweger 1979:2-14; Ustorf 2011:9-18; Wijzen 2001:221). See also the series *Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity*. Frans Wijzen (2001:221), for instance, has argued: “Interculturalisation expresses the idea that the process of inculturation is not simply the interaction between gospel on the one hand and culture on the other, as if the two represent two monolithic meaning systems, but between multiple cultural orientations.” For a succinct account of the emergence of intercultural theology, see Küster (2010:11-15).

<sup>24</sup> The decolonisation process had considerable effect on TEF, thus contributing to the contextual nature in which the vision and objectives of the fund were shaped (see TEF 1972:13).

previous associations and of being readily used in translation into a wide variety of languages”, as Schreier (1985:6) claims, it has “a more extended and less precise meaning” (Shorter 1988:11). Further, if all theologies are by nature contextual, including, for example, Afrikaner theology under apartheid (Gifford 1998:338; Smit 2003c), this begs the question what value the use of the term adds. Given that contexts are after all “constructed strategies”, another pitfall of contextualisation is that in many cases “context” often determines what are valued and what are not valued in religion (Sanneh 2003:4). A helpful discussion on both the promises and ambiguities of contextual theology is provided by David Bosch in his *Transforming Mission* Bosch (1991:455-457). Bosch explained the limits of both inculturation and contextualisation arguing that only the process of interculturalisation could do justice to both the universality of the church and the identity of the local culture. These concerns have led some theologians to insist on criteria for contextual theologies (Küster 2005:423).

To sum up my discussion in this section, it appears to me that Africanisation as a hermeneutic approach may be rightly described as a search for an African theology in general and as a search for African Christian identity (read: authenticity) in particular. Using the touchscreen of Africanisation, I have discussed the theological evolution of African theology through the phases of adaptation, incarnation, and inculturation. Other theological innovations on the African continent during these formative years of African theology pertain to theological discourse in South Africa during the early 1960’s, which had an explicit focus on the struggle against apartheid. I will return to this discussion in the next chapter. Suffice it to note that in the EATWOT statement referred to in the foregoing, three approaches to theology in Africa were identified namely, the approach of inculturation, liberation oriented theology, and South African black theology. EATWOT did not use the word inculturation, but this was clearly implied, given its recognition of the language of ATR as preparation for the Gospel (see Appiah-Kubi & Torres 1979:192). EATWOT went further to note that “because oppression is found not only in culture but also in political and economic structures and the dominant mass media, African theology must also be liberation theology” (Appiah-Kubi & Torres 1979:194). In this way, the theme of liberation was firmly placed on the African theological agenda.

### **5.3.3 The Quest for Identity**

Having analysed the background to Africanisation as a search for a new hermeneutic by showing developments since the 1950’s and the initial approaches of adaptation (later incarnation) and indigenisation in the Roman Catholic Church and in Protestant churches respectively, I will now briefly discuss the notion of identity as a theological category and further unravel the complexity of this category. Such a discussion is germane to an adequate understanding of the quest for authenticity within the context of the AACC. This is so because of the AACC’s role in providing an institutional framework for the development of such perspectives, as well as through its engagement of some of Africa’s renowned theologians in an attempt to discern appropriate theology(s) for the African context.

For most first generation African theologians, the concern with identity arose both from the impact of the West on Africa and the conversion from Africa Traditional Religion to the Christianity. As Mbiti (1969:232) understood this problem,

Mission Christianity was not from the start prepared to face a serious encounter with the traditional religions and philosophy or the modern changes taking place ... the Church in Africa now finds itself in the situation of having to exist without a theology.

In a later publication, Mbiti (1972:51) observes: “The Church in Africa is a Church without a

theology, without theologians and without theological concern”. Another African theologian, Bolaji Idowu, expressed the same issue by noting the predicament of the church in Africa owing to the neglect by missionaries to account for indigenous beliefs and customs of the Africa people. For Idowu (1968:426), the implication of this was that “the church in Africa came into being with prefabricated theology, liturgies and traditions”. In his *Towards an Indigenous Church*, Idowu (1965:22) articulated on these points and made a call for an indigenous African church with its own theology. Ghanaian theologian John Pobee (1983:5) characterises the predicament of the church in Africa as the “North Atlantic Captivity of the Church” in which Christianity in Africa began with an assumed definition of the Christian faith, which is “definitely North Atlantic – intellectually, physically, spiritually, economically and culturally.” Similarly, Éla (1988:154) called for the liberation of African Christianity from its ‘Babylonian Captivity’ to the ‘Roman structures’ of Western Christianity.

a) *African Religion as Praeparatio Evangelica*

Idowu and Mbiti reacted to the predicament that African Christians found themselves in by advocating nuanced versions of continuity between African religions and Christianity. Setiloane’s (1976) *The Image of God among the Sotho-Tswana* also points in this direction, albeit in a much nuanced manner (cf. also Setiloane 1978). Hastings (1976:52) has described the quest for religious authenticity of the African as represented by Mbiti and Idowu to be an “authenticity of continuity”. Idowu (1962) advocated a more radical version of continuity in this regard than Mbiti (see Bediako 1992:267-293, 303-334). For Mbiti, the concepts of God in Africa offered an entry point for discussion on those commonalities between African religiosity and biblical record.<sup>25</sup> Central in Mbiti’s thesis was a stress on the preparatory role (*praeparatio evangelica*)<sup>26</sup> of African religions. In other words, the Christian faith was the fulfilment of African religion. In this regard, he wrote:

I consider traditional religions, Islam, and the other religious systems to be preparatory and even essential ground in the search for the Ultimate. But only Christianity has the terrible responsibility of pointing the way to that ultimate Identity, Foundation and Source of security (Mbiti 1969:277).

According to Mbiti (1979:68), what the Gospel brought to Africa was Jesus Christ. Little wonder then that for Mbiti theology is Christology. He thus writes:

The final test for the validity and usefulness of any theological contribution is Jesus Christ. Since his Incarnation, Christian Theology ought properly to be Christology, for Theology falls or stands on how it understands, translates and interprets Jesus Christ at a given time, place and human situation (Mbiti 1971:190).

Mbiti’s view was a clear reversal of the position of the Edinburgh Missionary Conference of

<sup>25</sup> For some theologians, it is an exaggeration to argue for the centrality of the supreme being in African religion in the manner that Mbiti and Idowu proceeded (Mulago, cited in Bediako 1995:101). Others find appealing the view that underscores the anthropocentricity of African Religion as Nyamiti has emphasised. Nyamiti (1987:60) has described African religious behaviour as “centred mainly on man’s life in this world, with the consequence that religion is chiefly functional, or a means to serve people to acquire earthly goods (life, health, fecundity, wealth, power and the like) and to maintain social cohesion and order.” Others scholars, such as the Congolese theologian Bénézet Bujo (1992:33), argue instead that the focus of African religion is life.

<sup>26</sup> The term *praeparatio evangelica* itself may be traced back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century church historian Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea (c.263-339?), who formulated this term to refer to a concept by which Judaism was defined as a preparation for Christianity. Mbiti appropriated this notion as a bridge between a pre-Christian heritage and his own view of Christianity. Although Mbiti has published widely, it is in his works *African Religions and Philosophy*, *Concepts of God in Africa* and *The Prayers and African Religion* that he brings into sharp focus the view of African pre-Christian heritage as a *praeparatio evangelica*.

1910, at which it was concluded that the primal religions of Africa contained no preparation for the Gospel. Fashole-Luke (1975:267) thus observed that “the quest for African Christian theologies ... amounts to attempting to make clear the fact that conversion to Christianity must be coupled with cultural continuity.” As Bediako (1993b:372) has shown, Mbiti’s assertion of the African pre-Christian heritage as *praeparatio evangelica* is the most enduring paradigm in his writings. This must be understood, however, in perspective, given Mbiti’s later view of indigenisation. Mbiti (1979) came to regard the relationship between African traditional religion and Christianity, which had hitherto been pursued in terms of indigenisation, with caution. He wrote:

I do not think that we need to or can “indigenize Christianity.” Christianity results from the encounter of the Gospel with any given local or regional community/society. To speak of “indigenizing Christianity” is to give the impression that Christianity is a ready-made commodity which has to be transplanted to a local area. Of course this has been the assumption followed by many missionaries and local theologians. I do not accept it anymore. The Gospel is God-given. The church in which it is incarnated is made up of people who are by “definition,” indigenous “where they happen to be born or live or have their roots” (cited in Kinney 1979:66).

In this way, Mbiti distinguishes between Christianity and the Gospel in the firm belief that the former is always cultural bound.

The identity question continued to be a preoccupation even for a later generation of African theologians such as Lamin Sanneh and Kwame Bediako. In his *West African Christianity*, Sanneh (1983a:86) demonstrates the critical and preparatory role that was played by African traditional religion in the assimilation of Christianity. While Sanneh speaks of the missionary as signifying the stage of the historical transmission of Christianity, the adaptation of Christianity is assigned to the African factor. In other words, Sanneh (1983a:244) demonstrates the pioneering role of the African in the adaptation and assimilation of Christianity in their societies. He does so by attributing the successful implantation of Christianity to the facilitating role of African religions (Sanneh 1983a:89). In his view, in “African hands, Christianity spread along familiar religious channels, acquiring in the feedback a strong dose of local religious materials which the quarantined culture of the Western missionary had tried to filter out” (Sanneh 1983a:245). He thus introduces a tension between historical transmission and indigenous assimilation. In this regard, “the process of historical transmission in the form it took under scriptural translation stimulated that of indigenous assimilation” (see Sanneh 1983b:166). Put differently, Sanneh advocates for the significance of indigenous assimilation vis-a-vis historical transmission (cf. § 4.2.2 above).

Following the lead of Andrew Walls in stressing the importance of the identity question for the African church, Bediako has in his most celebrated work, *Theology and Identity*, argued that African theologians such as Idowu and Mbiti were wrestling with essentially the same problem as Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria. Bediako proceeded with his argument by offering an analysis and critique of four writers of the early church and four modern African theologians. Affirming much in the views of Mulago, Idowu and Mbiti on the question of the relationship between the Christian faith and African pre-Christian religious heritage, Bediako affirms the continuity between African Traditional Religion and the Christian faith. Quite understandably, Bediako made a serious attempt to emphasise the value of African religiosity. Describing the theological preoccupation with Africa’s religious past in the thinking of these scholars, Bediako (1993a:15) understands the past as not so much a chronological past but rather an ontological one.

For him, the theological concern with the African pre-Christian religious heritage was aimed at clarifying the nature and meaning of Africa Christian identity (see Bediako 1993a:15). In that regard, identity becomes a theological category (Bediako 1995:256). He

thus portrays the rise of modern African theology as the emergence of a theology of African Christian identity (Bediako 1992:xvii). Quoting Fashole-Luke, whom I have already referred to above, Bediako (1995:260) affirms that conversion to Christianity must be coupled with cultural continuity. On the extreme end of the continuity thesis were African thinkers such as Byang Kato (1975:169), who instead posited radical discontinuity between African religion and Christianity by stressing the distinctiveness of the Christian experience.

*b) Critiquing the Continuity Thesis*

There are, however, limitations to the continuity thesis in that it tends to emphasise similarities rather than dissimilarities between African Traditional Religion and Christianity (Westerlund 1993:46). Its advocates, such as Mbiti, appear to reduce African religions to their usefulness as a preparation for Christianity (see Maluleke 1998a:127,130). In this regard, one wonders whether African religions also have something to offer to Christianity. For this reason, scholars who argue for the integrity of African religion view African theologians who posit an inferior status to African religion as “intellectual smugglers who refuse to appreciate ATRs as valid religions possessing a peculiar identity” (p’Bitek (1971:88; cf. Chitando 2006:108-109; van Rinsum 2004:23-38; Maluleke 1998a:123-130). In his recent work, *The Invention of God in Indigenous Societies*, James Cox (2014:3) has pursued this argument by highlighting the ethical challenge posed by p’Bitek, namely that we treat “all religions in the same way by not privileging in the first instance Christianity and then world religions over indigenous traditions.” Such arguments lead one to infer that African theologians’ account of African religion is seemingly instrumentalist.

For others still, the work by Mbiti and Idowu on African Traditional Religions is criticised because “it sees through distorting Christian spectacles, and, in the process, invents an African traditional religion that never existed” (see Isichei 1995:325). I will say more on inventing traditions in the next section but suffice it to note here that p’Bitek (1971:79), the sharpest critic of the work of African theologians on African religions, saw in the works of these African theologians what he called “the Hellenization of African deities”. In other words, such studies tended to fit African traditional religion into a Christian framework. For even those African theologians, such as Setiloane (1979:63), who insisted that Africans had “a view of Divinity much higher, deeper, and all pervasive”, were decidedly Christian. One wonders why in the first place they were Christians and not adherents of the belief system that they argued had a much higher view of divinity. For Setiloane (1979:64), he was still in the Christian-fold, because he was like one who had been bewitched. In his own words, “I find it difficult to shake off the Christian witchcraft with which I have been captivated.”

How should the work of early generation of African theologians then be understood? For Bediako, it is precisely as Christian theologians that African theologians undertook the re-interpretation of African primal religions. He interpreted the concern of African theologians with the theological significance of the African pre-Christian religious heritage as an effort aimed at “clarifying the nature and meaning of African Christian identity”. Accordingly, Bediako (1995:4) avers that the Christianisation of the African past could be understood as one of the most important achievements of African theology. Using the phrase “Christianisation of African tradition”, Bediako (1995:5) interpreted the work of African theologians to have been concerned with a basically *religious* problem namely, making room in the African experience of religious powers for Christ. Following such ‘Christianisation’ of African tradition, Bediako argued, “African Christianity must now achieve an Africanisation of its Christian experience”. The Africanisation sought, in his view, should not be confused with the mere “indigenisation of the Christian faith and Gospel into African forms”. What is at issue according to Bediako’s (1995:5) proposal, is no longer a religious problem, but rather

an intellectual one regarding “how African Christianity, employing Christian tools, may set about mending the torn fabric of African identity and hopefully point the way to a fuller and unfettered African humanity and personality”.

Understandable as Bediako’s support of the continuity thesis may be, it is hardly deniable that while African theology has been able to indicate lines of continuity between Africa’s religious past and the Christian faith there are also some discontinuities with which such quest has barely dealt with. In his study *The Doctrine of God in African Christian Thought*, Kenyan theologian James Kombo’s (2007:19) has argued that African inculturation theology is yet to articulate the areas of divergences between the two views. The gist of his argument is that the knowledge or views of God - which African inculturation theologians have presented as African views of God - are conceived within the confines of *Modimo*, *Nyasaye*, *Mulungu*, *Leza*, and *Nyame*. For Kombo, these African names of God (in italics) do not presuppose an understanding of God in terms of the Trinity. He thus argues that African theology needs to move further and understand how God is revealed in Christ through the Holy Spirit. In other words, how is *Modimo*, *Nyasaye*, *Mulungu*, *leza* and *Nyame* to be understood in Trinitarian terms? Although Kombo himself ends up along the lines of African inculturation theology by proposing a doctrine of God on the basis of what he calls *ntu* philosophy, his is a call for the appropriation of African intellectual infrastructure in an attempt to construct an African doctrine of the Trinity. Perhaps a deeper challenge lies in the uncritical appropriation of the worldview of African pre-Christian religious culture in works of African theologians (see Ngong 2010:20).

Another area in which the question of continuity may be problematized regards the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. To date, African Christian articulation of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit remains largely unaddressed, with only a few theologians attempting to do so (see Anderson 1991; Daneel 1993; Ngong 2010; Oladipo 1996; Sakupapa 2012). How would African theologians, for instance, respond to a claim made by missiologist Donal Dorr (2000:91) that: “The Spirit is at work among peoples, traditions, and cultures long before the good news of Jesus reaches them”?

### c) *Problematizing African Christian Identity*

Wrestling with such questions accentuates the point that discourse on the relationship between Christianity and culture is indeed a perennial problem. In his book *Christ and Culture*, Richard Niebuhr proposed a typology of five conceptions of this relationship, which may in some contexts, be helpful in discerning the appropriate relationship between Christianity and culture. Other scholars, such as Andrew Walls (1996:3-11), discuss the relationship by regarding “the gospel as prisoner and liberator of culture”. Within the African context, it is perhaps Bediako (1992:xi) who has best captured the problem with which African theologians have wrestled, namely “how the abiding Gospel of Jesus Christ related to the inescapable issues and questions which arise from the Christian’s cultural existence in the world”. From an institutional perspective, the AACC has provided a platform at which such quest has found expression so much so that one African theologian opined that the “AACC is a source for African theology” (Muzorewa 1985:73).

The focus of African theologians on African Christian identity as discussed in the foregoing has come under sharp scrutiny. Some scholars note the complexity of the problem associated with the relationship between Christian identity and cultural identity (Conradie 2005a:11; Maluleke 2010:372). Others question the ambiguity of the language of Africanisation (Éla 1988:147). For others still, the concept of “Africanness” as an identity question is elusive (Pobee 1979:18). Perhaps an even larger challenge has to do with what entails identity in the views of the theologians presented above. It appears to me that the

problem of identity for the African theologians was not so much “who am I?” but “who are we?” (cf. Appiah 1992:76). Thus, what one finds is some sort of unitary essentialising approach to African identity. In their article “Is Africa Incurably Religious?”, Platvoet and Van Rinsum (2003:127) argue that Mbiti shared this unitary view of the pervasive religiosity of ‘African traditional society’, given his famous statement that “Africans are notoriously religious” (Mbiti 1969:1). This charge is sharpened when one considers Mbiti’s portrayal of such religiosity as an ontological phenomenon. Mbiti (1969:15) writes:

For Africans, [religion] is an ontological phenomenon; it pertains to the question of existence or being... Within traditional life, the individual is immersed in a religious participation, which starts before birth and continues after death... This is fundamental, for it means that man lives in a religious universe. Both that world and practically all his activities in it, are seen and experienced through a religious understanding and meaning... The point here is that for Africans, the whole of existence is a religious phenomenon; man is a deeply religious being living in a religious universe... Africans have their own ontology, but it is religious ontology

Following the theory of “Invention of Tradition”, which was pioneered by Terrence Ranger (see Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983:1-14), Platvoet and Van Rinsum (2003:135) contend that the myth of Africa as notoriously religious is one of the inventions of tradition of modern Africa. Nevertheless, such a myth is best understood as a post-colonial counter-invention against the pre-colonial and colonial European inventions of Africa “as primitive, savage, without religion, pagan, superstitious” and the rest of the colonial epithets.

To be sure, the focus on identity by African inculturation theologians may well point to an essentialist notion of Africa and African culture, which we must certainly refuse (Ngong 2012). Essentialism is of course itself a subject of contention in recent discourse (see Phillip 2010:47-60). Most of the inculturation theologians posed the question of inculturation in terms of what may be regarded as an alternative between what they construed as westernisation and authentic Africanness. Thus, the initial approach of indigenisation in Protestant circles risked the portrayal of theology in terms of cultural relativism (see Schineller 1990:18-19). The statement of a WCC consultation on “Church Union in Africa”, held at Accra in 1974, is instructive in this regard. According to the report of the consultation:

As African theology attempts to re-articulate the Christian mystery in African terms, it cannot make uncritical use of the African cultural heritage, African theology is at the same time full acceptance and critical transformation of the African background (WCC 1975:128).

Furthermore, one may argue that the notions of “Africa” and “African culture” written about in the works of African inculturation theologians may not easily escape the criticism of cultural romanticism. The danger of cultural romanticism has well been noted as looming in most discourses that take cultural identity as a theological source (Bevans 2005:25). This criticism looms large in view of the quest by African theologians to react against the dominance of Western culture in theology, but also in their positing of an African cultural identity predicated on the African past. As such, Pobe (1979:44) rightly warned against a “fossil culture”; that is, a “culture does not exist except in some people’s romantic fantasies” (Bevans 2002:25).

Another criticism of African inculturation theology is its tendency towards cultural romanticism and essentialism. It is argued that pioneers of African theology presented a view of African culture and identity predicated on a somewhat static view of culture. This often implied the conceptualisation of African identity as though it were fixed. To be sure, African cultural identity is not clear cut (Shorter 1988:245; Éla 1986:129). Given the importance of viewing African theology’s wrestle with identity issues against the larger quest for identity in Africa and African-America at large (Maluleke 2001:31), I will in what follows draw on some

philosophical and historical studies on Africa.

According to Ghanaian philosopher Anthony Appiah (1992:178), “identities are complex and multiple and grow out of a history of changing responses to economic, political, and cultural forces, almost always in opposition to other identities.” Like other human identities, African identities also come with “invented histories”, “invented biologies”, and “invented cultural affinities” (Appiah 1992:174). Appiah (1992:2) is thus critical of a uniform African identity and for that matter rejects what he terms as “radical pan-Africanism”. My sense is that one’s analysis and conceptualisation of African identity is affected by the challenge of defining Africa. With regard to the quest for identity in African theology therefore, such pursuit begs the question regarding conceptual clarity on the meaning of Africa and African (cf. Conradie 2005a:7).

Reflections on the meaning of Africa and African have often had to consider whether or not dominant notions of Africa are a reality or invention. The later term, invention, has in fact become rather ubiquitous within African studies ever since the publication of Mudimbe’s acclaimed book, *The Invention of Africa* (1988). Therein, Mudimbe interrogated the construction of Africa through Eurocentric categories and conceptual systems. Its focus is on the invention of Africa through Western discourses. In this sense, Mudimbe is a “whistle-blower” against ideologies of otherness, which he calls “alterity” (see Mazrui 2005:69). That is to say, Western scholarship on Africa produced an Africanist discourse in accordance with the changing trends within European experience and its self-indulgent view of the inherent superiority of the white race (Mudimbe 1988:16-17).

It was the African historian Terrence Ranger (1983:250) who argued very persuasively regarding the importation of European neo-traditional inventions of identity, as well as the inventions of African traditions – ethnicity, customary law, customary land rights and ‘traditional’ religion, amongst others. From this perspective, missionaries would be seen as having contributed to the production of reified notions of the indigenous. In the end, missionaries then contributed towards the affirmation of cultural difference.

In response to criticism that his proposal wrought and after noting the “too one-sided” and “once and for all” nature of his argument and its implication of a sort of break with his earlier research on African initiative, Ranger (1993) modified his postulation by suggesting an exchange of invention for imagination without necessarily rejecting his own thesis. Depicted in Ranger’s later view is the perennial question in African studies on identity regarding legitimacy, continuity, and discontinuity during the colonial encounter. Thus following the influence of Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*, Ranger acknowledges that while some traditions in colonial Africa really were invented, “customary law and ethnicity and religion and language were imagined, by many different people and over a long time.” These multiple imaginations, Ranger (1993: 81-82) argues, “were in tension with each other and in constant contestation to define the meaning of what had been imagined - to imagine it further. Traditions imagined by whites were re-imagined by blacks: traditions imagined by particular black interest groups were re-imagined by others.” In this way, he noted the complexity of traditions, as well as the contested nature of identities during the colonial era. Such perspectives highlight a serious limitation in African inculturation theologies, thus the essentialist tendencies on the meaning of both African culture and Africa.

According to Zeleza (2016:14):

The idea of “Africa” is a complex one with multiple genealogies and meanings, so that extrapolations of “African” culture, identity or nationality, in the singular or plural, any extrapolations of what makes “Africa” “African”, are often quite slippery as these notions tend to swing unsteadily between the poles of essentialism and contingency.

In light of this observation, Zeleza (2006:14) argues that Africa is as much a reality as it is a construct. With regard to the later, some constructions of Africa present African identities as mapped in racial, representational, geographical, or historical terms. The attempt by thinkers such as Mudimbe and Said to historicise the “invention” of Africa shows that how Africa is defined has been a product of its interaction with other civilisations. According to Mazrui (2005:69), this began with the very name ‘Africa’. It is worthwhile here to quote him at length:

It is one of the great ironies of modern African history that it took European colonialism to inform Africans that they were Africans. This is the positive version of “the Invention of Africa.” Europe’s greatest service to the people of Africa was not Western civilization, which is under siege, or even Christianity, which is on the defensive. Europe’s supreme gift was the gift of African identity, bequeathed without grace or design? but a reality all the same. Islam and the Arabs awakened Africa’s Black consciousness, but a continental identity was still dormant (Mazrui 2005:74).

While the Europeans did not invent the term ‘Africa’, they did play a decisive role in applying it to the continental landmass that we recognize today (Mazrui 2005:75). In his *The Idea of Africa* Mudimbe (1994, xi) shed more light in this regard:

Let us note that the very name of the continent is itself a major problem. The Greeks named it Libya and used to call any black person an Aithiops. The confusion begins with the Romans. They had a province in their empire known as Africa, and their intellectuals used the same word for the ‘tertia orbis terrarum pars’ ..., that is, the continent as we know it, being third, after Europe and Asia. With the European ‘discovery’ of the continent in the fifteenth century, the confusion becomes complete.

The works of the African philosophers Appiah and Mudimbe are indeed helpful in showing how certain Africanisation projects, including those of African theologians, were rooted in the colonial discourse, despite their attempt to represent authentic African realities. For instance, Mudimbe’s (1988:x) argument that “Western interpreters as well as African analysts have been using categories and conceptual systems which depend on a Western epistemological order” may well apply to the work of pioneer African theologians such as Mbiti and Idowu. This notwithstanding, Mudimbe’s work has been criticised for remaining locked in a vicious circle inherent in a deconstructionist stance. In this regard, Masolo (1994:179) argues that Mudimbe fails to show how the usable past can be used by ‘experts’ to construct an ‘authentic’ African episteme (cf. § 5.2.3b above).

Further to my problematising of the quest for authenticity in African theology, I think that the hermeneutics of suspicion adopted by such African theologians as Kä Mana, Jean-Marc Éla and Mercy Amba Oduyoye is equally instructive for an assessment of the authenticity quest. These thinkers underscore the limitations of the discourse of identity in African theology (read: Africanisation) by pointing to the need for African theological reflection that takes seriously the contemporary African situation. In the words of Éla (1988:1460147): “But faith lived in an African setting is a dangerous mystification if the church is closed in on itself, and confronts only the problems of its cultural identity”. Such hermeneutics of suspicion may be understood in two ways. Firstly, they may be associated with debates that emerged in the 1970’s concerning the relationship between African theology and South African Black Theology. This debate brought what Martey (1993:38) has described as a “hermeneutic division” between theologians in independent Africa and their colleagues in apartheid South Africa (see §6.3.3 below). Secondly, this relates to the emergence of African women’s theology pioneered by Oduyoye, as well as the related development of African feminist hermeneutics (see Dube 2000:3; Kanyoro 2002:26). Writing on African Women’s theology, Zimbabwean Maaraidzo Elizabeth Mutambara (2006:173-189) has shown how

African inculturation theologians have been insensitive to the patriarchal oppression in the African cultural traditions they seek to reclaim. Oduyoye (1993:50-65), for instance, has problematised the male constructions of African identity, particularly in her critique of Mbiti's views on love and marriage in Africa. Nevertheless, African women theologies share a concern for African religio-cultural heritage with African inculturation theologies, albeit in a self-critical manner. In this regard, Maluleke (1997:22) has rightly observed that "African womanist theologians are teaching us how to criticize African culture without denigrating it."

The critiques of African inculturation theology notwithstanding, the quests for Africanisation by African theologians predicated as they were on questionable constructions of identity were in no way unmerited. Maluleke (2010:371) rightly notes: "Owing to centuries of negative discourse on Africa, current discourse on Africanisation is conducted in the midst of several historical, ideological, theological and contemporary landmines." At the same time, such discourse is carried out in the midst of the larger discourse on Africa's place and status in the world. Therefore, despite the essentialising nature of the approach to identity amongst African inculturation theologians, they have contributed towards discourse on African philosophies and theologies of personhood and worldviews. Most significantly, a good number of them have both served and benefited from the ecumenical movement in Africa as well as beyond.

#### **5.3.4 Decolonisation as Nexus for the Authenticity Quest in African Theology: The Case of the AACC**

From the foregoing, it may be argued that decolonisation formed the nexus for the authenticity quest in African theology. Since the 1960's, various perspectives on African theology predicated on an emphasis on authenticity derived their impetus and nourishment within the circles of the AACC, given the organisations understanding of the significance of pan-African nationalism. Muzorewa (1985:51) has thus rightly contended that African nationalism provided a general context within which theology in Africa in the 1960's was done. Arguably, the central theme of African solidarity, which was a major concern of African nationalism, buoyed ecumenical theological developments in Africa, resulting in the formation of the AACC. Be that as it may, African nationalism formed the ideological basis for the decolonisation process, which, in turn, formed the nexus for the authenticity quest in African theology. Such quest found institutional support in the nascent AACC at least for Protestant Christianity. For the AACC, the search for an authentic African theology was seen to be essential for the unity of the churches in Africa (see AACC Programme Profile 1975-1978:27). As the reports of the various groups at the All Africa Church Conference that met at Ibadan in 1958 vividly illustrates, the churches in Africa were beginning to grapple with the Africanisation of Christianity, both in terms of worship and personnel (IMC 1958:59-64), as well as in the quest for identity (IMC 1958:68-69). Therefore, the search for unity amongst African churches has developed alongside the rise of African theology. In a way, the latter has been integral to the earlier.

#### **5.4 Ecclesiology and Ethics: An analysis of the History of the AACC (1963-1974)**

Having discussed the integral relationship between early theological innovations in African theology and the ecumenical quest for unity from the perspective of decolonisation, the remaining sections of this chapter will offer an analysis of how the AACC has addressed the ecumenical tension between ecclesiology and ethics in the period from 1963 to 1974. This will be done by means of exploring a number of generative themes discerned, particularly from a historical reading of the Assembly reports, official documents of the AACC and secondary literature in this regard. The approach will be to offer an analysis under three broad

headings, namely “selfhood of the church”, “church and society” and “the quest for unity”. A similar approach will be employed in the next two chapters. Since an Assembly is the supreme legislative authority of the AACC, which meets every five years (AACC Constitution 2008:4), the analysis will focus on the resolutions and outcomes of the Assemblies at Kampala (1963), Abidjan (1969), and Lusaka (1974).

Already at the All Africa Church Conference at Ibadan (1958), one may discern an emerging concern with the relationship between the unity of the church and its social responsibility. A study of Ibadan report shows that what the church is and what it does cannot be separated. Although this meeting did not immediately and extensively deal with the theological questions regarding unity of the church, it sufficiently decried the disunity of the churches in Africa by expressing its conviction regarding the need for a platform for fellowship and understanding between churches in Africa thus the eventual formation of the AACC (IMC 1958:17). At the same time, the delegates correctly read the signs of the times as its “Message to the Churches of Africa” clearly illustrates. The statement, originally intended to be read in all African churches on Easter Sunday of 1958, prophetically declared:

We rejoice in the advance of African countries toward self-government and in the liberation of African energies and talents, praying that they may be used for the service of Him Whom we acknowledge to be the Lord of all mankind ... The continent of Africa will see unparalleled events and changes during the rest of this century, welcomed by some, feared by others (IMC 1958:16).

Between Ibadan and Kampala, well over twenty-one African countries had become independent. One may arguably note that the Ibadan conference unwittingly underscored the relationship between ecclesiology and ethics in its message to the churches when it noted as follows:

We are humbly aware of our responsibilities to God and this continent, and dedicate ourselves anew to their performance, trusting that we shall be led and supported by our fellow Christians throughout Africa and the world (IMC 1958:16).

I think that such a nexus is reflected in the attempt to bring churches together in their witness to the unity in Christ and in service to the world. In what follows, this will be investigated by analysing how the first three assemblies of the AACC addressed.

## **5.5 Ecclesiology and Ethics at Kampala (1963)**

### **5.5.1 Selfhood of the Church at Kampala**

#### *a) Kampala 1963: A Launching Pad for the Authenticity Quest*

At its inaugural Assembly in Kampala held on 20<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> April 1963, the formation of the AACC was signalled by the beating of an African drum, an act which demonstrated the desire of African churches to express their faith in African cultural forms. This was significant, given the proscription to the use of African drums in worship by missionaries. As Utuk (1997:34) observes in his commentary on the Kampala inaugural Assembly, “the drum beat ritual pointed in the direction of authenticity to which the churches covenanted themselves.”

The AACC has, since its inaugural Assembly in Kampala, challenged its member churches to seek the meaning of the authenticity of Christianity. In his *Visions of Authenticity*, Utuk (1997) has captured this quest through an analysis the assemblies of the AACC from 1963 to 1992. In this connection, the Kampala Assembly may be described as an important launching pad for the authenticity quest (Utuk 1997:64). The authenticity quest is best understood in light of Kampala’s acknowledgement that the church in Africa had hitherto not attained true

selfhood (AACC 1963:32). Authenticity was understood from the perspective of self-identity. The Assembly thus invited churches in Africa to a thoughtful study of particular forms of the “manifestation of the life of Christ” (the church).

*b) Freedom in Christ: The Selfhood of the Church in Africa*

While African freedom was defined in relation to colonial rule in secular African historiography, the AACC saw African freedom in terms of freedom in Christ. The Assembly underscored this in terms of ecclesiastical selfhood. Selfhood of the church in Africa implied that the church in Africa must be ‘itself’. Such perspective on selfhood benefited from Idowu’s paper at the Assembly titled “The Selfhood of the Church in Africa”. Kampala’s stress on selfhood was an attempt to situate the Christian Church within the spiritual, cultural and political realities of Africa. It was noted that in order to achieve selfhood, the church “must have a clear theology and a true sense of worship” (AACC 1963:32). This implied that the church in Africa had to develop African forms of the liturgy, as well as to incorporate the use of African musical instruments in the church. Bible translation was seen as essential for the selfhood of the church in Africa (see AACC 1963:37). Most specifically, this meant that the theological reflection of the churches in Africa needed to resonate with contextual reality. Such concern gave impetus to the hosting of a consultation of African theologians in January 1966 in Ibadan, Nigeria, at which the question of the relationship between biblical revelation and African tradition was pursued (see §5.6.1a below).

## **5.5.2 Church and Society**

A study of the Kampala Assembly Report further shows that the churches in Africa were responding to challenges posed by colonialism in Africa and most significantly, to the need for the decolonisation of the church as well. Africanisation of the Gospel thus constituted one of the implications of such challenges.

The Assembly’s theme “Unity and Freedom in Christ” was indicative of the priorities of the churches in Africa at the time. Concern with freedom was also expressed at the Nairobi All Africa Christian Youth Assembly, which was held under the theme “Freedom under the Cross” a year before the Kampala Assembly. Topics discussed at the Kampala Assembly included ‘selfhood of the church in Africa’, ‘the Church and the churches’, ‘Christian concern for the family’, ‘the Christian concern for the family’, ‘the Christian in the community’, ‘economic development and Christian responsibility’, and ‘towards a theology of nationalism’. To be sure, the Kampala Assembly did not leave the question of African nationalism to “secular” or political nationalists alone. The AACC shared in the fundamental concerns of freedom and solidarity, which were equally concerns of African nationalism. Therefore, the Assembly issued a significant statement about African nationalism. In its definition of nationalism, the Assembly perceived nationalism not only as “opposition to foreign domination”, but as the “the common desire of a people to work together for their emancipation from any form of bondage, whether colonial, economic, social or racial” (AACC 1963:60). The Kampala Assembly acknowledged that nationalism was an unavoidable concept and process. Nationalism was thus affirmed as “indispensable in constructing a new country and a new continent”.

The AACC statement on nationalism distinguished four forms of nationalism, namely nationalism working towards freedom and independence; nationalism working towards the creation of national cohesion; nationalism of older nations which, even when repudiated, manifests itself through the attempt to conserve the traditional way of life; and nationalism that evolves into an ideology of totalitarian character. In the statement, some core values that nationalism should exhibit were suggested. The Kampala statement is quite representative of

the hitherto generally positive view of the role of the new nation-states in Africa to contribute towards development and the affirmation of African dignity, which was existent amongst churches the so-called “younger churches” at the time. Such enchantment with nationalism notwithstanding, the statement saw it necessary to place some restrictions on Christian support for nationalism, given the fact that nationalism could become demonic if it got tied to racism and nativism (see AACC 1963:60).

In its message to the churches in Africa, the Kampala Assembly proclaimed its identification “with the aspirations of the African people towards development of dignity and a mature personality in Christ” and further called on “the churches on this continent to participate wholeheartedly in the building of the African nation” (AACC 1963:16).

The nexus of ecclesiology and ethics came to the fore in Kampala’s engagement with nationalism. Ecclesiologically, the Kampala Assembly understood the three-fold task of the church as prophetic, reconciling and witnessing (AACC 1963:61). In this way, the Assembly portrayed unwittingly the interrelatedness of ecclesiology and ethics. The church was portrayed as a “watchman in the midst of the nation”, prophetically witnessing to the divine demands for truth, justice and peace ... and as “witness by her own life and example the love and peace which she commends to the nations.” In its message to the churches, the Assembly spoke of the church pneumatologically by envisaging the possibility of “renewed churches more sensitive through obedience to the Holy Spirit, more responsive to His bidding and awakened to concern for the needs of men, women and youth in the new Africa” (AACC 1963:16).

Clearly, the Kampala Assembly was in continuity with the concerns raised at the Ibadan All Africa Church Conference regarding the role of the church in the new Africa. In its message to the churches, Ibadan envisaged the future role of the church as follows:

We pray that the Christian Church in Africa will play its role as champion, teacher, counsellor and shepherd during these crucial years (IMC 1958:16).

This statement indeed set the tone for the church’s objectives during the period of political transition.

The AACC took further its engagement with nationalism by organising a consultation at Enugu in 1965 on “The Christian Response to the African Revolution.” Bringing together both clerical and laity, men and women, and representing twenty different countries, the consultation looked at different topics, including “A Christian Interpretation of the African Revolution,” “The Contribution of the Church to the Development of the New Africa,” “The Heritage of Christian Service and the Challenge of the New Societies in Africa,” “Present Positions and Problems of the Churches in Africa,” “The Ecumenical Programme for Emergency Action in Africa,” “Current Developments in Modern Africa,” and “The Role of Africa in World Affairs.” Most significantly, at the close of the consultation, the General Committee of the AACC committed to developing and implementing the WCC initiated Ecumenical Programme for Emergency Action in Africa (EPEAA). Within the WCC’s Division of Inter-Church Aid, the initiative for the EPEAA received impetus from a report presented by the South African ecumenist Z.K. Mathews, in which he expressed concern over the refugee problem in Africa at the time (see Ankrah 1998:43).

Following the AACC’s executive committee resolution at Enugu an its further discussion on the matter when it met in Kitwe, Dr Clinton Marsh of the United Presbyterian Church, USA, was appointed as the first Director of the AACC agency to carry out the EPEAA. In the EPEAA, the WCC assumed the role of mobilising resources, while the AACC undertook the coordination and implementation of the programme initiatives (see Kishindo 1996:58).

Kodwo Ankrah (1971:125), a former staff in the EPEAA agency at the AACC notes that through this programme, Protestant churches in Africa provided assistance to refugees through primary, secondary, vocational and university education, as well as through the provision of some daily needs such as food, shelter, medical care and clothing (see also AACC 1970:87-88). Later, Ankrah (1997:127) would challenge the concern with only alleviating human suffering associated with being a refugee, arguing instead for an approach that also includes challenging causes of refugees. This was a significant criticism given that the EPEAA's plan was to keep its services to emergency aspects (Marsh 1966:5). The life of the EPEAA came to an end in December 1969. Out of concern for a more permanent response to the refugee problem, the AACC in collaboration with the WCC established its Refugee and Emergency Services Desk in the early 1970's. The new AACC Refugee Office soon took off under the leadership of Rev. Misaeri Kauma from the Church of Uganda.

### **5.5.3 Kampala's Ecumenical Vision**

On one hand, Kampala's vision of the unity of church saw the gift of unity through a Christological prism by suggesting that the unity of the body of Christ (the Church) exists in Christ. On the other hand, the search for visible unity, of which the AACC was an institutional expression, was predicated on the traditional African sense of family (AACC 1963:40). The Assembly delegates envisaged that such unity would be attained in stages. In that regard the formation of the AACC was seen as the first stage. The Assembly nevertheless warned against using the AACC as an "umbrella for covering the continuing sin ... of the underlying disunity among the different parts of the church". In this way, denominationalism was noted as a contradiction to the unity in Christ. As practical steps towards an "incarnate-union" - the visible unity of the church - the Assembly pleaded with delegates to teach their members to consider themselves "first as Christians and only afterwards as belonging to any one denomination" (AACC 1963:41). In my view, however, Kampala did not sufficiently deal with the "non-theological factors" of denominationalism (cf. Lund 1952). In Utuk's (1997:61) view, Kampala "completely ignored the sources of denominations in Africa."

It is noteworthy, that the Assembly noted the need to treat AICs with respect but could not elaborate on that pending a study of the report from a consultation on African Independent Church movements that had been arranged by the Department of Missionary Studies of the WCC and held under the auspices of the All Africa Church Conference at the Mindolo Ecumenical Centre from 6th to 13th September 1962 (see §5.6.3 below).

## **5.6 Ecclesiology and Ethics at Abidjan (1969)**

When the AACC met for its second Assembly at Abidjan in 1969, the political climate in much of Africa had dramatically changed compared to the time when the AACC met at Kampala. At the time of the Abidjan Assembly, majority of African countries had obtained political independence. Gathering under the theme "With Christ at Work in Africa Today", the 400 participants, of which 200 were delegates, deliberated on several issues affecting the church in Africa, including the need for an African theology, development and the search for unity, including new ways of cooperating with AICs and the Roman Catholic Church.

### **5.6.1 Selfhood of the Church at Abidjan: The Need for an African Theology**

If Kampala had signalled the need for the indigenisation of theology, which was further underscored at the Ibadan consultation (1966), it was at the second Assembly of the AACC at Abidjan in 1969 that the need for an African theology was explicitly raised. The report of section 3 at Abidjan noted: "The search for cultural and liturgical forms through which we can express our Christian faith must go on in all fields of Church life in Africa" (AACC

1970:117).

a) *Guidelines for African Theology*

The Assembly emphasised the need to promote African theological thinking and considered a follow up to the 1966 Ibadan Theologians' Consultation. The Ibadan consultation is reckoned to be the very first conference in Africa to focus solely on African theology. Mbiti (2013:1), one of the participants at the consultation, would later describe the gathering as "the first ecumenical conference of African theologians", given that participants included scholars of theology and religion who were members of varied church traditions, including the Anglican Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Methodist Church, the Orthodox (Coptic), and the Presbyterian Church. At this consultation, African theologians deliberated on the question of a relevant theology for African churches. The consultation resulted in the publication of *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs* (1969). The papers read at the consultation reveal that participants recognised a sort of continuity between African traditional beliefs about God and God's disclosure in Jesus Christ (see §5.3.3b above). In the statement from the consultation, participants put it thus:

We recognise the radical quality of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ; and yet it is because of this revelation we can discern what is truly of God in our pre-Christian heritage: this knowledge of God is not totally discontinuous with our people's previous traditional knowledge of him (Ellingworth & Dickson 1969:16).

This statement showed that biblical revelation was not per se destructive to African religious cultures. Rather, it confirms and strengthens them. As a follow up to this initiative, the Assembly offered a tentative definition for African theology "a theology which is based on the biblical faith and speaks to the African soul ... expressed in categories of thought which arise out of the philosophy of the African people" (AACC 1970:114). According to Utuk (1997:247), Kwesi Dickson – one of the editors of *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs* – was influential during Abidjan's definition of African theology.

The Assembly also offered some guidelines on African theology. The principles outlined included making Jesus Christ the centre of African theology; instrumental use of African philosophy for Christian expression; and dialogue between African theologians and African anthropologists in order to place African Christian thought in proper perspective (see AACC 1970:115).

b) *The Use of the Vernacular in Theological Reflection*

Another matter of significance at Abidjan was the call urging African theologians to do their theological reflection in the vernacular (see AACC 1970:115). It went further than Kampala by not being content with Bible translation into the vernacular alone. Abidjan's call was another way of insisting that language is critical in ensuring that the thought processes drawn upon in African theology are an aspect of the African heritage. Thus put, Abidjan did not rule out the linguistic role of adopted languages such as French and English. However, not many theologians immediately paid attention to this call. Although not writing in response to the Abidjan call, Ghanaian theologian and ecumenist John Pobee (1979:23) echoed this call in his *Toward an African Theology*, published almost a decade after Abidjan when he argued that African theologies should ideally "be in the vernacular". By means of his use of Akan proverbs and wise sayings, Pobee attempted more than any other African theologian to hitherto delve into the religious and moral oral tradition of his people in his articulation of African theology. Pobee (1979:23) rightly observed that "language is more than syntax and morphology; it is the vehicle for assuming the weight of culture."

Commenting on Pobee's attempt in view of his own persuasion regarding the vernacular

heritage of Christianity in Africa (Bible translation), Bediako (1995:72) argues that taking “the vernacular seriously then, becomes not merely a cultural but also a theological necessity.” For Bediako, making use of the scriptures in the vernacular has immense value for the theological endeavour because it would enable African theology’s methods, interests and goals “to be shaped and controlled by the genuine needs of Christianity in African life.” The point is that language shapes our theological categories. In this vein, Mbiti’s recent translation of the New Testament into Kikamba, the language of the Akamba people of Kenya, titled “The Kikamba Bible - *Utianiyo Mweu Wa Mwiyai Yesu Kilisto*” (the New Testament of the Lord Jesus Christ), which was launched in December 2014 by Kenya Literature Bureau is indeed laudable. Becoming the first African theologian to translate the entire New Testament from Greek to Kikamba, Mbiti has pioneered a path unique from the widespread African versions of the Bible, which derived from colonial European languages. Already in his publication *The Bible and Theology in African Christianity*, Mbiti (1986:28,162) noted the importance of vernacular translations when he observed that “the bible in the local language becomes the most directly influential single factor in shaping the life of the church in Africa.”

The Abidjan proposal notwithstanding, it is plausible to contend that the difficulty of African theology is that the languages of the nations that colonised Africa continue to this day “to organise and frame theological discourse” (Antonio 2006:44).

### 5.6.2 Church and Society at Abidjan

The Assembly delegates at Abidjan pondered on how the Church in Africa would face the new issues facing the continent, given the arrival of African independent states. Such issues included tribalism, corruption in governments, national development, the refugee question, and conflicts in some countries. Abidjan thus stressed the reconciliatory and prophetic role of the church.

#### a) *The Churches’ Ministry of Reconciliation: Initiatives of the AACC*

Abidjan met at a time when there was conflict in Nigeria and Sudan. The Assembly reiterated its mandate to minister in God’s name as an agent of reconciliation amidst tensions and conflict. Abidjan pointed to the colonial legacy of partition as one of the reasons for conflict in Africa (AACC 1970:109). The proposals on the churches’ ministry of reconciliation made at Abidjan did not espouse any clear theology in that regard (AACC 1970:113). Harold Miller (1993:15) has thus rightly noted that “throughout the AACC’s deliberations, reconciliation as a specific function of African ecumenicity was appealed to theologically rather than programmatically.” In his view, this can be attributed in part to the pressure of other urgent action agenda in a rapidly changing Africa, but also to the fact that African theologians understand Christian truth more as metaphor than as a plan of action.

It was significant, however, that the Assembly sent a mission of goodwill to Nigeria and the former Eastern region between December 1-8, 1969 during the Biafra war. Earlier in 1966, a goodwill mission to Sudan had also been undertaken with Dr. Akanu Ibiam as delegation leader. Perhaps the classic AACC reconciliation initiative pertains to ending conflict in Sudan in the 1970’s. Through its General Secretary, Burgess Carr, and in collaboration with the WCC, the AACC presided over a peace negotiation in Sudan, which resulted in a peace accord signed on 27th March 1972 and ratified in the presence of Haile Selassie 1, Emperor of Ethiopia (see Hart 1972:17). Following the signing of the peace accord, the AACC established a commission for relief, resettlement and rehabilitation in the Sudan and appointed as its first director Kenyan administrator Bethuel Kiplagat. The peace accord was abrogated in 1983, when the Sudanese government imposed Islamic sharia law over the entire country. Later in 1993, the AACC launched a project known as the Sudan

Peace Consultancy and deployed a full time consultant to monitor and encourage peace processes related to Sudan. Other efforts at peace building include sending a goodwill mission to Nigeria (at the decision of the Abidjan Assembly). The AACC has also been able to send peace missions to the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, and Angola.

### 5.6.3 Abidjan's Ecumenical Vision

Seeing church unity and church renewal as belonging together, the Abidjan Assembly presented its ecumenical vision as evangelical power. The search for unity without involvement in mission was seen as an aberration. As the report of section 3 at the Assembly put it: "God is moving us at this time of our African history to seek unity – not for its own sake but for mission – and to search for renewal of the church structures and life for the realisation of her God-given task in the world" (AACC 1970:120). The mission of which Abidjan spoke was rooted in God, reflected in the prophetic tradition of the Old Testament, in the work of Jesus Christ in the New Testament, and in Christ's continued work through the Holy Spirit. The calling of the church, according to the Assembly, was to respond to God's mission by identifying with the poor, oppressed and exploited (AACC 1969:120). Utuk (1997:93) described such a unitive view as being both "theologically and pragmatically sound". Quite clearly, one may infer from Abidjan's ecumenical vision an inter-relatedness of ecclesiology and ethics.

Such a vision of unity also meant that the AACC had to undertake a new path of relating to AICs, African Roman Catholics and African conservative evangelicals. It was significant that the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Cape Coast, Ghana, John Amissah, attending as one of the four official Roman Catholic observers, addressed the Assembly and spoke of inter-confessional dialogue.

The concern with AICs at Abidjan resonated with wider interest and sometimes unease with the rapid growth of AICs at the time. While the Kampala Assembly had only inchoately touched on the subject by pleading for greater respect and sympathy for Independent Churches, it was at the Abidjan Assembly, however, that the AACC gave serious attention to AICs (AACC 1963:32). The report of section 3 at this Assembly noted that AICs should be viewed, "not through stereotypical forms, but as they would see themselves to be" (AACC 1970:122).

It came to be recognised that the AICs had transformed many aspects of African Christianity. Abidjan underscored the feature of renewal as one such aspect in the life of historic churches, which the phenomenon of AICs challenged. In this regard, the potential within AICs to root the gospel in the experiences of particular African communities was brought to the fore. Building on the insights from Abidjan, the then General Secretary of the AACC, Burgess Carr, noted at the Lusaka Assembly that there were creative attempts within the AICs "to discover those new insights which African traditional beliefs, conveyed through ethical sanctions, music, movement and art, offer for a deeper and more profound understanding and expression of our Christian faith" (see AACC 1975a:76). The rapid growth of the AIC movement led some theologians in the 1970's to describe this stream of African Christianity as the "third force" in African Christianity beside Protestantism and Catholicism (Appiah-Kubi 1979:120). The AICs were seen as the nexus between African tradition and Christianity. Hastings (1976:54) hailed AICs as "the avant-garde of African Christian authenticity", while Appiah-Kubi (1979) described them as signs of African authenticity.

South African theologian Setiloane (1978:408) regarded AICs as forming "the vanguard of African resistance to the corrosion caused by Western theological teachings on the 'ways' of religious thinking and practice". These perspectives notwithstanding, it was observed already

at Abidjan that the proliferation of AICs represented both renewal and schism.

It is hardly surprising, then, yet still ironic that although already during the 1960's AICs represented a profoundly African response to the Christian faith, they were not in the first instance well received by African theologians (Hastings 1976:53). While AICs symbolised some version of the Africanisation of Christianity, African theologians regarded them with ambiguity, despite at the same time calling for religious authenticity by seeking an authenticity of continuity (Mbiti, Idowu). For instance, Idowu (1962:211-212) did not regard AICs to be Christian enough, thus describing them as hysterical, syncretistic and babbling in his publication *Oludumare* and later simply as a separatist movement in a paper presented at a seminar held in April 1965 at the University of Ghana, which attracted a wide range of scholars from Africa (Idowu 1968:434-435).

From the AACC perspective, it was significant that a number of churches described as AICs were admitted into the membership of the AACC by the time of the Lusaka Assembly in 1974. These included the Church of Christ on Earth by the Prophet Simon Kimbangu, the Church of the Lord Aladura and the Presbyterian Church of Africa. These developments notwithstanding, the membership of AICs with the AACC has not been smooth sailing as recent debates regarding the theology of Kimbanguism suggest. Certain statements within the Kambanguist movement portray the members of divine Trinity namely the father, Son and Holy Spirit to have to have metamorphosed and incarnated themselves in the three sons of Simon Kimbangu namely Charles Kisolokele, Salomon Dialungana and Joseph Diangienda (see Broggi 2015:80-87). In an official letter to the WCC in June 2003, the then leader of the movement Simon Kimbangu Kiangani – grandson to Simon Kambangu – wrote that Simon Kimbangu (the founder of the movement) was the Holy Spirit (2015:79). Such beliefs are regarded as unacceptable by some member churches of the AACC. The concern here has to do with the potential threat to church unity of differing doctrinal positions. Other ecumenical structures such as the WCC have for instance recently suspended the membership of the Church of Christ on Earth by the Prophet Simon Kimbangu. The tension between ecclesiology and ethics is therefore clearly concretised in this regard.

## **5.7 Ecclesiology and Ethics at Lusaka (1974)**

The Lusaka Assembly theme, namely “Living No Longer for Ourselves ... But For Christ” pointed to a continuing thrust on a Christological basis for the search for unity and the witness of the church in the world. Perhaps to a greater extent than the previous two Assemblies, Lusaka remarkably, and in my view perhaps unwittingly, underscored the integral relationship between ecclesiology and ethics. This will be unravelled in the ensuing discussion.

### **5.7.1 Selfhood of the Church at Lusaka**

The title of the report from the Lusaka Assembly, namely “the struggle continues” was an appropriate one, given the need for a shift in the ecumenical mode of engagement amongst African churches from dependence to liberation (cf. Oduyoye 2004:474). As the then General Secretary of the AACC Burgess Carr observed in his address to the Lusaka Assembly, although the civil wars in Nigeria and Sudan had been no more at the time of this meeting, the struggle to “recover the stolen dignity of our black personhood; the struggle to seize our history in our own designs; the struggle against drought, poverty, alienation and exploitation” continues. At Lusaka therefore, delegates considered matters pertaining to liberation struggles in southern Africa and the question of the selfhood of the church in relation to African churches’ dependence on foreign funding and personnel. By selfhood the Assembly meant that the “African Church, with Christ as its base, should now carry out its duties and its responsibilities itself identifying with its African background” (WCC 1975:126).

The Assembly questioned the stress on Africanisation as indigenisation by insisting on the need for an explication of the incarnational side of its authenticity quest. This was aptly illustrated by the choice of the Assembly's theme. In light of these preliminary observations, it will be argued in this section that an emphasis on the selfhood of the church was characteristic of the AACC's handling of the tension between ecclesiology and ethics at the Lusaka Assembly. This was variously underscored in terms of a theology of incarnation, as well as through the call for a moratorium on foreign personnel and funds.

a) *Indigenisation Approach Indicted: The Championing of an Incarnational Approach to the Selfhood of the Church*

At Kampala the need to indigenise Christianity was raised. Abidjan pointed out the need for an African theology in very clear terms. At Lusaka the pitfalls of indigenisation were noted. The Assembly delegates observed that "indigenisation had been concerned with external trappings" and thus preferred the term Africanisation. Consequently, a theology of incarnation was proposed, evident in the choice of the Assembly theme of the Assembly (AACC 1975a:33). Accordingly, the selfhood of the church was interpreted via Christology:

To attain selfhood, it must be a Church which is keenly aware of the direct headship of Jesus Christ; it must also be continually receiving inspiration and guidance directly from Him, through the Holy Spirit (AACC 1975a:34).

According to the report of work-group three on "ministry for social justice", hindrances to Africanisation were three-fold, namely the question of power, the presence of missionaries and expatriate workers, and the organisational and administrative structures bequeathed to churches in Africa by missionaries. This was a recognition that although the leadership of churches at the time was in many cases in the hands of local people, the real power lay in the so-called mother churches in Europe and in many others cases with mission agencies. A critical historical investigation of missionary history in Africa leads one to conclude that these issues reach back to the legacy of missionaries at the height of the call for the Africanisation of Christianity. In his *Christianity and the New Africa*, Beetham (1969:29-31) has shown that the years of missionary control of churches in Africa bequeathed weak churches. He argues that excessive control bred dependency on missionary funds, disunity, inadequate manpower development and ambiguous cultural policies. As impressive as Lusaka's emphasis on Christology was, it was unfortunate that the Assembly did not consider the implementation of the recommendation of the Abidjan Assembly regarding African theology. In this vein, Utuk (1997:129) rightly identifies Lusaka's "failure to expand, in a direct and conscious manner, Abidjan's sketch of African theology" as an oversight.

b) *Moratorium as quest for authenticity*

The Lusaka Assembly expressed the selfhood of the church in Africa by calling for a moratorium on receiving money and personnel. The AACC (1975a:53) affirmed the moratorium as "the most viable means of giving the African church the power to reform its mission in the African context". By calling for a moratorium, the Assembly intuitively expressed African impatience with the pace and results of mission-initiated indigenisation (see Kalu 2008:275).

The idea of a moratorium was not itself conceived at Lusaka. Historically, the roots of the moratorium may be inferred from the integration of the IMC into the WCC in 1961 becoming the WCC's Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME). Later, the CWME assembly in Mexico in 1963 had as its theme "Mission in Six Continents". This meeting signalled the end to the old distinction between missionary sending churches and missionary lands (fields), thus initiating a new understanding of the missionary vocation of the churches

(see Fey 1970:194). For Utuk (1991:222) the roots of the moratorium may well be traced back to the devolution statements at Madras (1938).

The clearest articulation of the call for a moratorium found expression in the thinking of John Gatu, the then General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Kenya and astute African ecumenist (see Reese 2014:251-254). In his address at a Mission festival of the Reformed Church in America in Milwaukee in October 1971, Gatu argued that the time had come for the withdrawal of foreign missionaries from many parts of the Third-World. In Gatu's view, a moratorium would be a pathway to the selfhood of the churches in the Third-World. In his words, "the third world must be allowed to find their own identity, and the continuation of the present missionary movement is a hindrance to this selfhood of the church" (Gatu 1974:70). In the same year, Asian theologian Emerito Nacpil, who was at the time president of Union Theological Seminary near Manila, Philippines, raised a similar call, as did the Latin American theologian Jose Miguez-Bonino.

In 1972, the African delegates at the meeting of the WCC task force on Ecumenical Sharing of Personnel (ESP), which met in Chouilly, Switzerland, made a proposal for a moratorium (see IDOC 1974:44-45). In 1973, John Gatu proposed a moratorium on sending and maintaining missionaries in the South at the conference CWME World Conference on 'Salvation Today' held in Bangkok. Thus, in its discussion on the question of missionary relationships for greater equality and mature relationship, section III (Churches Renewed in Mission) of the assembly recommended that the

moratorium would enable the receiving church to find its identity, set its own priorities and discover within its own fellowship the resources to carry out its authentic mission. It would also enable the sending church to rediscover its identity in the context of the contemporary situation (CWME 1973:106).

In light of this, Gabriel Setiloane recommended that material discussed in section III on the call for a moratorium be included in the report of the assembly committee on Partnership (see CWME 1973:23). Accordingly, it was proposed that a moratorium is a valuable tool for mission in some places. In the editorial to an issue of the *International Review of Mission* dedicated to reflections on issues that emerged out of the Bangkok meeting, Emilio Castro, the then director of CWME, argued that the "moratorium should never be the expression of a desire to break off relationships or to reject the call to mission. Moratorium must be for better mission; this is its only justification" (Castro 1973:397). The next year, the moratorium issue became a recurring theme during the AACC General Assembly in Lusaka, Zambia. In the same year, three executives of the Christian Conference of Asia, Harvey Perkins, Harry Daniel, and Asal Simanjuntak, put forward a call for the moratorium in a study document entitled "Let My People Go" (see Anderson & Stransky 1976:192-210).

The Lusaka Assembly's call for a moratorium was therefore an endorsement of the concept after noting the inadequacy of the approach of indigenisation. Such a resolution was also partly enriched by John Gatu's paper "Call for Africanization of the Church in Africa", which was part of the working papers at Lusaka.

The moratorium proposal at the Lusaka Assembly implied both the quest for self-reliance by halting external support (both finance and personnel), as well as the need for a new theology of mission in Africa (see Carr 1974:38; Dedji 2003:34). That is to say, the moratorium debate was not only a strategy for self-reliance on the part of African churches. It was also a deeply missiological debate. It posed the question regarding the responsibility for mission in Africa. Put differently, the moratorium could be understood as a way of questioning whether African churches could assert their identity if they continued to depend on funds and personal from their so-called parent churches (see Kendall 1978:86-107). The

call for moratorium was by implication a view that Africa should also develop its own theology. According to the report of Work Group 3 at the Lusaka Assembly, “should the moratorium cause missionary sending agencies to crumble, the African Church would have performed a service in redeeming God’s people in the northern hemisphere from a distorted view of the mission of the church in the world” (AACC 1975a:53). The call for self-reliance was thus an attempt by African churches to grow into maturity so that they too could contribute to the global “mission” of God.

Kalu (2008:275) describes the moratorium as “a more strident and different form of the indigenisation project.” In this sense, the moratorium reflected African impatience with the pace and results of mission-initiated indigenisation to which I referred to earlier in my discussion of the Africanisation of the Church and Theology in Africa above (see §5.3.1). Differently stated, the moratorium was viewed as a necessary condition for the Africanisation of the gospel. This debate was part of the larger quest for the ecclesiastical liberation of Africa from Western paternalism.

In his passionate advocacy for the moratorium in the post Lusaka period, Burgess Carr (1975:14) noted: “Leave us alone for a while, so that we may be able to discover ourselves, and you, in Jesus Christ.” “When that has happened”, Carr (1975:14) contended, then you would be able to see “genuinely self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating churches; churches that have found new freedom to seek unity among themselves; and churches whose relationships with other churches are based upon equality under the lordship of Jesus Christ.” Carr’s reflection was partly reminiscent of Henry Venn’s policy of three selves, namely a self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating African church (see Porter 2004:167). In this way, Venn nurtured belief in African capacity. This is nowhere more evident than in his call, already in 1851, for the need to create a native pastorate. Venn’s policy has thus come to be known as the euthanasia of mission (see Barnes 2013:38).

It was indeed a bold move by the incumbent General Secretary of an organisation that had hitherto relied quite heavily on foreign funds to call for a halt on finances and personnel. Utuk (1997:111) has poetically described Carr’s sharpest vision of the call for the moratorium especially as advocated at Lusaka as a “hyssop of authenticity”.

At the Lusaka Assembly, the AACC declared that it would not support the WCC Ecumenical Sharing of Personnel (ESP) scheme, which was recommended at the WCC Uppsala Assembly (1968). The AACC Lusaka Assembly observed that African participation in the WCC ESP would mean a drain on personnel talent and unique expertise at the time when they are desperately needed locally for the success of Africanisation, fearing a form of new dependence (AACC 1975a:54). As such, the AACC recommended the exchange and sharing of personnel within the continent. From the administrative side, the Assembly offered a challenge for the secretariat and the policy organs of the AACC to ensure that the churches were presented with “an administrative structure which is authentically African and not dependent on support from abroad for its survival” (AACC 1975a:54).

In fulfilment of the Lusaka mandate, the AACC designated its program profile for the period 1975-1978 “a time for self-reliance”. In order to encourage the churches on this path, as well as to clarify its call for moratorium, volume 8 of the AACC *Bulletin* focussed on the moratorium debate and was titled “A strategy for self-reliance” (see AACC 1975b). Four reasons were advanced for the moratorium: (a) To discover an authentic African form of Christianity that can, in turn, enrich all the Christian churches of the world; (b) To encourage African churches to leave the dependent attitudes many of us have adopted; (c) To help African churches establish their own priorities in their work for Christ and to become fully missionary churches themselves; And (d) To enable the traditionally missionary sending

churches in other lands to re-examine the nature of their mission and their future partnership with other churches. In retrospect, one may argue that the call for a moratorium was an attempt by African churches to grow into maturity so that they too could contribute to the global “mission” of God. Furthermore, the General Committee of the AACC that met at Alexandria in 1976 adopted an African confession of faith dubbed the “The Alexandria Confession” (see AACC 1976a). In this historic document, the churches recognised liberation from all forms of oppression as a continuing struggle and therefore pledged themselves to the struggle for human liberation.

The moratorium call from Lusaka attracted voices of support, as well as criticism from within and beyond Africa. In a letter to Emilio Castro, Dutch missiologist Johannes Verkuyl described the moratorium debate fruitless and the choice of the word moratorium itself a “*very ill chosen*” one (Verkuyl & Castro 1975:307,310; italics in original). In his response, Castro insisted that “debate on moratorium will help in many local situations to reassess our priorities, to discover our real identities, to provide new opportunities for missionary service” (1975:307,310). For Castro, the moratorium was an indication “that a new period of missionary history is at our doors” (1975:308). In a book titled *Contemporary Missiology*, Verkuyl (1978:334-340) provided an extensive treatment of the moratorium debate by discussing its manifestation in both Asia and Africa. He judged the AACCs call for a moratorium to have been made without prior consultation with member churches and that it was discussed as an isolated topic. In his view, the AACC could have done better by adopting Bangkok’s phrase “mature relationships”, rather than the negative term “moratorium”. In his view, the moratorium “solves absolutely nothing”; it obscures rather clarifies (1978:338). Therefore his conclusion on the moratorium debate was that “the focus of attention should not be a moratorium but the task which still remains to be done ... Hundreds of millions of people stand either wholly or in part outside the range of Gospel Communication” (1978:339). In my view, while Verkuyl’s plea for an emphasis on “mature relationships” is plausible, he was not correct in portraying the call moratorium as having been treated in isolation. As evident in this study, the moratorium had implications for the selfhood of the church, as well as for the ecumenical vision of the Lusaka Assembly that was predicated on an incarnation theology in which Christ frees the churches not only from “easy dependence upon foreign money”, but also from “denominationalism” (AACC 1975a:14,34).

Generally speaking, the moratorium debate received positive, albeit critical response from the wider ecumenical community as evident in WCC responses and in developments in related mission organisation. The significance of the moratorium debate within the ambit of the WCC was evident in the decision to dedicate a special issue of the *International Review of Mission* (1975,64) to the moratorium debate in 1975. In January 1975, the WCC ESP held a consultation at Le Cenacle in Geneva, Switzerland, at which representatives of churches in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and from some Western Protestant churches met and deliberated on the moratorium. Discussion on the moratorium continued even at the WCC Nairobi Assembly in 1975, where the issue provoked debate leading eventually to a study programme known as the Ecumenical Sharing of Resources (ESR) (see Barnes 2013:344-345; Kinnamon 2004:67; Paton 1976:67). The ESR was formally launched by the WCC central committee in 1976 and later produced a study guide entitled “Empty Hands: An Agenda for the Churches” in 1980. The first ESR event in this regard was a consultation on “Conditions of Sharing” held in Glion in 1977 and this was soon followed by several regional consultations. Much later, within the framework of the WCC CWME, the document “Mission and Evangelism and Ecumenical Affirmation”, published in 1982, reflects a view of the moratorium as an encouragement not only to the reconsideration of traditional relationships in mission between the so-called younger churches of Africa and Asia and the sending churches of Europe and

America, but also to the “recovery and affirmation of the identity of every church”. In this regard, the document says the following:

Moratorium does not mean the end of the missionary vocation nor of the duty to provide resources for missionary work, but it does mean freedom to reconsider present engagements and to see whether a continuation of what we have been doing for so long is the right style of mission in our day (WCC 1982:444).

Quite evident from the above discussion, the WCC mobilised efforts at careful theological reflection on ecumenical sharing of resources. However, as Martin Robra (1994:282) observes, the attempt “to elaborate a “resource-sharing system” was far less successful and failed to translate the concept into structural changes” (cf. Dickinson 2004:415).

The evangelical response to moratorium was in the beginning seemingly negative, but later turned rather ambiguous. In his address to the International Congress on World Evangelism held in Lausanne in July 1974, Billy Graham rejected the moratorium. However, in the “Lausanne Covenant”, the moratorium was treated in positive light also though the term itself was not used. It was noted that “the reduction of foreign missionaries and money in an evangelized country may sometimes be necessary to facilitate the national church’s growth and self-reliance and to release resources for unevangelized areas” (Lausanne Covenant no. 9). Some attribute the inclusion of this concern in the “Lausanne Covenant” to the presence of John Gatu at the gathering, whose name appeared as one of the convenors (see Uka 1989:216). Meanwhile, pioneer African “evangelical” theologian Byang Kato (1975:167), who was generally critical of the ecumenical movement, argued that the moratorium was “merely an emotional appeal without adequate consideration of the ramifications involved ... Moratorium is unbiblical and unnecessary.” In Roman Catholic circles, Rome convened a special Synod of Bishops on Africa, which rejected the moratorium. Kalilombe (1979:46-47) argues that while the Catholic Bishops of Africa were in agreement with the aim of the AACC call for a moratorium, they disagreed with the proposed means to attaining selfhood. However, some individual African Roman Catholic theologians such as Laurenti Magesa (1976:30) approved the moratorium call and thus called for a moratorium “on simply everything: financial assistance; personnel; liturgical and prayer books; theological treatises; orders and directions from abroad – everything”.

Some of the contentious issues regarding the moratorium debate related to the criticism emerging especially from Western ecumenical agencies, namely that the call was a threat to the catholicity of the church. Arguably, the proponents of the moratorium flashed the ethical card against ecclesial imperialism, while the ecumenical agencies pulled out the ecclesiological card. For Carr, the argument from agencies was implausible, given that the whole church could not be claimed for the churches in Europe. According to Carr, the catholicity of the Church has been for far too long “identified with the technological-mercantile culture of western peoples” (AACC 1975a:76). For Carr, the catholicity of the church cannot be linked to the presence of Western missionaries and their resources. The moratorium debate therefore potentially provided an inroad into African theological reflection on ecclesiology.

Within the AACC itself, it was rather sad that following a budgetary crisis that the AACC suffered as a result, the AACC Nairobi Assembly (1981) modified the moratorium to include some kind of mixed modality of authenticity (cf. §6.5.1.b below). Ironically, during that time the AACC also went ahead to make an appeal for a large sum to help in the construction of its headquarters in Nairobi. Furthermore, the debate did not elicit positive response from the majority of the churches that the AACC represents. Many of them soon continued to depend on foreign support. These issues notwithstanding, advocates for the moratorium such as John

Gatu would still insist that the moratorium debate was “one of the positive contributions the AACC has made to the ecumenical movement and well beyond” (AACC 1982:52).

From a positive point of view therefore, although the moratorium debate did not result in the radical halt of the influx of Western missionaries and resources from Western mission agencies, it contributed to self-reflection amongst Western missionaries and mission agencies. For instance, although not directly outcomes of the moratorium debate within the AACC, discussions emerged in many circles regarding responsible relationships in missions (see Larson & Castro 2004:142-144). For missionary agencies such as the Paris Missionary Society (PMS) and the London Missionary Society (LMS), this meant the restructuring of their organisations. It was necessary to respond appropriately to the implications of the changed missional context to which the moratorium debate was directed. The PMS thus soon formed the *Communauté Evangélique d’Action Apostolique* (CEVAA), with the objective of unity of witness and action. In 1977 the LMS and its successor organisation, the Congregational Council for World Mission, became the Council for World Mission (CWM). In one way therefore, the moratorium contributed to structural readjustment amongst some Western mission agencies.

More specifically, the moratorium debate brought to the fore the importance of self-reliance, self-expression and self-identity of the churches in Africa. Judging from the responses that the debate attracted, the AACCs call for a moratorium accentuated missiological debate that signalled a shift from paternalistic to partnership models of mission. As Uka (1989) concludes in his assessment of the AACC call for moratorium, the call “must be understood as dramatising the need for a more prophetic, holistic, authentic and contextualised missionary endeavour.” In my view, the moratorium debate was also significant as it contributed to accentuating the ecumenical concern over the integration of unity and mission (cf. §2.2.3.b above). In the view of the Burgess Carr, the moratorium debate brought a new dimension to the search for unity; thus, a matter of ecclesiology. He noted that the moratorium “issue centres upon selfhood (a theological concept) and self-reliance (an economic-political concept) ... but let it be clearly understood that selfhood and self-reliance are linked in a relationship of identity to mission” (Carr 1976:163). From the perspective of this study therefore, the moratorium debate is seen to have put in perspective the tension between ecclesiology and ethics within the context of the AACC (see §5.7.2 below). As Castro (1975:121) observed:

Once faced, the issue of moratorium was seen to raise, with greater than ever urgency, the whole gamut of ecumenical issues from ecclesiology to the unity and universality of the Church, cultural identity, the use of power, the relationship between God’s people and God’s mission, and not just the question of structures for mission.

### **5.7.2 Church and Society at Lusaka**

Lusaka’s agenda was not only centred on the moratorium debate, but also included robust discussion regarding liberation movements on the continent. In this sense, Lusaka went further in its description of the prophetic role of the church than had been the case in earlier Assemblies. The Assembly thus defined the prophetic ministry of the churches in Africa as follows:

The mission of the church is prophetic, and in serving it can accomplish its prophetic mission by being engaged, involved and sensitive to the well-being of the society. The Church must be alive in the present in order to better live in the future (AACC 1975a:38).

The prophetic ministry of the church in Africa was well captured in the address of Burgess Carr to the Assembly. Carr pointed out the integral relationship between the quest for unity

and the social responsibility of the church. In his words, “the struggle for justice and reconciliation in the world is integral to the call to unity among Christians” (AACC 1975a:77). According to Carr, it follows from this that the struggle against racialism and apartheid, tribalism and colonialism are not external to the demands of the gospel upon us for unity. Ecclesiologically, Carr did not see the quest for the unity of the church as an end in itself (cf. §5.7.3 below). Rather, seeking the unity of the church has implications for liberation, justice and reconciliation amongst men and women (AACC 1975a:77).

For Carr, the challenge lay in the absence of a relevant theology in the midst of injustices. Accordingly, in his view, “nothing exposes the weakness of the Church in Africa more than the absence of a relevant theology to deal with the situations of injustice so rampant on our continent” (AACC 1975a:88). Carr’s perspective here must be understood in light of own concern with liberation theology, as well as the budding concern with socio-political issues by a number of African theologians (see §6.3.4 below).

The Lusaka Assembly thus emphasised that involvement in the liberation of humans and society was part of the churches’ responsibility. In his address to the Lusaka Assembly, then chairman of the General Committee Rev Richard Andriamanjato, underscored the prophetic mission of the AACC when he argued that the AACC was not content with mere declarations in the fulfilment of its mission (AACC 1975a:71).

Underscoring the form of engagement that the AACC should take with regard to liberation movements in parts of Africa at the time, General Secretary Carr controversially argued that “any outright rejection of violence is an untenable alternative for African Christians” (AACC 1975a:78). This was after the juxtaposition of what he referred to as the “selective violence” of the liberation movements on the one hand, and the “collective vengeance” of the South African, Rhodesian and Portuguese regimes on the other. Carr thus endorsed the distinction made at the Kampala Assembly between “violence” and “collective vengeance” (see AACC 1963:61). He reinterpreted Kampala’s vision in this regard by pointing to Christology. “In accepting the violence of the cross, God, in Jesus Christ”, Carr contended, “sanctified violence into a redemptive instrument for bringing into being a fuller human life.”

The Assembly delegates went a step further in highlighting the prophetic ministry of the church when they passed a resolution to re-affirm the AACC’s support of all efforts to achieve liberation in South Africa and in parts of Guinea Bissau. The Assembly also confirmed its commitment to combat racism (see AACC 1975a:39). Accordingly, in November 1976, the AACC together with the Programme to Combat Racism (PCR) of the WCC jointly sponsored a consultation on the liberation of Southern Africa at Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation, Kitwe, Zambia. Participants in the consultation, who included, amongst others, representatives of churches and liberation movements in Southern Africa, called for cooperation between the churches and the liberation movement. They also highlighted the priorities of liberation movements. Theologically, the role of the church was understood in terms of kerygma, prophecy, diakonia and kenosis (see Final Report 1977).

In tandem with this general orientation regarding liberation movements, the ACCC published a special issue of its Newsletter focusing on liberation in November 1976 (AACC 1976b). In that same year, a strong statement was issued by acting General Secretary Sarwat Shehata stressing that in light of the liberation struggles in Southern African at the time, what was needed was peace, freedom and justice but not peace for the sake of peace (see AACC 1976c).

In his discussion on these developments from the Lusaka Assembly, Ogbu Kalu (2008:277) has argued that “Moratorium and African liberation struggles influenced the shifts in the strategy for decolonising the African churches”.

### 5.7.3 Lusaka's Ecumenical Vision

Lusaka's ecumenical vision can be discerned both in the individual visions proffered by theologians like Burgess Carr and in the collective visions of the Assembly expressed through group reports and the Assembly message to member churches. Lusaka's stress on selfhood and self-reliance, as the moratorium debate illustrates, was an urge to churches in Africa in the direction of total liberation from hindering factors towards unity. This emphasis highlighted the need for the Church in Africa to be authentically African and, at the same time, an integral part of the universal Church of Jesus Christ. The Assembly thus offered a challenge to the churches when it described a church that has attained selfhood as one that must be able to answer in practical terms the meaning of John 1:1-14 in that churches' particular situation (AACC 1975a:34). Using this text analogically to speak of Christ's headship of the Church, Lusaka observed that the "church in every locality is a manifestation of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church". The report of section IV on "church union or church co-operation" indicates the resolve of the member churches to "no longer be content just with co-operation", but to set visible union as their goal (AACC (1975a:39). Arising out of this, the Assembly approved guidelines on how the member churches and national councils of churches could pursue visible unity. In its message to the churches, the Assembly called on the churches to "allow Christ to free them from denominationalism and outmode church structures, and rigidity and timidity in changing them, so that we may be led by the Holy Spirit to a reality of oneness in Him".

### 5.8 Conclusion

It has been argued in this chapter that the ferment of African nationalism coupled with the decolonisation process brought into sharp focus the whole idea of African identity. These processes formed the nexus for the emergence of the ecumenical movement in Africa, as well as the development of African theology. In this vein, I argued that the history of the development of African theology as reflected in the history of the AACC echoes a decolonisation process. Following a critical appraisal of the quest for African Christian identity in African theology, I proceeded to underscore the piloting role of the AACC in the provision of institutional support and direction towards various theological innovations on the continent. It was argued that the AACC's concern with the quest for authenticity paralleled wider debates on the Africanisation of Christianity in many ecclesial circles in Africa and most specifically, with the development of African theology. In this regard, I argued that the contribution of the AACC in the development of African theology may be understood as a quest for the decolonisation of the mission Christianity. Most significantly, that the ecumenical movement in Africa developed alongside the rise of African theology indeed affirms the view expressed by African participants at the Accra consultation of the Faith and Order Commission, namely that "African theology and the unity of the Church are interdependent" (WCC 1975:128). This is at least true of the period covered in this chapter. The same point may be made from another perspective. Ecumenically, the various visions of ecumenicity that the AACC has expressed show that the ecumenical quest for unity has closely been related to the struggle to find a truly African identity.

I further demonstrated the fact that in much of its history, the AACC has had a focus on the selfhood of the church in Africa (AACC 1975a:33-34; AACC 2003:179-199, 189-199). This has often been understood in terms of the quest for authenticity within African Churches. While the Kampala Assembly marked the beginning of the quest for authenticity in the AACC, it was at Abidjan that the need for an African theology was more explicitly stated and guiding principles formulated. At the Lusaka Assembly in 1974, it was recommended that theology needed to go beyond academic phenomenological analysis.

Central to the argument of this chapter was the view that while it may appear that the focus of the AACC largely reflects what may seem to be issues of “life and work”, the ecclesiology and ethics nexus has appeared at several times in the history of the AACC. Therefore, although the history of the AACC during the period covered in this chapter may appear to emphasise the social agenda of the church – Kampala’s concern with nationalism, Abidjan’s stress on development, and Kampala’s emphasis on self-reliance and its overt support of liberation movements – the issues that demanded the responses of the AACC to pressing social issues were quite clearly prompted by ecclesiological issues. The Kampala designation of the church’s three-fold task as prophetic, reconciling and witnessing is one such instance (AACC 1963:61). Abidjan’s ecumenical vision as evangelical power further points towards the inter-relatedness of ecclesiology and ethics. The address of Canon Burgess Carr to the Lusaka Assembly equally pointed out the integral relationship between the quest for unity and the social responsibility of the church when he argued that the struggle against racialism and apartheid, tribalism and colonialism are not external to the demands of the gospel upon us for unity (AACC 1975a:77). A critical reading of the minutes and reports on Assemblies, conferences and consultations, and keynote addresses of its presidents and general-secretaries during the period covered, one may rightly conclude that the AACCs handling of the ecumenical tension between what the church is (read: ecclesiology) and what it does (read: ethics) correlates with the process of decolonisation.

My sense is that while the AACC may appear to have privileged the social responsibility of the church at the expense of weak ecclesiological reflection, it is the case that theology in Africa has generally always related to the social context. As such, various theologies articulated by African theologians cannot be understood independent of the concrete social conditions in which they live. Congolese theologian Bénézet Bujo’s publication *African Theology in its Social Context* is illustrative of this point. Therein, Bujo (1992) sought to set the development of African theology in its social context.

The logo of the University of the Western Cape, featuring a stylized building facade with columns and a central archway, rendered in a light blue color.

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## **Chapter 6: Development Discourse in the AACC: An Analysis of Ecclesiology and Ethics in the History of the AACC (1975-1992)**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter entails an analysis of the ways in which the AACC has handled the tension between ecclesiology and ethics during the period 1975-1992. The AACC held three Assemblies during this period namely at Nairobi (1981), Lomé (1987) and Harare (1992). Building on insights from the previous chapter, it will be argued that this period witnessed a diversification of theological approaches in African theology in general and within the AACC in particular. The chapter will further highlight the role of the AACC in providing a platform for the exchange and development of theological ideas on the continent. Since theology is not done in a vacuum and so is the work of the AACC, it will be argued that theological discourse in the AACC has often responded to prevailing issues in the African “reality”. In order to situate my analysis of ecclesiology and ethics within such a context, a brief overview of the socio-political context of the period will be provided.

More specifically therefore, the present chapter offers a detailed analysis of ecclesiology and ethics in the history of the AACC through an historical and theological analysis of Assembly reports and other relevant primary documents. Such analysis will be explored not only in view of the African socio-political context of the time but also in light of the diversification of African theology as exemplified in the debates on the tension between inculturation and liberation (including African women’s theology), and between African and Black theologies.

Structurally, the chapter will begin with an historical description of the African development scene during the period 1975-1992. This will involve a very brief analysis of the dominant development thinking during the period in order to set the framework for my subsequent discussion of the AACCs handling of the tension between ecclesiology and ethics. Thereafter, a discussion of the debate on underlying tensions in African theology between inculturation and liberation will follow. The chapter will then provide a detailed historical analysis of the AACCs handling of the tension between ecclesiology and ethics. I will conclude this chapter with a discussion on the theme of development as gleaned from such analysis.

### **6.2 Africa after Independence: A Brief Historical Overview of Development Discourse in Post – Colonial Africa**

Give the bulk of literature on the meaning and contestations around the concept of development, the following section is limited to the concerns of African nations (after political independence) with ideas of nation building. It necessarily provides a link to my discussion of the illusion of political independence which was discussed in the previous chapter (see §5.2.2d above). Against such a background, I will provide a very brief historical overview of the development discourse in Africa. This will not include detailed discussions on theories of development owing to the bulk of literature on the subject. Suffice it to mention that my discussion takes into account theoretical reorientations of the aims of development from the narrow focus on economic growth,<sup>27</sup> to the concerns for human well-being<sup>28</sup> and

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<sup>27</sup> This was dominant amongst proponents of modernisation theory. They held a view of development as social transformation associated with economic growth and a change from traditional social forms to modern ones. See, for instance, Rostow (1960).

<sup>28</sup> See for instance the United Nations Development Programme *Human Development Report* (1990). The first chapter of the report opened with a statement that people are “the real wealth of a nation” and then went on to

environmental sustainability<sup>29</sup> and more recently to a focus on sustainable development with its triple emphasis on social, economic and environmental dimensions of development. In this regard, I do not assume that there has been a single view of development that may best characterise African development efforts in the period under investigation. The concluding part of this section will bring into sharp focus the so-called African development crisis and the ensuing developmental initiatives.

### 6.2.1 The Concept of Development in the African Context

Like the concept of nationalism which was discussed in the preceding chapters, the notion of development is undoubtedly a contested one. There is thus no universal definition for development. Within the African context, the notion has been associated with many aspects that pertain to the quest for the well-being of societies. For instance, Ghanaian sociologist and anthropologist Kwesi Kwaa Prah (2011:156) understands the notion of development as prominently implying “the improvement and uplifting of the quality of life of the people, that they are able, to a large measure, to attain their potential, build and acquire self-confidence and manage to live lives of reasonable accomplishment and dignity.”

Historically, the roots of the modern discussion on development are often traced back to the end of the Second World War and this is mainly associated with the American Marshall plan which was launched on 5<sup>th</sup> June 1947 (see Rist 1997:69).<sup>30</sup> Regarding the so-called Third-World, it was the Bandung Conference of 1955<sup>31</sup> that underlined the two cardinal principles that would guide third world politics in the coming decades. These were namely decolonisation and development. While the theme of decolonisation was extensively treated in the previous chapter, my discussion of development in this chapter is limited to the relevance of such discourse for an adequate understanding of the context in which AACC has carried out its mandate.

As shown in the previous chapter, most African nationalists perceived the acquiring of political power as an inescapable prerequisite to economic and social power for their new nation states. To legitimise their new states African leaders soon embarked on the programme of nation building. As Crawford Young (2004:12) argues,

Innumerable rituals of state drummed the national idea into the public consciousness: national holidays, national anthems, daily flag-raising ceremonies at all administrative headquarters. In a dozen banal ways, the nation was subliminally communicated through its ubiquitous flag, its currency, its postage stamps, its identity cards.

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define human development as a process of enlarging people’s choices. Such conceptualisation of development was to some extent grounded in Indian economist and philosopher Amartya Sen’s capability approach (see Sen 1999).

<sup>29</sup> See for example the report of the Brundtland (1987) in which sustainable development is defined as “a process in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development and institutional change are all in harmony, and enhance both current and future potential to meet human needs and aspirations.” This definition notwithstanding, the notion of sustainability is a contested notion. Arguably, its meaning is socially and politically constructed and reflects the interests and values of those involved.

<sup>30</sup> This notwithstanding, the use of the word ‘development’ with respect to the socioeconomic context was not new. It had been used earlier by Karl Marx. The term also appeared in article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations as well as in the writings of Lenin. The term development also appeared in a number of resolutions which were passed at the United Nations General Assembly in December 1948.

<sup>31</sup> The Bandung Conference was a gathering of twenty-nine (29) Asian and African states which met in Bandung, Indonesia to discuss the political and diplomatic autonomy of the so called less developed countries in the face of Cold war politics.

Despite the initial euphoria of independence and the varied policies of nation building, the project was to a great extent marred with challenges and in many cases an unsuccessful venture (Falola 2001:114-115, 141-142). Given the economic slump and the growing indebtedness that characterised most post-colonial African states from the late 1970s to early 1980s (cf. §5.2.2d above), many Africans soon became disillusioned with political independence. The situation was further complicated by the onset of military regimes and coup d'états in some countries. Clearly, political conflicts and widespread dictatorships that characterised these developments negated some of the gains of nationalism. Such undesirable activities on the continent indeed constitute part of the explanation for Africa's underdevelopment at the time. In view of all this, some analysts refer to the 1980's as Africa's "lost decade".

### 6.2.2 The African Development Crisis

In wider discourse on development in Africa, the view that Africa's preoccupation with development has yielded meagre returns has often been accentuated. Many have expressed such state of affairs in terms of the "African development crisis". Some discuss the crisis under the rubric of underdevelopment (Ake 1996; Offiong 1982; Rodney 1972). For instance, Samir Amin (1990:1) has offered an analysis of the so-called African development crisis arguing that "development has broken down; its theory is in crisis, its ideology the subject of doubt." Factors advanced to explain such a situation have been wide ranging. Varied internal<sup>32</sup> and external factors<sup>33</sup> have been suggested by different scholars. Mkandawire and Soludo (2003:1-2) provide a broad explanation as follows:

Our problems have been compounded by the very weak/poor conditions, short but peculiar history of post-independence colonial heritage, and hostile external environment. On the other hand, the international community – the multilateral development institutions (especially the Bretton Woods Institutions), and bilateral agencies (mostly former colonial masters) – also bear much of the blame. There has been hardly any development program in much of Africa without the tacit or explicit involvement/endorsement of the donors ... In what has ensued, Africa has been turned into a pawn in the chessboard of experimentation for all manner of ill-digested development theories and pet hypotheses.

The AACC came to a similar conclusion in its *Report on the Root Causes of Hunger and Food Insufficiency in Africa* (1986) when it says that the African crisis of the 1980s had connections with both internal and international forces shaping the continents development. According to the report, "the international link alone produced structural relationships internally that reproduce poverty and underdevelopment" (AACC 1986:40).

Apart from such arguments, some have raised the question whether or not development was actually on the agenda of the first generation of African "statesmen". For Claudia Ake (1996:19), "African countries came to independence with hardly any discernible vision of development and no agenda for its realisation." He sees the struggle for political independence to have taken so central a place that everything else, including development, was marginalised. His point is that although some African leaders such as Jommo Kenyatta and Julius Nyerere saw development as the overriding task post-independence, "the ideology

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<sup>32</sup> Falola (2005:3) has for instance noted that through the instruments of inept leadership, corruption, authoritarianism, endless political crises, military rule, civil wars and lack of concern for the poor, Africans have contributed more than any other people to the cause of underdevelopment in the continent. Jean-Francois Bayart (1993) has equally noted the negative role of African politicians when he depicts African politics as *La politique du ventre* (politics of the belly). For Bayart, such 'politics of the belly' originated in the institutional structures and social relations of the colonial state (cf. § 5.2.3 above).

<sup>33</sup> On external factors, see Ake (1982), Offiong (1982), and Rodney (1972).

of development was exploited as a means for reproducing political hegemony.” Thus, for Ake (1996:9), “it got limited attention and served hardly any purpose as a framework for economic transformation”. Ironically, the quest for development by these African leaders had become their strategy of power as well as the *raison d'être* of their regimes (see Ake 1996:18).

Pondering this question, Malawian scholar Thandika Mkandawire has argued that for most of the first generation of African leaders ‘development’ was indeed a central preoccupation. According to him, “the eradication of the ‘unholy trinity of ignorance, poverty and disease’ – was a central component of the nationalist agenda” (Mkandawire 2005:13). As an example of this postulation, Zambia’s first Republican President Kenneth Kaunda committed to fighting “hunger, poverty, ignorance and disease” in his maiden presidential speech in 1964 (see Kaunda 1988:23). Mkandawire’s contention is that the objective of development in the broad sense of structural change, equity and growth was indeed popular and internally anchored.

Thus, in the early post-colonial period, African intellectuals – including the new African professoriate in the 1970’s -1980’s – supported nationalist leaders in what came to be known as “nation building”. They indeed initially collaborated with the newly formed governments in their quest to overcome poverty, ignorance and disease (see Falola 2001:211). The new African governments soon began to link educational plans to the estimated economic needs for “manpower” (see Beaver 1966:89). Differently put, within the framework of state-controlled or state-supported education, the goal of such education was nation building (see Cowan 1965). This cooperation, however, quickly disappeared after the 1970’s. In several African countries, political leaders interfered with the universities by prescribing regime loyalty as a necessary feature of African universities. This was prompted by *inter alia* the view amongst the political elite that universities were beginning to serve as centres of political opposition agendas. Thus, a rift soon irrupted between intellectuals in the university and African states. In some cases, universities came to be completely side-lined. As Mkandawire (2005:14) admits therefore, development was eventually sidetracked from its central objectives. In many places, institutions that were established to aid nation building were soon turned into instruments of domination.

The foregoing notwithstanding many African states soon attempted “home grown” approaches to development. Prior to this, however, most of the development models and ideas that the new African governments employed sprang from outside Africa; that is, largely from international organisations such as the Bretton Woods institutions and United Nations – through its various commissions dealing with development General Assembly. It is of course understandable that at independence, most African countries did not have the needed numbers of trained personnel to deal with development questions. Hence, the dearth of local economists and planners in post independent Africa resulted in heavy reliance on expatriate staff and knowledge. As Ake (1996:19) has shown, this in turn led to the reproduction of neo-colonial notions of development. For instance, the first generation development plans in African countries such as Tanzania, Kenya and Nigeria simply followed the rhythm of the colonial economy.

### **6.2.3 African Developmental Initiatives**

The above notwithstanding, there were attempts in a number of African countries to craft home grown approaches to development. Many of these approaches adopted African socialism and self-reliance as alternative development strategies. In other African countries, a Marxian strategy was adopted leading to the nationalisation of the principal means of production.

Although the Organisation for African Unity (now African Union) made some efforts

aimed at development, it did not set for itself a development agenda in the first years of its existence. This was partly because the organisation was enmeshed in the euphoria of political independence. In 1980, the OAU summit adopted the Lagos Plan of Action. As a development strategy, the Lagos Plan of Action was infused with concepts of underdevelopment theory. It declaredly had self-reliant intentions. Other initiatives include the Monrovia declaration (1979/80), African Priority Programme on Economic Recovery (1986-1990), the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development (1986-1990), the Arusha Declaration (1990), and the more recent New Partnership for Africa's Development (§7.5.2a below).

However, due to multivariate factors, most of the developmental initiatives undertaken by African countries did not lead to positive results. Hence, as shown above, the 1980s marked Africa's most severe economic crisis. This led many African countries to look to the west for help and those that didn't were quite severely crippled economically. This also needs to be understood in light of the cold war politics (see §5.2.2c above). As a response to Africa's underdevelopment and poverty during the 1980's and 1990's, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) introduced Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) (see Mihevc 1995:50-53). Civil society and churches in Africa levelled criticism against the negative impact which SAPs had particularly on the poor (Mihevc 1995:225-272). The AACC played a crucial role in this regard (§ 6.7.2a below).

The foregoing discussion is germane to a proper understanding the prevailing socio-political situation in which the AACC and its member churches have carried carry out God's mission in the period under investigation. Despite the internal institutional challenges that the AACC faced in the late 1980's (see §6.5 & 6.6 below), the organisation demonstrated courage and determination as it identified itself with the struggles of the African peoples for socio-economic and political emancipation. The following discussion on the diversification of theological reflection and praxis in Africa will buttress this observation.

### **6.3 Diversification of Theological Reflection and Praxis in Africa: A brief historical of underlying tensions in African Theology**

In the period after the AACC Lusaka Assembly (1974), there were two main dominant approaches to theology in Africa each reflecting an aspect of the contemporary African reality (see Dickson 1984:133). These were namely, inculturation (culture) and liberation (poverty). Many African theologians came to regard these concerns as the twin foci of African theology (see Bujo 1992:66-68; Gibellini 1994:6-7; Nyamiti 1994:64-65, 1984b:501).<sup>34</sup> The emergence of liberation approaches to African theology soon led to debates on the underlying tensions between the two hitherto dominant approaches to African theology. In what follows therefore, I will discuss the theological debate between advocates of the approaches of inculturation and liberation. In so doing, I will attempt to discern whether or not the AACC played a role in the process of theological diversification in Africa and what implications this had on its programmatic thrusts. It is assumed that the answer to this question will illumine the analysis of the AACC's handling of the tension between ecclesiology and ethics as well as be judged in light of such an investigation.

Since the theme of liberation was only inchoately addressed in the preceding chapter, I will more fully address it here. Methodologically, about four approaches may be identified in

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<sup>34</sup> Representative theologians of this trend would include Kwesi Dickson, Edward Fashiole-Luke, John Mbiti, Bolaji Idowu and Harry Sawyer, amongst others. Liberationists include Engelbert Mveng, Laurenti Magesa, Burgess Carr and Marc Éla.

African liberation theology.<sup>35</sup> The first approach employed Marxist social analysis thus closely paralleling tendencies in Latin American liberation theology.<sup>36</sup> The second approach came in the form of liberation theology patterned after nationalist ideologies. An example of this is the so-called Ujaama theology that was pursued by some theologians in Tanzania who took the socio-economic, political and cultural context informed by the policy of Ujamaa as the theological context for reflection (see Sindima 2008:68-69, Frostin 1988:29-50). A limitation of theological approaches based on political ideology is simply that they easily become situational theologies with restricted relevance beyond the dictates or relevance of the respective ideology (cf. Vähäkangas 1999:35). The third and fourth approaches to the liberation strand of theological discourse in Africa found expression in South African black theology (see § 6.3.1b below) and in African women's theology (see § 6.3.2b below) respectively. From the foregoing, one may rightly speak of four strands of African theology and in that regard of diversification in African Theology. Maluleke (1997:17) has expanded on this to include other emerging theologies such as theologies of AICs which are not covered in this study given its scope.

African Liberation theology was sharply placed on the agenda of African theological discourse at the first EATWOT Conference held in Dar es Salaam in 1976 (see Torres & Fabella 1978:269-271). Building on such a perspective, the meeting of the Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians in Accra, Ghana in 1977 could thus note that because “oppression is found not only in culture but also in political and economic structures and the dominant mass media, African theology must also be liberation theology” (see Appiah-Kubi & Torres 1979:194). Present at both the Dar-es-salaam and Accra meeting were representatives of some Afro-American theologians who were in the vanguard of American black theology. Since there is a plethora of studies on black theology, I will not venture into a discussion of its meaning and historical background in detail (see Cone 1969, 1970; Young 1986:31-59).

Within African theology, the debate between African Theology and South African black theology was strictly speaking generated by the transatlantic dialogue between some African (Inculturation) Theologians and their Afro-American counterparts.

### **6.3.1 Underlying tensions between African Theology and Black Theology: A Brief Analysis**

The history of dialogue between African theology and Afro-American black theology may be traced back to 1969 when the National Committee of Negro Churchmen (NCNC) sent two observers to attend the AACC General Assembly at Abidjan (Hopkins 1999:159-166). The election of Burgess Carr as General Secretary of the AACC at the Abidjan Assembly (1969) was timely for the encounter of black theology and African Theology. Since Carr was himself an African liberation theologian and also well familiar with the black church in America, it is understandable why he promptly moved to implement a “Round Table discussion on African and Black Theology” (Wilmore 2004:215). This initially led to a meeting between a delegation of Black American theologians – including James Cone and the chairman of the NCNC Maynard Catchings – and some African theologians in Tanzania in 1971 (see Massie 1973). Later, a consultation on “African Theology and Church life” was held at Makerere

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<sup>35</sup> Here, I follow the argument advanced by Per Frostin (1988:8-13) namely, that the most distinguishing characteristic in defining liberation theology is methodology rather than content.

<sup>36</sup> According to Gustavo Gutiérrez (1978:247), “theology is critical reflection on and from within historical praxis.” For a good summary of the historical development of Latin American Theology see Dussel (1978:175-192) and Gutiérrez (1978:240-255).

University in Uganda in January 1972 at which it was emphasised that “theology arises from church life and genuine theology cannot be divorced from the life of the Christian community” (Fashole-Luke 1975:266). Another consultation soon followed and was held at Union Theological Seminary in New York in 1973.<sup>37</sup> An even larger gathering of twenty-eight African theologians and eight Afro-Americans was organised at the Ghana Institute for Management Studies in December 1974 at which the African delegates represented the theological commission of the AACC (see Wilmore 2004:209-222). It is interesting to note that while NCBC and the AACC shared in common the pan-African vision, the earlier comprised individuals whereas the AACC is a representative body of some several Protestant churches in Africa. In what follows, I will discuss the underlying tensions between African theology and black theology with a keen eye on discerning the role of the AACC in these developments.

a) *Afro-American Black Theology Encounters African Theology*

Hopeful of a mutually enriching dialogue with African theology, Afro-American Black theologians Cone and Wilmore (1993:377), in a paper first published in 1972, juxtaposed the aims and mutual complementarity of the two as follows:

African theology is concerned with Africanization. Black theology is concerned with liberation. But Africanization must also involve liberation from centuries of poverty, humiliation, and exploitation. A truly African theology cannot escape the requirement of helping the indigenous churches to become relevant to the social and political ills of Africa ... Similarly liberation has to do with more than political oppression and social justice.

In their view, it remained to be discovered how the two theologies could, amongst other things, correct the excesses and deficiencies of one another (cf. Hopkins 1999:162-166). Few months before the Ghana meeting of 1974 mentioned above, Mbiti published an article titled “An African Views American Black Theology”. This essay has been reckoned by many to be the most substantial reflection by an African theologian on the dialogue between African theology and [North-American] black theology. On the basis of what he saw as considerable differences between the concerns of these two theologies, Mbiti (1993:382) categorically argued that “Black Theology cannot and will not become African Theology.” The latter grows out of our joy in the experience of the Christian faith, whereas the earlier emerges from the pains of oppression (1993:383). Although Mbiti (1993:382) noted that black theology addresses itself to other themes such as Church, the Community, the Bible, Violence and Ethics, he regarded black theology’s preoccupation with liberation too excessive, thus judging such a focus as probably the chief limitation of black theology (1993:381). Thus it was that Mbiti declared discontinuities between black and African theologies.

African theology has no interest in colouring God or Christ, Mbiti (1993:383-384) argues. It has “no interest in reading liberation into every text, no interest in telling people to think or act “black”.” In his response to Mbiti, Cone (1993:400) instead argued that it was not enough “to indigenise Christianity or to Africanize theology [in apparent response to the theological approach of Mbiti]. The people also want to be liberated from racism, sexism, and classism.” Cone clearly found Mbiti’s position politically conservative. Cone was equally critical of the work of Fashole-Luke and Kwesi Dickson while he spoke approvingly of Jesse Mugambi and Burgess Carr for what was in his view their overt concern with liberation. Accordingly, Cone (1993:400-401) argued that “the future of African theology, and all Third World Theologies, is found in the attempt to interpret the Christian gospel in the historical context of the people’s

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<sup>37</sup> It is significant to note within this context that during the academic year 1972-73, Mbiti was the Harry Emerson Fosdick Visiting Professor at Union Theological Seminary.

struggle to liberate themselves from all forms of human oppression.”

In his analysis of this debate, Afro-American Black theologian Josiah Young (1986:107) concludes that the two are now “distant cousins”. Although this debate was initially prompted by the attempt to initiate dialogue between Afro-American black theology and African Theology (many of whom were inculturationists), it soon attracted the views of South African Black theologians. In light of this observation, it is plausible to argue that the tension between African inculturation theology and South African black theology was a necessary outcome of the encounter of African theology with Afro-American black theology. To better discuss the shift of the debate to South African black theology, it is necessary to briefly highlight the emergence of this theology in South Africa.

*b) The Tension between African (Inculturation) Theology and South African Black Theology*

South African black theology emerged in the late 1960s owing to the influence of the black consciousness movement – a group of radical black South African students influenced by the thinking of Basil Moore (Mosala 1989:1). Given similar challenges faced by both black South African and their counterparts in America, black theology also received impetus from Afro-American Black liberation theology as espoused by thinkers such as James Cone. The publication of his *Black Theology and Black Power* in 1969 was especially instructive in this regard. Locally, the contribution of Basil Moore of the University Christian Movement was indispensable to the development of black theology in South Africa (see Moore 1973; De Gruchy 2004:148). The specifically South African orientation of black theology initially found expression in a collection of essays that were published in a book form edited by Moore (1973). South African black theology further found expression in the then exclusively black South African Students Organization (SASO) with Manas Buthelezi, Steve Biko, and Adam Small as some of its early exponents (see Martey 1993:22-26). In his analysis of the historical background of South African black theology, Martey (1993:27) concludes that the main theme of this approach to theology was liberation with an emphasis on politics.

Some of the significant names associated with black theology include Manas Buthelezi, Bongajalo Goba, Mokgethi Motlhabi, Desmond Tutu, Allan Boesak, Simon Maimela, Itumelang Mosala, Buti Tlhagale, and Takatso Mofokeng. In contemporary South Africa, Tinyiko Maluleke may be identified as one of the voices that have remained faithful to theological hermeneutics of South African black theology. The focus, themes and development of black theology have been well documented that it is not necessary to give an in-depth treatment here (see Boesak 1976:14-36; De Gruchy 2004:144-164; Frostin’s 1988:84-178; Ukpong 1984b:522-530; Maluleke 1998b:61; Motlhabi 2008:1-25; Muzorewa 1985:101-113). Suffice it to note that South African black theology shared in common with Afro-American black theology the quest for liberation from racial injustices and oppression. In light of Mbiti’s essay on black theology therefore, it may be argued that it is from this perspective that Mbiti opined the relevance of Afro-American black theology for the South African context despite his criticism of its preoccupation with race.

Similarly, Pobee (1979:38-29) observed that Afro-American black theology’s preoccupation with liberation from racial oppression severely limited its relevance to Africa theology except for the South African context. In view of these observations, it was almost a matter of necessity that some South African theologians had to respond to Mbiti’s article on black theology. Before turning to the South African reaction to Mbiti’s article, it is necessary to briefly note other African theologians who held critical views on black theology in South Africa.

Sierra Leonean theologian, Fashole-Luke (1975:268), argued that South African black

theology focussed too narrowly on race and colour. Working with a pluriform understanding of African theology, Fashole-Luke noted a challenge with regard to South African black theology namely that African theologians

are challenged by the Gospel to raise African Christian theologies above the level of ethnic or racial categories and emphases, so that Christians everywhere will see that Christianity is greater and richer than any of its cultural manifestations, and that the Gospel of liberation is for the oppressed and the oppressor alike.

For Gabriel Setiloane (1980:49), black theology's preoccupation with blackness and racism implied that there would be no need for black theology as soon as the "black versus white scenario is over".<sup>38</sup> Being a South African himself, it is plausible that Setiloane was equally confronted with challenges posed by the issue of apartheid. Yet, his focus on African theology was along the lines of Africanisation or indigenisation. Therefore with regard to liberation, his views were rather ambiguous. In his *African Theology* for instance, Setiloane (1986:45) argued that what "the liberation African theology strives for is that of the very soul of Africa from the imprisonment in the vaults of Western conceptualism and discourse."

Ghanaian biblical scholar and theologian Kwesi Dickson (1984:124-140) also emphasised a cultural approach to doing theology in Africa. In his book *Theology in Africa* (1984) that was published almost a decade after Mbiti's article on black theology, Dickson recounted the debate between African theology and black theology and spoke of the need for African theologians to embrace both African cultural traditions and socio-economic oppressions (1984:136). Nevertheless, Dickson (1984:140) found the cultural approach to African theology unavoidable. He extended this approach to biblical hermeneutics when he opined cultural continuity between the Bible and African life (1984:141-148). Dickson's (1984:134) view of culture is unattractive, however, especially when he argues that "no one would deny that there is a cultural reality in Africa which colonial rule and the recent influences of urbanisation, technology, etc. have not been able to destroy." What is at issue here is that he reduces African culture to what existed before missionaries and colonialists came to Africa. In this sense, my criticism of the limitations of African inculturation theology discussed in the previous chapter applies to him as well.

The more explicit response to Mbiti's essay on black theology came from South African theologian and the first black Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town Desmond Tutu in a paper titled "Black Theology and African Theology – Soulmates or Antagonists". Tutu (1979:391) began by noting the differences between black theology and African theology and then concluded by arguing that black theology is a part of African theology. Tutu's paper was delivered at the conference of black and African theologians in Ghana in 1974 and was first published in the *Journal of Religious Studies* in 1975. Tutu attributed the differences between the two approaches to the contexts in which each arose. Black theology, Tutu argued, is more thoroughly and explicitly political than African Theology is.

I myself believe I am an exponent of black theology coming as I do from South Africa. I believe I am also an exponent of African theology coming as I do from Africa. I contend that black theology is like the inner and smaller circle in a series of concentric circles (Tutu 1993:391)

In this way, Tutu opined that the two are not mutually exclusive; they are "soul-mates". Tutu (1979:492), however, argued that African theology must "address itself more seriously to present-day issues of the modern Africa and grapple with the enormous problems that have followed political independence" and thus recover its prophetic calling.

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<sup>38</sup> For helpful works on the significance of black theology in contemporary South Africa see Tshaka (2010:532-546) and Maluleke (1995:1-30).

A number of South African Black theologians such as Manas Buthelezi (1978:61) and Allan Boesak (1978:82-83) voiced disenchantment with indigenisation theology to the extent that it did not address the contemporary experiences of Black South Africa. Although not in direct response to Mbiti's article, it is perhaps Manas Buthelezi who held very strong views that portrayed the relationship between African theology and black theology in exclusive terms. Buthelezi (1978:64-65) taunted indigenisation theology as a pet-project of missionaries that was predicated on an ethnographically reconstructed African worldview thus its tendency towards cultural objectivity. According to him, this theology is based on excavating the past as though it were the past that was important for doing theology and not the present. Buthelezi thus saw danger in the focus of indigenisation on the "African past" in that it "may be romanticised and conceived in isolation from the realities of the present." As such, Buthelezi (1978:68) opts for an anthropological methodology that begins with African people themselves not as an object of study but rather in terms of "Africans' initiative in the context of their present existential situation". Such an approach, Buthelezi (1978:65) argues, would engender "a 'post-colonial person' who has been liberated by Christ from all that dehumanises." Buthelezi thus suggests that liberation must have priority over inculturation. This, however, does not mean that Buthelezi rejected African culture. His criticism of religio-cultural approach to African theology must be understood in the context of apartheid in which Black were forced to live in Bantustans in "keeping" with African traditional standards (see De Gruchy 1985:95; Muzorewa 1989:64). Clearly, the use of culture as a tool to control rather than to liberate must be rejected. For Buthelezi therefore, it was a matter of choice between African theology and black theology and his choice for the latter is obvious.

On his part, Boesak warned of the danger of yielding to the temptation of uncritical accommodation, becoming "cultural theology". He argues that "an authentic situational theology is prophetic, critical, not merely excavating corpses of tradition, but taking critically those traditions from the past that can play a humanizing and revolutionizing role in our contemporary society" (Boesak 1978:83). This, however, was not a rejection of past tradition. Rather, Boesak was concerned with recreations of traditions that had no relevance to current issues. He had earlier developed some of these ideas in his doctoral dissertation that was later published as *Farewell to Innocence* in which he proposed an ethic of liberation replete with critical references to the work of Cone (see Boesak 1976:112-119). In Boesak's (1978:77) view, black theology is "the critical reflection of Black Christians on their involvement in the black liberation struggle, always keeping in mind that the oppressor cannot be liberated unless the oppressed are liberated."

From the foregoing, it is clear that some opined an exclusive stance on the relationship between African Theology and black theology while others addressed the debate from an inclusive perspective. As anthropologist Matthew Schoffeleers (1988:101) rightly notes "at a later stage, however, it was decided that there need be no conflict, since the two schools of thought could and should be viewed as mutually complementary." Within the South African context, there developed a multiplicity of theologies a situation that gave birth to other theological debates.<sup>39</sup> According to De Gruchy (1985:86), the dividing lines in the South African theological debate had more to do with the varying ways in which Christians perceived social reality and the ways in which they related these realities to Christian tradition.

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<sup>39</sup> In this regard, it must be noted that theological developments in South Africa since the late 1970s are not limited to Black theology but also to what Maluleke (2000:193) has described as "white contextual or liberation theology" of scholars such as David Bosch and John De Gruchy and most recently the ecological theology of Ernst Conradie. In this regard De Gruchy (1984:447) identifies five strands of theology born out of such struggle namely confessing, black, liberation, womanist/feminist, and prophetic or kairos theologies.

### 6.3.2 Underlying tensions between African Theology and African Liberation Theology: A brief historical analysis

When the Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians met in Accra, Ghana in 1977, it was clear that African theology had entered an era of diversified theological reflection. In his paper presented at this conference, José Chipenda (1979:71) who later served the AACC as General Secretary (1987-1997) alongside Desmond Tutu as President (1987-1997), urged delegates to consider a “liberation approach” to African theology. In the final communiqué of the conference, it was noted that African theology needed to be placed in the context of the wider framework of the African reality including the “struggles for the transformation of socio-economic systems, racism, sexism, and other forms of economic, political, social and cultural oppressions” (Appiah-Kubi & Torres 1979:193). The participants declared thus:

We believe that African theology must be understood in the context of African life and culture and the creative attempt of African peoples to shape a new future that is different from the colonial past and the neo-colonial present (1979:123).

Accordingly, African theology was envisioned to be a contextual theology that is at the same time a liberation theology (1979:194). Mbiti (1986:55) too, despite his initial criticism of the emphasis on liberation, would later recognise the growing concern with the theme of liberation amongst African theologians, especially in South Africa and in the AACC. For Mbiti (1979:89), however, African discussion of liberation “proceeded without or with only a few scriptural references.” The stress on the hermeneutic of liberation also found expression amongst some African theologians in independent Africa.

#### a) *African Liberation Theology North of the Limpopo*<sup>40</sup>

The more well-known advocates for African liberation theology in independent Africa were mainly Roman Catholic theologians including Jean Marc Éla (1988; 1986), Bénézet Bujo (1990; 1992), Laurenti Magesa (1976), and Engelbert Mveng (1994; 1983). On the Protestant side, Burgess Carr was the most notable liberation theologian of the time. Although Carr may be described as a liberation theologian, he also included the theme of indigenisation in his approach to African theology (see Young 1986:107).

Other emerging African scholars such as Jesse Mugambi also wrote on liberation themes. Mugambi’s (1974:41-42) first explicit work on the theme is a paper entitled “Liberation and Theology” in which he argued that in “the African context, and in the Bible, salvation as a theological concept cannot be complete without liberation as a social/political concept”. In a later publication, *African Theology: An Introduction*, his discussion of Christology in relation to the kingdom of God also shows a growing concern with the hermeneutic of liberation on his part (Mugambi 1989:80-90). For Mugambi (1989:109), Jesus was not exclusively concerned with the “salvation of the soul” but also with the “process of liberation of the individual and of society”. Mugambi thus descried the polarisation of salvation and liberation by some theologians (see § 6.3.3 below). According to Conradie (2012b:287), liberation was the dominant theological metaphor that Mugambi employed in that work. In my view, although it may be rightly argued that liberation was indeed a dominant theological concept in Mugambi’s theology; such a focus would later change in light of his proposal for reconstruction as the new motif for African theology. In that shift, however, Mugambi (1995:11-12) has been criticised for undervaluing the work of liberation theologians including those in the EATWOT network (see Dedji 2003:75-77; Maluleke 1996b). I will return to this discussion in the next chapter (§7.3.2b below).

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<sup>40</sup> I employ this terminology to designate African liberation theology in independent Africa.

Another protestant theologian of note who operated within the general framework of liberation theology was Angolan theologian José Chipenda. His ecumenical career evidences a consistent interest with liberation themes as will be highlighted in my discussion of the AACCs history during his tenure as General Secretary (see § 6.7.2 below).<sup>41</sup> It is significant that these three protestant theologians identified above have made immense contribution to the theological profile of the AACC. Other African liberation theologians include Zablon Nthamburi who also drew insights from Latin American liberation theology in his approach.

The concern with liberation also found expression through the work of some African women theologians. In this regard, it must be pointed out that although the debate between African and black theology had considerable consequences for women as much as men, neither of the groups in this debate paid attention to African women concerns and gender issues. In this regard, Mercy Oduyoye (1995:89) criticised liberation theology by arguing that it ignores gender issues in its focus on structural analysis of injustices. Without giving a detailed analysis of women's marginalisation in the African church, society and academia, the next section will offer a discussion of African women's theology as an "exemplar" of the nexus of the inculturation and liberation debate.

#### *b) African Women's Theology as Liberation Theology*

Since Oduyoye is arguably the most representative figure of African Women's theology, this section will largely focus on her publications.<sup>42</sup>

For African women theologians,<sup>43</sup> the experience of women must form part of the data for theological reflection (Oduyoye 1986:135). Such experience cannot be divorced from the African religio-cultural experience. In African traditional culture, women's experience of being person is often construed in terms of their relation to others, as wife or as mother. For African theologians therefore, it has been necessary to recover the liberative potential of their cultures.

From the foregoing therefore, it may be argued that although African women theologians share the concern for African religio-cultural heritage – which is a central concern in African inculturation theologies – they are at the same time critical of those aspects of African culture that are oppressive to women (see Kanyoro 2001:167). A classic example of this is Oduyoye's (1993:349-354) critique of Mbiti (1973:43) for linking immortality and marriage/procreation in his *Love and Marriage in Africa*. The context of her criticism is Mbiti's (1973:111) concession for polygamy in cases where a woman is unable to have children (cf. Oduyoye 1995:147; Nasimiyu-Wasike's 1992:104-108).<sup>44</sup> Further, in her

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<sup>41</sup> See for instance his "Theology of Liberation" (1975:50-55). Chipenda also served as Programme Secretary for the WCC Programme to Combat Racism from 1973-1980.

<sup>42</sup> Other African women theologians include Rose Zoe-Obianga, Nyambura Njoroge, Isabel Phiri, Musimbi Kanyoro, Teresa Okure, Louise Tappa and Musa Dube. Some of these are active members of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, a movement of African women theologians initiated by Oduyoye and officially inaugurated in 1989 at Trinity Theological College in Accra, Ghana. For a detailed discussion on the history of the Circle and Oduyoye's pioneering role in the development of African Women's theology see Njoroge (2005:447-457). Louise Tappa worked at the AACC as director of Christian Education and Theology.

<sup>43</sup> Although some, such as Oduyoye quite frequently use the term feminism in their work, most members of the circle reject the description of their work as feminist because of connotations associated with the word namely that it is antagonistic and too Western.

<sup>44</sup> Another African woman theologian Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike (1992:106) shows how the feminist interpretation of polygamy differs from a man's interpretation. In her view, "the expanding and strengthening of immortality through polygamy was and is primarily, if not exclusively, a male ideal, as the beneficiaries of that institution were and are primarily, if not exclusively, males".

*Daughters of Anowa*, Oduyoye (1995) used African culture to interrogate the oppression of women in African communities. Kenyan woman theologian Musimbi Kanyoro developed the notion of cultural hermeneutics to describe such an approach. According to Kanyoro (2002:9),

Our cultural heritage was indeed the basis for our common understanding about who we are and what that means. It seemed to imply that for our community in Bware, if change were to be viable for anything, it must address first and foremost, cultural issues. This premonition that led me to suggest that our culture needs to be put to a thorough test under the framework of what I later came to call cultural hermeneutics ... which permits people from one generation to another to re-interpret scriptural texts in the light of their times and culture.

For Kanyoro therefore, cultural hermeneutics – understood as an engendered hermeneutics – is a key to the liberation of women in Africa. She states that “cultural hermeneutics puts every culture to scrutiny with the intention of testing its liberative potential for people at different times in history” (Kanyoro 2002:10). Employing such a tool, African women theologians dismiss any claim of the moral innocence of African culture (see Oduyoye 1986:126). A question arises, however, whether cultural hermeneutics goes far enough to address other issues affecting women and societies in general which emerge for instance from unjust economic systems and globalisation.<sup>45</sup>

A common criticism of African culture from African women theologians is that it has legitimised the oppression of women by perpetuating patriarchal structures in society. Viewed in this way, it is clear that the theme of liberation is very pronounced in African women’s theology. A significant contribution in this regard pertains to African women theologians’ rejection of male constructed anthropologies that depict the woman as the other. To this effect, South African feminist theologian Denise Ackermann (1992:13) observes that “anthropology is both the starting point and the central category for feminist liberation theology.” For instance, Oduyoye (1986:120-137) attempts a retrieval of the biblical anthropology by portraying feminist as a precondition for a Christian anthropology. The anthropological vision that emerges in her work is one that does not entail the duality of male and female (Oduyoye 2001:73-74). Furthermore, sexuality and the cognate issue of embodiment is discussed as a necessary matter so that the female body is not seen as an obstacle to the fullness of the woman’s humanness (Oduyoye 2001:70-71; 1986:131).

According to Oduyoye (2001:38), African women’s theology is “developing in the context of global challenges and situations in Africa’s religio-culture that call for transformation.” In her first major theological book, *Hearing and Knowing*, the theme of liberation was central especially in the most constructive part in that publication. Speaking of African theology in general, Oduyoye (1986:80) argues that “it is the experience of liberation from colonialism and the cry for this liberation that have stimulated theologies that struggle to be relevant to the realities of Africa.” Using the biblical motif of exodus, Oduyoye shows that the struggle for liberation cannot only be spoken about with regard to say apartheid in South Africa. There is also a struggle for liberation, even in independent African states, “as the nations struggle to be fully liberated from colonialism and from their internal misgoverning of themselves” (Oduyoye 1986:81).

In view of the above discussion, one may argue that African women’s theology is at the heart of the union in the debate between inculturation and liberation since women theologians tackle concerns of both approaches. By having a comprehensive view of feminism as going beyond the cultural concerns to include economic issues, African women theologians share

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<sup>45</sup> Here, the work of Botswanan woman theologian Musa Dube is an exception. See for instance her *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (2000). Of course, Dube’s approach may best be described as a postcolonial feminist biblical hermeneutics

elements of inculturation and liberation hermeneutics (West 2015:384). This positive assessment notwithstanding, Philomena Njeri Mwaura (2015:17-19) – an African woman theology from Kenya – has offered a critique of African women’s theologies in relation to public theology. In her view, although African women have worked in the public arena in significant ways as church ministers and civil society activists “their approach is inadequate for they have focused much of their theological writings and activism on religion and culture located more in the private sphere.” She thus advocates for an African women’s public theology that does not “just identify areas of injustice but also engages the church, government and wider society in complex areas like law, public policy, constitution, economics and politics” (2015:22).

c) *Christological discourse in African theology as an Example of theological diversification*

The tension between inculturation and liberation became evident especially in the area of Christology. Since African theologians generally regarded Christ to be the new factor that Christianity introduced to Africa, it is hardly surprising that Christology is probably the most developed subject in African theology. In his survey of African Christologies, Nyamiti (1989:17) shows that Christological reflection has tended to correspond to the respective emphases of inculturation and liberation theologies (cf. Moloney 1987:505-506). Other African theologians have developed different typologies (see Manus 1993:49-70; Mugambi 2003b:136-161; Ukpong 1994:41-45). For the purposes of this study, it is helpful to comment on Nyamiti’s typology as it best illustrates theological diversification in African theology. In this regard, my concern is more an historical exploration rather than a constructive theological discussion of Christology in African theology.

African inculturation theologians developed a variety of ways in answering the question of who Christ is to the African. In their reflections on Christology, they conferred honorific titles on Jesus such as master of initiation (Sanon 1991), ancestor (Nyamiti 1984; Bujo 1992), great chief (Pobee), elder brother (Kabésélé), king (Manus), guest (Udoh), healer (Kolié, Shorter) and Christus Victor (Mbiti). In all the three strands of African liberation theologies discussed above, the image of Christ as the liberator was central. In liberation theology north of the Limpopo, Christology has been a dominant theme. According to Éla for example, “the main task for African theology today is “to discover Jesus Christ the God who liberates and transforms life in solidarity with people” (quoted in Moloney 1987:515). Laurenti Magesa (1991:151-163) also speaks of Christ as the liberator.

In South Africa, some black theologians developed the notion of the Black Messiah. A major work on Christology in South African black theology was developed by Takatso Mofokeng (1987) in his doctoral dissertation which was later published as *The Crucified among the Cross-bearers* in 1983. His concern was to develop a Christology that underpins the struggle for liberation in South Africa (1987:42). Regarding Jesus and the cross Mofokeng (1987:7) writes:

As he traversed this way of the cross black men and black women in our African past were converted to him and to a liberative praxis in their time and world. In other words, Jesus Christ the Crucified was there as the liberative undercurrent in our African past, creating, evoking and empowering a corresponding liberative undercurrent in our African history.

Mofokeng (1987:235) sees Jesus Christ as the Lord of history and time who “rose and lives as the eternal event of liberation amongst the oppressed ... suffers with them, shares their joy and their suffering ... and fights with them.”

As for African women theologians, their Christologies are grounded in both faith and experience. As Amoah & Oduyoye (1988:43) aver, although in general women affirm the

Christological position of the African male theologians, “at time they go beyond it or contradict it altogether.” They contend that for African women, “Christ is the liberator from the burden of disease and the ostracism of a society riddled with blood-taboos and theories of inauspiciousness arising out of women’s blood. Christ liberated women by being born of Mary, demanding that the woman bent double with gynaecological disorders should stand up straight” (cf. Oduyoye 2002:166). Similarly, Nasimuye – Wasike (1980:120) accentuates Christ’s solidarity with women when she notes that Christ “is the one who takes on the conditions of the African woman – the conditions of weakness, misery, injustice and oppression.”

African women theologians reject images of Jesus that stress hierarchal/patriarchal structures. In this regard, Amoah & Oduyoye (1988:41) criticise Pobe’s image of Christ the King. Such arguments notwithstanding, African women have not had problems with particularising the Christ of God with the man of Nazareth compared to some of their counterparts in the European and North-American context (see Oduyoye 2002:165). For Oduyoye (1986:137) therefore, “there is no sexual distinction in the Trinity, but qualities labelled feminine and masculine are all manifested in Christ Jesus who is the image par excellence.” From the foregoing, it is clear that a survey of African Christologies reflect a tendency to dichotomise the concerns of inculturation and liberation.

### 6.3.3 Towards a Unitary Vision of African Theology?

Given such tensions in African theology, some theologians have argued for a unitary vision in this regard. The focus here is not to discuss whether or not such a “unitary” vision is necessarily attractive or for that matter whether a uniform approach to theology is healthy. For instance I do not find attractive the call by Motlhabi (1994:114, 141) for “a single, integrated African theology.” Such a view may certainly stifle creativity. If the debate between inculturation and liberation is in fact a hermeneutic debate as Martey (1995:37) argues, then it is implausible to imagine a single and universally coherent hermeneutic in African theology. In this regard, my focus in what follows is to underline the inadequacy of pitting one approach against the other(s).

One of the early attempts to wrestle with this issue was undertaken by Zimbabwean theologian Gwinyai Muzorewa (1989:60) who argued for the development an “African Liberation Theology” that combines the cultural and liberation characters (cf. Muzorewa 1991). In the end, I think, Muzorewa simply argued for a liberation theology. It is not clear to me how Muzorewa combines the two approaches. Arguably, this may be attributed to the influence on his theological thinking by black theologian James Cone under whom he completed a doctoral thesis at Union Theological Seminary in New York.

Despite being labelled as a liberation theologian, Jean Marc Éla is another theologian who has pursued an approach to African theology that stresses an integral relationship between inculturation and liberation in African theology. Éla (1988:xvii) writes:

Critical reflection on the relevance of an African Christianity requires us to identify the structures or strategies of exploitation and impoverishment against which Africans have always struggled, finding their own specific forms of resistance within their own cultures.

In an earlier publication entitled *My African Cry* (1986:129) – a book that has been hailed by some scholars as one of the most expressive documents of an African theology of liberation (Gibellini 1994:7) – Éla contends that if the authenticity quest of African theology remains focussed only on inculturation, it would simply turn into “a vast entertainment project, whose purpose is to distract the exploited masses from the struggles of the present”. According to Éla (1986:90) the Bible, “which speaks of God and human beings in the same breath, always

includes in the deliverance of God's people their political, economic, and social liberation – without, however, its being reduced to these.” His view is indeed a balanced one. The liberation of the oppressed must be the *conditio sine qua non* for any authentic inculturation of the Christian message (Éla 1988:xv1).

Another Roman Catholic theologian, Bénézet Bujo, highlights the relationship between the two approaches. Although Bujo (1992:66) scathingly points out the limitations of inculturation theology when he describes it as “a pompous irrelevance truly an ideological superstructure at the service of the bourgeoisie”, he nevertheless underscores the need to re-appropriate African cultural heritage in such a way as to further the cause of liberation from all forms of oppression. His concern pertains to an approach to inculturation which ignores “the surrounding social misery” (Bujo 1992:65). In an earlier publication, Bujo (1990:125) asked whether “a nation can develop culturally, while being politically oppressed and economically exploited ... and its people faced with starvation”.

For Justin Ukpong (1984b:531), also a Roman Catholic theologian, the inter-relationship between these African theologies may be located in the concepts of freedom and life which are indeed concerns of both inculturation and liberation theologies.

A more comprehensive analysis of the complementarities between inculturation and liberation theology in Africa is offered by Emmanuel Martey (1993) in his study *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation* and by Stephen Munga (1998) in *Beyond the Controversy: A Study of African Theologies of Inculturation and Liberation*. Without necessarily offering a detailed analysis of these works, I will specifically offer a brief overview of the conclusions drawn by Martey. He argues for a synthetic interpretation of the approaches of inculturation and liberation. According to him, what is needed is a synthetic interpretation of these approaches. Martey (1993:129) thus suggests a holistic view of culture; that is a “macro-culture” that captures encompasses the concerns of both inculturation and liberation. Quoting Adrian Hastings, Martey insightfully highlights that inter-relationship between inculturation and liberation when he notes that “liberation is not only political; it must also be a cultural achievement, a reassertion of the validity of spiritual and intellectual continuity with the postcolonial past.” For Martey (1993:130) therefore, liberation in African theology has to be fought at both the socioeconomic and political realm as well as at the religio-cultural sphere of life. Martey's central argument is simply that African theology must have a unitary perception of liberation and inculturation. Accordingly, he lauds Burgess Carr for demonstrating such a unitary vision in his theological outlook.

Seeing inculturation and liberation as belonging together is also evident in the final communique of the 1977 Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians. According to the participants, the African situation requires a new theological methodology understood in the context of African cultural life and the creative efforts of African peoples to shape a new future (see Appiah-Kubi & Torres 1979:193).<sup>46</sup> In this way, the African theologians involved in EATWOT stressed the contextual nature of theology (1979:194). Most specifically, these theologians were calling for liberation not only from cultural poverty, but also from sexism, political and economic oppression. One may thus argue that both the inculturation and liberation theological approaches to African theology were present in EATWOT (see Küster 2010:5-6). This is particularly true of the Ecumenical Association of African Theologians (EAAT) which was established at the EATWOT conference in Ghana in 1977.

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<sup>46</sup> One can infer a similar concern in the Final Statement of the EATWOT fifth conference held in New Delhi in 1981 when participants noted that “we are convinced that a relevant theology for the Third World should include both the cultural and socio-economic aspects of the people's lives” (see Fabella & Torres 1983:199).

In my view, it appears that the challenge related to the debate on inculturation and liberation has to do with how to avoid dichotomising the two approaches without at the same time blurring the distinctiveness of each (cf. Maluleke 1998c:64). It appears that theologians on both sides of the debate failed to appreciate what each approach could contribute in service to Africa. It is therefore significant that a later generation of South African theologians such as Tinyiko Maluleke (1996a:19-42) and Xolile Keteyi (1998:51) who had been influenced by South African black theology of liberation could begin to appreciate African religio-culture “for the purposes of conducting a dialogue with Christianity.” In this vein, Maluleke (1998b:62) identifies ATRs and AICs as dialogue partners for black theology while arguing that “ATR is [sic] the religion of the poor” in South Africa.

I am not suggesting here that culture was never an issue in South African black theology. Rather, my concern is to show that its treatment of culture was scanty. Little wonder that contemporary South African theologians such as Rothney Tshaka (2015) lament the fact that there are limited traces of black pride and black culture in mainline black churches in South Africa. Examples of a few publications that touch on culture in the articulation of black theology include those by Itumelang Mosala (1986a:97-99; 1989:98) who raises the need for a critical study of ATR. Mosala characterises ATRs as “protest against alienating forces” wrought by colonialism.<sup>47</sup> In his view,

A Black Theology of liberation must draw its cultural hermeneutics of struggle from a critical reappropriation of black culture just as an African Theology must arm itself with the political hermeneutics that arise from the contemporary social struggles of black people under apartheid capitalism.

The point in my allusion to culture with respect to black theology is that the oppression of blacks in apartheid days affected not only the socio-political dimension of their experience, but also the cultural. It is in light of this that Keteyi (1998), whom I have referred to above, proposed a view of “inculturation as a strategy for liberation”.<sup>48</sup> Maluleke (1998c:62) considers Keteyi’s formulation as “a non-evasive, original, helpful and creative way of addressing the inculturation-liberation divide”. As will be shown towards the end of this chapter, the debate between inculturation and liberation took a different turn in light of the proposal for a reconstruction theology that was instigated by Jesse Mugambi from within the ambits of the AACC. For Mugambi (1995:9-11), the suggestion that liberation and inculturation were the two poles of African theology appeared too sharp a distinction. His own analysis on this debate led him to opine an innovative transcendence of both inculturation and liberation. Mugambi’s (1995:24, 38-39, 165-166) proposal led to yet another tension in African theology, however, namely between liberation and reconstruction. Such a tension led to theological debates, particularly amongst South African black theologians.

At a deeper level of analysis of the debate between inculturation and liberation, one may argue that the central concern of inculturation theology is in fact itself a theme of liberation. This observation is especially critical if one critically investigates the soteriological visions of inculturation and liberation theologies. Cameroonian theologian David Ngong (2012:24-29) has helpfully shown how in both approaches to African theology, there was an emphasis on a

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<sup>47</sup> Mosala (1986b:197) argues that those committed to the liberation struggles of the Black oppressed “cannot ignore the history, culture, and ideologies of the dominated black people as their primary hermeneutical starting point.” His treatment of ATRs and African culture reflects a Marxist orientation (see Martey (1993:136). The challenge has to do with the question where race begins and class ends and vice versa.

<sup>48</sup> Keteyi (1998:24-27) suggests four approaches to dealing with culture in the South African context namely through “ethnic groups”, “dominant heritages”, “Black culture” linked together with “Anglo-Boer culture” and the “emergent democratic culture”. He concludes that it would be fruitful to consider the dialogue between inculturation and liberation at the level of the emergent culture (1998:51).

view of salvation as an immanent and anthropocentric concern. Ngong comes to this conclusion after an analysis of the views of Mbiti, Oduyoye, Ela and Buthelezi as representative theologians of African inculturation, women's, liberation, and black theologies, respectively. In my view, it is probably with regard to how the view of salvation as an immanent and anthropocentric concern was interpreted that we find differences. Put differently, it is with respect to their respective perspectives on the relationship between salvation and liberation that inculturation and liberation theologies are at variance. For as Kä Mana (2004:29) notes, "all the major trends of African theology since independence were theologies of struggle."

#### **6.3.4 The Contribution of AACC towards Theological Diversification in Africa**

Having described in detail the development of various approaches to African theologians and their underlying tensions, this section will briefly discuss the AACCs contribution to these debates and the effects of these theological developments on discourse within the AACC. Since these connections will be revealed in more detail in my analysis of ecclesiology and ethics in subsequent sections, the present discussion will be very brief and panoramic.

Within the circles of the AACC, the debate that arose in light of emerging trends on liberation theology implied that the selfhood of the church is not a matter limited to theological discourse predicated on culture only. The metaphor of liberation was therefore used as a theme to rally the quest for the selfhood of the church in Africa. Such a view was explicitly put forward by General Secretary Burgess Carr in his address to the Lusaka Assembly. Clearly, the views of Carr which I have discussed in detail in the previous chapter, illustrate a budding concern with liberation theology in the AACC.

The Lusaka Assembly made liberation one of the priority areas for its mandate on the continent. Following this precedent, the next Assembly at Nairobi (1981) recommended the need for the AACC to emphasise economic liberation (AACC 1982:70). That Assembly also brought the question of reconciliation much discussed amongst South African black theologians to bear on the AACCs new mandate in the following years (see § 6.5.3b below). It needs to be noted, however, that by speaking of liberation theology within the AACC, I do not imply that the AACC has a particular theology of its own. As Luckio Otieno (1983:212) has shown in his master's thesis on "Theological developments in the AACC 1958-1978", the AACC contribution may be best understood in terms of providing platforms for the churches in Africa to "reflect and find opportunities of expression for their theological views" through its General Assemblies, consultations and conferences, amongst others. More so, the theological persuasions of its leadership play a crucial role in determining the direction of the AACC notwithstanding the role of General Assemblies in that regard. Put differently, the AACC may indeed be seen as a source of African theology given its continued role in providing space for the exchange and sharing of theological ideas related to the mission of the church in Africa. This is precisely the case with regard to the period under review.

Returning to Carr and his heralding of the liberation hermeneutic within the AACC, a quote from his introduction to the report of the Lusaka Assembly is instructive:

The churches discovered that "living for Christ and no longer for themselves" meant identification with the complex of liberation struggles that are going on in Africa. But the most startling discovery was the awareness of their own need for liberation. Lusaka will be remembered as the moment in history when the churches in Africa recognised their need to be set free by Christ in order to share in His liberating and renewing activity in Africa.

This example lends credence to Mbiti's (1986:181) observation that Carr put much weight behind the issue of liberation during his tenure as General Secretary of the AACC (1971-

1978). In Carr's (1976:167-168) view, liberation and unity provided the context in which the churches in Africa needed to situate their missionary calling in the 1970s. Arguably, within the ambits of the AACC, concern with liberation may therefore be said to have arisen out of ecumenical necessity as Carr's address at the Lusaka Assembly aptly illustrates (cf. Cone 1979:183). Thus, after the Lusaka Assembly, the AACC provided a platform through its *AACC Bulletin* for the popularisation of discussion on liberation in Africa theology. This also included contributions by South African black theologians. Further, the involvement of South African Black theologians in AACC Assembly's at Nairobi (1981) and Lomé (1987) further contributed towards the conviction that placing the agenda of socio-political and economic liberation central in the processes of determining and carrying out the mandate of the AACC was a matter of ecumenical necessity. In retrospect therefore, it may be observed that the Lusaka Assembly (1974) put emphasis on the prophetic role of the church in society while reconciliation and liberation featured prominently at the Nairobi Assembly (1981). Meanwhile, the election of Desmond Tutu as President of the AACC at the Lomé symbolised the African churches' concern not only for the liberation of blacks in apartheid South Africa but also that of "the oppressed and deprived in other parts of the continent" (see AACC 1988:xii).

From the perspective of this study, pondering the theme of liberation as it emerged in theological debates in African theology in general and in the AACC in particular leads one to raise the question whether liberation is a matter of ecclesiology or of ethics. While it may immediately appear to be a matter of ethics given that in practice, the emphasis on liberation within the ecumenical movement has tended to be captured under the rubric of the social responsibility of the church (read: social ethics). Nevertheless from a missiological perspective, liberation is also a matter of ecclesiology. Theologically, liberation should be understood as a form of soteriology and should be framed as God's work, not ours, not even that of the poor and oppressed (Conradie 2012a:2). A related question to this is of course whether salvation as a theological concept is complete without liberation as a socio-political concept (cf. Min 1989). On this point, I find Mugambi's position attractive. According to him, liberation and salvation are complimentary yet "salvation without liberation is incomplete" (see Mugambi 1989:81, 110; cf. Bosch 1991:442-445). Conradie (2012b:287) summarises Mugambi's view very well when he notes that "the relationship between liberation and salvation, theologically understood, can be expressed in terms of the distinction between that which is penultimate (eliminating all forms of domination) and that which is ultimate (as an eschatological goal)."

#### **6.4 The AACC's handling of Ecclesiology and Ethics: A Historical Analysis (1975-1992)**

Having discussed the African development scene in post-colonial Africa and the diversification of theological reflection in African theology, what follows is a critical historical investigation of the AACC's handling of the tension between ecclesiology and ethics in the period 1974-1992. My analysis will be pursued in terms of three broad headings patterned after my analysis of ecclesiology and ethics in the previous chapter. It will be argued that during this period, concern with development began to take centre stage in the AACC programmatic thrust and thus corresponding to the budding concern with liberation theology in much of African Theology.

#### **6.5 Ecclesiology and Ethics at Nairobi (1981)**

The AACC's 4th General Assembly should have met in 1979 but only took place from 1st to 10th August 1981 in Nairobi. At the time of the Nairobi Assembly (1981), the AACC was

facing a leadership crisis following the resignation of Burgess Carr as General Secretary in 1978. The then chairperson of the AACC Executive Committee, John Gatu, linked the crisis to the departure of Burgess Carr (AACC 1988:52-53). According to Utuk's (1997:133) interpretation of Gatu's speech, "Carr was directly or indirectly a victim of his tough but necessary stand on the moratorium policy." The second explanation of the crisis came from acting General Secretary Rev. Maxime Ranfransoa whose immediate predecessors, namely Mr. Sarwat Shehata (1978) and Canon Kodwo Ankrah (1979-1980) similarly served the AACC in acting capacity. Ranfransoa interpreted the crisis in terms of confidence, finance and leadership. He observed that "the financial crisis is a logical outcome of the crisis of confidence, which is itself a result of the leadership crisis" (AACC 1982:56).

In light of the crisis within the AACC as well as challenges in the new African states, it was fitting that the Assembly met under the theme "Following the Light of Jesus Christ". As my analysis of the Assembly will show, the impact of black and liberation theologies clearly manifested at the Nairobi Assembly.

### **6.5.1 Selfhood of the Church at Nairobi**

Regarding the self-hood of the Church, two themes may be identified from the Nairobi Assembly report. These are namely evangelism and moratorium.

#### *a) Evangelism*

In the report of section 1 on "The Gospel and Education for Liberation", the Assembly stressed a view of mission that placed evangelism and mission side by side. Emphasis was placed on the holistic Gospel that does not separate service from evangelism. The report urged member churches to employ "symbols, tales, proverbs, illustrations taken from authentic African experience" as one way of enhancing the authenticity quest (AACC 1982:70). Considerable attention was placed on the need to train the laity for participation in evangelism. Participation in education towards liberation from sin, in all forms – political oppression, economic exploitation, and all forms of injustices – was seen as part of the evangelistic task of the church (AACC 1982:69). This focus on evangelism was indeed good news for African evangelicals given the tension between the so-called ecumenicals and evangelicals. That Nairobi emphasised the role of the laity in the task of evangelisation underscored the AACC's determination for the selfhood of the church. This was best expressed in a recommendation that urged the AACC secretariat to study the possibility of organising consultations for Christians engaged in identifiable professions (such as doctors and lawyers, amongst others), to help them witness to Christ in and through their profession.

#### *b) Moratorium Re-examined*

If the proposal for moratorium had been a central issue in the understanding of the selfhood of the church at Lusaka (1974), some voices at Nairobi (1981) felt that the moratorium idea was ill-advised. Ranfransoa argued that the "idea of moratorium has died and has been duly buried" (AACC 1982:57). In light of the looming crisis within the AACC, the Assembly delegates had to face the question of self-identity of the church in Africa much more realistically than had been the case hitherto. The Assembly accordingly endorsed "self-reliance through purposeful action, working for independence without antagonising or alienating many supporters (both local and foreign), including those who misunderstood the intent of the moratorium" (Utuk 1997:148). This was a significant step given that despite much talk about the moratorium at the previous Assembly, the AACC had continued to depend on foreign ecumenical partners for the funding of most of its programmes.

For some of the old guards present at Nairobi such as Gatu, it could not be imagined that

the moratorium statement issued at Lusaka be withdrawn. According to Gatu, the moratorium was “one of the positive contributions the AACC has made in the Ecumenical movement and well beyond” (see AACC 1982:153). The finance committee recommended for more pragmatic commitment of member churches towards funding AACC programmes (AACC 1982:88). Concerning foreign partners, the Assembly build consensus around the idea of “liberating aid”. This was another way of moderating the moratorium vision in light of socio-economic challenges that the institution was going through. According to Utuk (1997:160), the concept of liberating aid was not entirely new as a similar idea was discussed at Willingen (1952) in the context of discussions on giving up the use of the terms “younger” and “older” churches.

### 6.5.2 Church and Society

The statements from the Nairobi Assembly regarding church and society issues reflect a growing influence of the concerns of liberation theology. This was apparent in the manner in which social issues were analysed. In view of this, Utuk (1997:150) has rightly noted that the discussion of social issues at the Nairobi Assembly employed commendable social analysis that past Assembly social analyses appear amateur. The Assembly deliberations and recommendations regarding socio-economic issues, militarisation, the ideological battles (between capitalism and socialism), and on marginalised groups in society (including women, the youth, childless women, prostitutes and refugees) was indeed thorough than previous Assembly analyses (see AACC 1982:70-74). The pre-Assembly paper by Sam Kobia entitled “Elitism, Wealth and the Church: Pitfalls and Challenges of Political Independence and Social Consciousness in Africa”, was instrumental in this regard. In his paper, Kobia (1981:123-125) argued that the church in Africa has played a part in developing the new African elite. The elite, Kobia argued, subsequently went through a process of alienation from the masses that they could not legitimately understand the aspirations of their people.

Most significantly, Kobia (1981:125) argued that “class formation in Africa is a concomitant of the development of elitism and capitalism.” The wealth of the nations benefits the international system of capitalism and the national bourgeois. For Kobia (1981:128) therefore, “Following the Light of Christ” entails that the life of a Christian is a permanent struggle – a struggle against all forms of ‘sin’ in this world”. He noted that poverty was one of the dividing issues amongst human beings. The struggle against poverty can thus not be separated from the quest for fellowship and unity sought by institutions such as the AACC, Kobia contended. Arguably, the impact of liberation theology on the theological landscape at the time is clearly discernible in Kobia’s analysis and in the Assembly’s deliberation on the African socio-economic situation. In what follows, I will discuss the Assembly’s perspectives on these issues. I will specifically focus on discussions regarding (a) women, (b) refugees, (c) liberation, and (d) development.

#### *a) Women in Church and Society*

The Assembly identified women as one of the marginalised groups in African societies. By marginalised, the Assembly referred to “people who do not feel in the right setting, people whom society consciously or unconsciously forgets and finally those people who are outside the structures of decision making in all fields: political, economic, social etc” (AACC 1982:72). In July 1981, the AACC facilitated a meeting of women in Nairobi, Kenya just two days before its Nairobi Assembly to consider the issue of the position of women in Church and Society.<sup>49</sup> Decisions taken by women at this consultation were critical in the Assembly

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<sup>49</sup> Another significant meeting for women – a consultation of women theologians – for women was organised by the WCC program on “The Community of Women and Men in the Church and Society Study” (1978-1981)

deliberation regarding women thus leading to a significant statement on women (see AACC 1982:71). The analysis of issues affecting women at Nairobi went a step further than had been the case previous Assemblies. A critical survey of discourse on women in the AACC illustrates this point. I will briefly expound on this point in what follows.

The concern with women issues in African church circles of course predates the formal inauguration of the AACC. Already in 1963, the All Africa Church Conference together with the WCC sponsored seminar on the theme of “The Christian Home and Family Life” which took place at Mindolo Ecumenical Centre in Kitwe, from 17th – 10th April of that year.<sup>50</sup> Participants recommended the creation of a department of Home and Family Life within the AACC that would coordinate programmes of study, training and action on the church’s work on the “Home and Family” (All-Africa Seminar 1963:57). This was followed by a consultation on the “Responsibility of Christian Women in Africa” that was held at Makerere University College in Uganda from 11th – 19th April 1963.<sup>51</sup> Discussion on the place of women in the church featured at the AACC inaugural Assembly in Kampala owing largely to the presence of some women who had participated in the Makerere consultation. The Assembly in Kampala thus created a department of Cooperation of Men and Women in Church, Family and Society as one of the subdivisions of the second commission (of the five Commissions) established at Kampala.

The Lusaka Assembly (1974) provided another opportunity for women to air their views. There, women recommended the need to provide training facilities for women, including theological education (see AACC 1975a:35). Discussions largely centred on the question of marriage, however, and the Assembly attempted to work out an African theology of marriage which stressed the view of marriage as “a covenant between two individuals, a man and a woman” and as “a communal affair – a contract between two families” (AACC 1975a:31). The communal emphasis was seen as the specific African contribution to the view of marriage. In this regard, the discussion on marriage mirrored general concerns at the time with developing an African theology that draws from African experience. It was also significant that Lusaka symbolised the budding concern to involve women in tasks that had hitherto been a preserve of men.<sup>52</sup> Thus, a Cameroonian Presbyterian woman Dr. Rose Zoe-Obianga chaired the work group “Church and Cultural Renewal”. Her continued involvement with the AACC is further captured in the reports of the AACC Assemblies at Nairobi (1981) and Lomé (1987). Another woman, Justice A.R. Jiagge from Ghana, brought her legal acumen to the debate on AACC Revised Constitution at the Assembly. Meanwhile, Mercy Oduyoye was involved in leading some devotions at the Assembly.

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in consultation with the AACC at Ibadan, Nigeria in 1980. Amongst the various resolutions passed at this meeting, the women called for “equal rights and opportunities for service in the church as laity and ordained ministers with full pastoral responsibilities in parishes and administrative areas be assured to women” (see Quist 1980:33; Phiri 1997:146-148). Oduyoye was instrumental in organising this conference together with Isabel Johnson, then secretary of women’s department of the AACC and Daisy Obi, then director of Institute of Church and Society of the Christian Council of Nigeria (see Oduyoye 1990:31-56).

<sup>50</sup> Issues discussed included polygamy, prostitution, family planning, and childless marriages, amongst others. Deliberations at the seminar were later published as *Report of All Africa Seminar on the Christian Home and Family Life* (1963).

<sup>51</sup> Participants made several recommendations that included, amongst other matters, representation of women on Church boards, training of lay women, ordination of women, and the encouragement of recruitment and training of women to meet the varying needs of the church (see *AACC Bulletin* 1965:54). For a summary of the discussion see “Christian Women of Africa Share in Responsibility: Consultation on the Responsibility of Christian Women in Africa” in the *AACC Bulletin* 1 (3).

<sup>52</sup> Lusaka also elected some women to serve on its General Committee.

At the Nairobi Assembly (1981), a woman, Nicole-Christine Ebelle-Ekanga was elected as Vice President of the AACC. Other women present at the Assembly such as Annie Jiage and Zoe-Obianga participated in Assembly work groups for sections III and section II as chairperson and rapporteur respectively. Although Nairobi was well attended by women delegates as compared to previous Assemblies, its deliberations on women did not immediately issue in the institutionalisation of the AACC's concern with the marginalisation of women in church and society. It is plausible, however, to argue that the need to shift the focus of discussion on women issues from the hitherto "family life" concerns to specifically deal with women's liberation in church and society was at full gestation. A considerable recommendation was thus made that encouraged member churches to create women's bureaus. The Assembly further pointed out that there must be programs for the education of women on their role in church and in society, in order to achieve the church's general objectives. What exactly the church's general objectives were was not clearly spelt out.

*b) The Refugee Situation*

Given concerns regarding a number of emergency situations at the time such as floods, droughts, and the refugee problem, the Assembly approved a document that described how churches could engage with such issues (see AACC 1982:77-78). This, however, needs to be understood in light of a programme which the AACC had started in response to the recommendation of the Lusaka Assembly to establish a relief department within the AACC to specifically handle the drought disaster in the Sahel, as well as to continue with programme that had earlier been the preserve of the EPEAA programme which came to an end in 1969 (see §5.5.2 above). The AACC refugee department undertook these tasks. In addition to highlighting the root causes of the refugee situation in Africa, the Nairobi Assembly statement on refugees called on member churches to observe the "refugee week". The Assembly noted the close relationship between the violation of human rights and the going number of refugees at the time (AACC 1982:76).

*c) Liberation*

The Assembly affirmed that "in following the light of Christ, the Church cannot but take the side of the poor and the oppressed in their struggle for their God-given humanity" (AACC 1982:82). Thus, recalling the Lusaka recommendations on political liberation, Nairobi (1981) emphasised the need pay attention to the issue of economic liberation. In this regard, it was recommended that increased attention be paid to economic liberation based on revised national and international economic patterns. This further meant that the church in Africa must carry out its prophetic witness in spite of whatever ideological system it finds itself in. Accordingly, the system of apartheid in South Africa was condemned while the greed prevalent in capitalist societies and the lack of personal freedoms in socialist societies were opposed (AACC 1982:75). A recommendation was thus passed which authorised the secretariat to organise a consultation dealing with ideologies out of which an authentically African ideology suitable for the African continent could emerge. While the ideological battles were regarded unproductive, the AACC described the Christian message as "above ideology". As plausible as this view is, I think that it is also true that the resources of the Christian faith can be abused and thus used to buttress a particular ideology. Arguably, the case of Afrikaner theology in South Africa is illustrative of this point.

With regard to liberation struggles in Southern Africa (South Africa in particular) and in light of previous Assembly decisions on the question of violence as an ethical option, the Assembly delegates regarded this matter as a delicate one. In a carefully worked out statement, the Assembly distinguished the continued militarisation of Africa from the use of counter-violence methods that were employed in the struggle for liberation in Southern Africa

(AACC 1982:82).<sup>53</sup> Regarding the earlier, the Assembly called for demilitarisation (1982:82). Growing militarism was seen as contributing to the crisis of inverted priorities. As intimated in the preceding subsection, the issue of refugees was also seen as one outcome of militarisation following the increase in and interstate wars.<sup>54</sup> The Assembly's view of liberation struggles was that a "genuine desire for peace and human fulfilment" lay behind the struggles. In following the light of Jesus Christ, the Assembly statement on militarisation notes, the "Church cannot but take the side of the poor and the oppressed in their struggle for their God – given humanity" (AACC 1982:82).

#### *d) Development*

Amongst the several resolutions at Nairobi, it was also recommended that the AACC creates a department responsible for development problems (see AACC 1982:72). Related to this was another recommendation that came from the work group on "AACC – What kind of organisation do we want?" that was chaired by Rev. Richard Andriamanjato. This recommendation stressed that in order to enable the churches to be effective, the AACC should conscientize its constituency "to the political, economic and social realities of the African continent and the world as it is only after this that the churches can determine their role in Africa" (AACC 1982:84). In response to the above mentioned recommendations, the Research and Development Consultancy Service (RDCS) was established as a department at the AACC secretariat in 1982. This was the first institutional expression of the AACC's commitment to development. Since the creation of the RDCS, a focus on development formed one of the central thrusts in the AACC programmatic arrangement.

The main aim of RDCS was to assist the churches in development activities that foster people's participation in development. RDCS was to support the churches in advisory and consultancy services as well as in coordinating of ecumenical joint ventures and in training programmes for development. By 1985, the RDCS saw its task as aimed towards promoting and encouraging a reassessment of the churches commitment to development within the African context. In this context the Baobab-for network newsletter proved instrumental. The question of action research emerged out of this context. Action research sought social transformation, that is, researchers become advocates of the interests of disadvantaged social groups. According to the RDCS (1986:13), "the assumption of knowledge under action research is that people, regardless of educational levels and occupation, possess important practical and empirical knowledge that allows them to operate in their current environments. The task of the researchers then becomes not to produce knowledge, but to facilitate the construction of knowledge by the community itself." Therefore through the RDCS, the AACC would play a role of facilitating exchange of information and experiences.

### **6.5.3 Nairobi's Ecumenical Vision**

From the foregoing, it may be argued that the nexus of ecclesiology and ethics at the Nairobi Assembly may be abstracted from its deliberation on the selfhood of the church in section 1 on "The Gospel and Education for Liberation". While it may appear that ensuing discussions favoured a social agenda of the church, a critical analysis of the Assembly's deliberation on

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<sup>53</sup> It is helpful to note here that the AACC had earlier undertaken a critical role in denouncing nuclear weapons. In May 1976, the AACC held a meeting with its counterparts from the German churches at which it was resolved that the German churches put pressure on the West Germany government and private firms to stop nuclear collaboration with South Africa (see AACC 1977).

<sup>54</sup> These views largely reflected recommendations from a consultation on "Political Trends, Human Rights, Arms Race and Development in Africa" that was jointly hosted by the AACC and the WCC's Commission on the Churches in International Affairs in November 1980 as part of the pre-Assembly preparations.

reconciliation reveals a clear linkage between ecclesiology and ethics. Compared to previous Assemblies, Nairobi discussed the church's prophetic ministry of reconciliation in relation to the quest for unity. An historical investigation of AACC Assembly deliberations on the theme of reconciliation reflects a profile of varying emphases. According to Harold Miller (1996:41) – a Mennonite missionary and former staff of the AACC – concern with the theme of reconciliation reflects the conviction within the AACC that the churches' ministry of reconciliation is a biblical mandate that should reflect the immediate demands of the political and social realities in Africa.

*a) Reconciliation through Human Rights Advocacy and Peace-Keeping Initiatives*

The pragmatic side of the AACC approach to peace and reconciliation included human rights advocacy and peacekeeping (see Miller 1996:41-42). In collaboration with the WCC, the AACC hosted the first ever church-sponsored consultation on violations of human rights in independent Africa in Khartoum, Sudan in February 1975. The consultation called on churches to encourage the promotion of human rights as well as for the establishment of a Human Rights Commission for Africa (see AACC 1975c). This notwithstanding, full-fledged human rights advocacy within the AACC was a later development as will be shown in my analysis of ecclesiology and ethics at the Lomé Assembly. Suffice it to note that the AACC/WCC consultation on "Political Trends, Human Rights, Arms Race and Development in Africa" which was held in Nairobi in 1980 was indeed significant in turning the AACC's attention to human rights at the Nairobi Assembly in 1981 (see Wako 1981:115-120). Consequently, the Nairobi Assembly recommended that AACC member churches and National Christian Councils establish human rights standing committees (AACC 1982:76). The concern for human rights also came up in the Nairobi Assembly statement on causes of the refugee situation (1982:77).

The AACCs historical involvement in a number of conflict situations such as the cases of Sudan (in 1972) and Nigeria (in 1969) are illustrative of its commitment to the ministry of reconciliation. Such reconciliatory measures were also envisaged to be a contribution towards creating conducive atmosphere for voluntary repatriation of refugees in cases where conflict resulted in the refugee problem (AACC 1982:78). The AACC also gave moral and financial support to a number of peace initiatives such as the case of the Mozambican churches' participation in the peace process in that country (see Butselaar 2001:21; Vines & Wilson 1995:131-144).

An analysis of the Nairobi Assembly section report on "The Gospel of Reconciliation" is germane to a proper understanding of the Assembly's view on the Church as God's agent for reconciliation. The following two sub-sections, I will discuss the Assembly's deliberation on reconciliation by focussing on two aspects. These are namely the tension between liberation and reconciliation and the view of reconciliation as an aspect of African ecumenicity.

*b) The Tension between Liberation and Reconciliation*

The pre-Assembly background papers prepared by two South African theologians namely Desmond Tutu<sup>55</sup> and Allan Boesak, proved insightful in the Assembly's deliberation on liberation and reconciliation. Boesak's paper titled "To Break Every Yoke – Liberation and the Church of Africa" brought to light some of the pertinent issues regarding the tension between reconciliation and liberation. Boesak's paper is best understood in light of the debate on the tension between liberation and reconciliation that was sharply brought into focus by American black theologian James Deotis Roberts in his critique of James Cone's theological

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<sup>55</sup> Although Tutu's paper was made available to the Assembly, he was not present at the Assembly.

method. In his *Liberation and Reconciliation: A Black Theology*, Roberts (1971:7) argues that “a Black Theology that takes reconciliation seriously must work at the task of intercommunication between blacks and whites under the assumption that for those who are open to truth, there may be communication from the inside out.” In a later publication, Roberts (1974:138) argued that “we cannot fully know Jesus in the role of reconciler until we know him in his role as liberator.” The “way to a knowledge of Christ as reconciler”, Roberts continues, “passes through his ‘liberator role.’” For Roberts (1971:70), Christian theology has therefore always been about liberation and reconciliation. These two constitute the proper “goals for the Christian church in general and the black church in particular.” Regarding reconciliation, he insists that reconciliation can take place only between equals; “It cannot coexist with a situation of Whites over Black” (Roberts 1971:58).

Cone (1970:17), on the other hand, insisted on the view of Christian theology as a theology of liberation. While acknowledging the importance of reconciliation, he argued, however, that it must be done on black rather than white terms. For Cone, reconciliation therefore presupposes the work of justice. Despite differing perspectives on the meaning of reconciliation, both agreed that liberation is the precondition for reconciliation (see Roberts 1971:61). Within the South African context, Allan Boesak engaged in this debate by devoting a chapter to the discourse in his *Black Theology: Black Power* (1976:123-152). While Boesak (1976:125, 127) agreed with Cone’s view of black theology as a liberation theology from white racism and that it is impossible to talk about reconciliation until “full emancipation has become a reality for all black people” he was critical of Cone’s stress on liberation from white racism as the ultimate criterion for all theology (1976:143). Boesak (1976:135) thus finds Robert’s argument for a view of reconciliation that is inextricably bound to liberation attractive.

With regard to Boesak’s pre-Assembly paper prepared for the Nairobi Assembly, it is clear that Assembly delegates affirmed Boesak’s contention that the tension between liberation and reconciliation must be rejected as the creation of a false dilemma. The delegates thus affirmed that “there can be no reconciliation without liberation” (AACC 1982:79). Given the critiques of some African theologians on South African black theology’s emphasis on liberation, it was significant that black theologians Tutu and Boesak helped place on the African ecumenical agenda a nuanced version of reconciliation. One needs to acknowledge, however, that such contribution nevertheless did not bring the debate on liberation and reconciliation to a close.

The debate resurfaced within the context of post-apartheid South Africa. Questions emerged regarding what reconciliation entails, as well as on its validity (see Maluleke 2003:218-221). In his contribution to the reconciliation discourse, Maluleke (2003:237) suggests a view of reconciliation that “encompasses being reconciled to Black cultures, religions and even the environment as part and parcel of becoming reconciled with fellow human beings.” The implication of the argument is that reconciliation with white people would only follow after the reconciliation of black people with their fundamental means of livelihood. Ernst Conradie (2013b:13-17) has succinctly provided an overview of this debate in attempt to offer conceptual clarity regarding the notion of reconciliation. He highlights the conflicting ways in which the term has been used in the well-known South African documents namely the Belhar Confession,<sup>56</sup> the Kairos Document<sup>57</sup>, and the National Initiative for

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<sup>56</sup> One may reach the conclusion that the Belhar Confession emphasises that there can be no reconciliation without justice and no justice without reconciliation. It places such an understanding in the context of the unity of the church in Jesus Christ. For a discussion on the inter-relationship between unity, reconciliation and justice, see Koopman (1986:96-106).

Reconciliation. Like many other commentators (e.g. Villa-Vicencio's 2002:3; Mamdani 2002:56), Conradie notes the elusive nature of the language of reconciliation in the context of post-Apartheid South Africa. From a theological perspective, Conradie (2013b:78) opines that "radical reconciliation" is an elusive mystery that may be best understood as an eschatological reality.

*c) Reconciliation as a function of African Ecumenicity*

Following from the above discussion, it is my view that discussion on reconciliation at the Nairobi Assembly broke new ground. Firstly, it was significant that reconciliation was placed alongside liberation. Secondly and more importantly at least from the perspective of this study, the Assembly delegates uniquely highlighted the link between unity and reconciliation. In this regard, the link between ecclesiology and ethics was unwittingly highlighted.

In the Assembly report of section IV on "The Gospel of Reconciliation", it was noted that "Through his church (God) wants to restore wholeness and bring healing to his broken world" (AACC 1982:80). In their discussion on the missionary legacy of denominationalism in Africa, the delegates affirmed the "indigenous African model of reconciliation". Such an approach was seen to be holistic as it embraced the Christian model and even went beyond it. According to the Assembly report, the indigenous model takes a view of reconciliation as "a renewal and recreation of relationships – between individual and God, with neighbours and social reality." Specific recommendations were thus made in which reconciliation was proposed as a tool for securing God's liberation; a means of nation-building; as a way of structuring an equitable society and as a way of enhancing a holistic Gospel (see AACC 1982:80-81).

The report outlines about thirteen areas of conflict in which reconciliation is needed. These include ethnic, political, racial, and religious conflicts, amongst others. In light of these areas of conflict, the report notes that "the churches' concern for the elimination of all processes of alienation is not an appendage to our mission as a church, but a task that comes directly from the message of reconciliation given by our Lord." Thus put, reconciliation was arguably portrayed as a specific function of African ecumenicity. This is plausible in view of Nairobi's appeal to the "indigenous African model of reconciliation" as intimated above. Such a view resonates with attempts by some African theologians to develop African ecclesiologies on the basis of African communal orientation (cf. Conradie 2007b:19-22).

Mercy Oduyoye (1991) has for instance proposed an understanding of the ecumenical task of reconciliation predicated on the analogy of the African extended family.<sup>58</sup> Against the backdrop of the visible disunity of the church and its ontological unity, Oduyoye calls for the re – appropriation of the concept of the family for Christianity. "The vision of visible unity of the clan of Christ in our days", Oduyoye (1991:469) writes, "has become an over-riding concern of all the households that make up the Christ clan." Similarly, John Mary Waliggo argues for the notion of the "African clan system" as an apt model of the church that lays emphasis on ecumenism. Such a notion stresses the idea of descent from a common ancestor.

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<sup>57</sup> *The Kairos Document: Challenge to the Church*, urged liberation without excluding reconciliation. The document, however, insists that there is no reconciliation without justice (1986:26). It offered a critique of church theology and its emphasis on reconciliation than justice.

<sup>58</sup> Within Roman Catholic circles, the notion of the "Church as family of God" was endorsed as an ecclesiological concept by the African Synod in 1994 and later promulgated by Pope John Paul II. See *Ecclesia in Africa* (1995), Pope John Paul II Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Church in Africa and Evangelising Mission towards the Year 2000. See for instance Onwubiko (2001:82-94) and Uzukwu (1996:67-78).

African ecclesiological models patterned after the African family or clan emphasise the values of relationality and communality. Quite clearly, this is attractive for fostering ecumenism given the stress on solidarity, fraternity, openness and inclusivity which these values elicit (cf. Uzochukwu 2009:78). However, the models of clan and family also carry potentially damaging associations. For instance, it is true that to a large extent, an African family is hierarchical. With reference to the clan model for instance, Sankey (1994:448) argues that “Clan identity has to some extent provided an incentive to nepotism, corruption and the advancement of one social group to the detriment of others.” This is so largely because notions of clan typically reinforce a preoccupation with internal relations amongst members to the detriment of the “world” outside (1994:447). Waliggo (1996:208) has similarly argued that the notion of family in Africa needed to be “liberated” before it could be employed as a description of the church. Given the hierarchical and unequal nature of family relations in both contemporary and traditional Africa, Waliggo sees the need for “a vision of an African family where equality is guaranteed, sharing of responsibility is accepted, the clear option for the disadvantaged members is made, and deadly tensions are eliminated” (cf. Msafiri 2002:92). Without this, he contends, the theology of the Church as family is a double-edged sword that may be profitably used but may also lead to benign paternalism. Of course, like any model, it is not expected that the model of church as family of God would in all respects correspond with reality. Models are not scale reproductions (see Dulles 1987:28). It therefore requires further clarification and refinement.

From the foregoing, it is clear that the inter-relationship between ecclesiology and ethics surfaced at the Nairobi Assembly of the AACC. My discussion has highlighted how the issues of refugees, women, socio-economic liberation, reconciliation and evangelism could not be discussed apart from the being of the church. AACC discussion on the church continued the authenticity quest that was heralded at Kampala under the rubric of selfhood of the church. To aid the AACC in its execution of the new mandate from the Nairobi Assembly a new organisation structure was proposed which saw the creation of the RDCS. This unit came to focus more on the question of development. Quite clearly, the impact of liberation theology manifested at the Nairobi Assembly.

## **6.6 Ecclesiology and Ethics at Lomé (1987)**

When the AACC met for its fifth Assembly at Lomé on August 18<sup>th</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup>, 1987, its institutional crisis had deepened despite remedial actions taken at the Nairobi Assembly.<sup>59</sup> Utuk (1997:163) has thus rightly described the Lomé Assembly as a surgery. Like its predecessor Assembly, Lomé met under the leadership of an Acting General Secretary this time James Kangwana who succeeded Maxime Ranfraso following the dismissal of the latter as General Secretary in December 1986.<sup>60</sup> Kangwana acted as General Secretary for five months only. Meanwhile, Archbishop Walter Khotso Makhulu of the Botswana Church of the Province of Central Africa – who had been President of the AACC from 1981 – resigned his position mid-term.

In his address to the Assembly, Kangwana observed that while the decisions taken at Nairobi such as the creation of Unit I (RDCS) had helped inject new energy in the AACC, poor management style, inadequate central and unplanned utilisation of resources soon

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<sup>59</sup> The Assembly should have met in August 1986 – as decided at the General Committee meeting in Harare Zimbabwe in 1984 – but could not do so because of the crisis.

<sup>60</sup> The dismissal of the General Secretary was largely prompted by the fact of a huge financial deficit that the AACC had incurred owing to sympathetic payment made to staff as benefits and the authorisation of activities for which funds were not available during his tenure (AACC 1988:123)

contributed to heightening the crisis within the AACC (1988:160-161). Kangwana lamented that the AACC had continued to rely heavily on foreign funding to carry out its mandate.

The Assembly also met at a time of severe crisis in most African countries while corruption, nepotism and lack of accountability became rampant in most African governments. I won't say more on this since I touched on these issues in my discussion of the African development crisis at the beginning of the present chapter (see § 6.2.2 above). The choice of the Assembly theme as "You Shall Be My Witnesses" aptly reflected what was at stake in the churches' task in the world as well as the efforts for church unity in Africa symbolised in the creation and work of the AACC. Further, in the preface to the Lomé Assembly report, the newly elected General Secretary José Chipenda captured this conviction when he noted that the "church, as a living community is called upon to participate in God's creative and redemptive work" (AACC 1988:xi). In this way, he envisaged a crucial role of the church as a positive agent of change on the continent.

### **6.6.1 Selfhood of the Church at Lomé**

Lomé's discussion on the selfhood of the church touched on a number of issues. I will only comment on three of these given the scope of my study. These are namely on "health and healing" and the "integrity of creation".

#### *a) Healing and Health*

A section report of the Lomé Assembly includes a discussion on the churches' healing ministry. Healing was discussed as an aspect of the evangelisation task of the church. Given the authenticity quest that has been dominant in the history of the AACC, healing was another aspect in which the authenticity quest could be enhanced. Dispelling the disdain of African traditional medicine in light of the advance of Western medicine, the section report underscored the need to explore the full potential of African traditional medicine for the health delivery system in Africa and beyond. Seeing African traditional medicine as a gift from God, the report envisioned the possibility of a Manual of African Medicine which would include a list of known cures to diseases in the respective African countries (AACC 1988:95). What delegates had in mind was the need for research into traditional medicine as one way of addressing the burden of health challenges in Africa especially in rural communities. That the African concept of health and disease is more social than biological meant that the swallowing of drugs did not necessarily entail that African challenges of health were dealt with. In this regard, the use of liturgies based on "good and sound African beliefs and practices" that would help meet the health needs of the people was recommended (AACC 1988:97). It was further recommended that church-health related institutions in Africa must prioritise preventative medicine. Collectively, the Assembly called for the establishment of national health coordinating Associations or Agencies in African countries (AACC 1988:117).

#### *d) The Integrity of Creation*

Lomé introduced ecology as part of the authenticity quest by appealing to the African traditional respect for nature. Theologically, the Assembly affirmed that problems related to the environment needed to be dealt with not only with reference to sin but specifically so. Although the concern with ecology was prompted by a discussion on development given the negative effects of some technologies on the environment, the deliberations clearly pointed to an ecological reflection that emphasises the re-examination of African cultures with regard to creation. This was necessary given that a critical look at African cultures – with regard to the many layers of creation including relations amongst human beings (e.g. men and women) –

would point to an emphasis on the interdependence of justice, peace and integrity of creation. Therefore the section report that captures deliberations on this issue implied a wholistic theology that embraces both the various aspects of human endeavours for peace and justice as well as ecological concerns. The theme of development was thus discussed in relation to human rights, the environment, and the oppressed including women and youth given their exclusion from mainstream development efforts (see AACC 1988:51, 59).

### **6.6.2 Church and Society**

One may identify about four themes from the Lomé Assembly report that may be discussed under the rubric of church and society. These are namely, liberation, development, human rights, and women concerns. In a way these three themes are quite inter-related. No wonder deliberations in virtually all sections at the Assembly made reference to human rights concerns and the struggle against poverty. In what follows I will briefly analyse the Lomé Assembly deliberations on each of these themes.

#### *a) Liberation*

The theme of liberation was quite central not only in the individual papers read at the Assembly, but also in discussions of section groups and in the collective Assembly resolutions. For instance, that the Assembly paid sufficient attention to the South African struggle against racism is immediately evident in the Assembly resolutions. This is further illustrated in the decision of the AACC leadership to accord an evening session to the then General Secretary of the South Africa Council of Churches Frank Chikane to share with delegates some concerns regarding apartheid (see AACC 1988:176-187). The Assembly's concern with the South African situation led to a statement in which the AACC declared the apartheid regime illegitimate and therefore demanded the immediate release of all political prisoners in that country, amongst other issues (AACC 1988:129). The statement reiterated the AACC's support of the WCC initiated PCR. The statement further deplored the brutality of the South African apartheid regime. The Assembly also authorised a letter from the Assembly sent to sister churches in Europe and America urging them to solicit help from their respective governments on behalf of detained anti-Apartheid activists. The letter further requested these churches to educate their members regarding "the story of Africa vis-a-vis racism, the international political and economic structures which have adverse consequences on African development and liberty" (AACC 1988:131-132). Theologically, the issue of racism was approached from the perspective of creation. Beyond this, it is not clear what theological perspective provided the warrant for the AACC position. Broadly speaking therefore, by declaring the African churches' support for liberation movements in Southern Africa, Lomé stood in continuity with previous Assembly resolutions on the matter.

#### *b) Development*

Given the prevailing socio-economic situation in most African nations, the AACC discerned the urgency of the churches' witness to the good news of God in Christ in view of such realities. Such witnessing also begged the question who Africans say Jesus Christ is. In this regard, the Assembly delegates lifted up twelve images of Jesus namely, Jesus as big tree, big umbrella, brother, counsellor, freedom fighter, giver of abundant life, healer, helper, liberator, messenger of God, reveller, revolutionary and shepherd (AACC 1988:70).

The report of section II described witnessing as a necessity laid upon the people of God. Thus, in its statement on development, the Assembly chided African national leaders for being "insouciant and incapable of ensuring equitable distribution of resources" (Utuk 1997:189). The Assembly also affirmed the wide spread disillusionment with political

independence that was associated with economic woes and abuse of power in much of Africa (AACC 1988:77; cf. §6.2.2 above). The delegates saw the task of the church in such a situation as one of witnessing to the transforming and life giving power of the risen Lord. Thus, as part of the mission of the church, the AACC affirmed that member churches needed to embrace development programmes including the provision of health facilities, agricultural projects and vocational training (AACC 1988:80). A major Assembly resolution in this regard was passed which emphasised that “Christians should see it as their responsibility to fully participate in the social, political and economic life of their country” (AACC 1988:114).

Christian witness as involvement in development was imagined as necessarily including an ecumenical dimension. Collaboration in development was therefore seen to have the potential to provide opportunities for the practice of ecumenism (1988:58). This view was unfortunately not fully developed.

#### *c) Human Rights*

At Lomé, the AACC concern with Human rights was further deepened. Given the violation of human rights in apartheid South Africa and in much of independent Africa, the concern for human rights led to significant recommendations at the Lomé Assembly. African countries were enjoined to “devise ways and means to eliminate conflicts and divisions resulting from the colonial past and present links with different (ideological) blocs.” Further, churches and Christian Councils of Churches in Africa were encouraged to establish human rights desks (AACC 1988:117-119). And the AACC was to establish an African resource desk on human rights.

It needs to be observed, however, that the “The African Church leaders Human Rights Summit” organised by the AACC in September 1986 in Cairo was formative for the AACC formal position on human rights as well as deliberations on this theme at the Lomé Assembly. Generally, the AACC welcomed the OAU (now AU) African Charter on Human Rights and Peoples Rights, which was officially adopted by the latter on 28<sup>th</sup> June 1981, in Nairobi, Kenya and came into force on 21<sup>st</sup> October 1986 after ratification. To this effect, the AACC was to appeal to African Governments through local Churches and National Councils for the ratification of the ACHPR especially those countries that had not done so.

#### *d) Women*

Regarding women, the Lomé Assembly became a turning point largely due to the determination of women delegates at that Assembly. Although the question regarding women ordination was discussed during the Assembly’s deliberations on ministerial training, it is surprising that this issue did not form part of the Assembly resolutions. Further, one indeed wonders why the Lomé Assembly did not collectively condemn sexism before women delegates took matters in their own hands (see Utuk 1997:188). This same criticism may be levelled against the collective visions from the Nairobi Assembly whose report is replete with gender insensitive language. Of course in the report of section 1 of the Assembly, refrain was called for regarding the use of the word “man” when referring to human beings.

Thanks to women delegates at Lomé for taking a robust approach to issues that concerned them.<sup>61</sup> The women formulated a statement in which they made three cardinal demands to the Assembly (see AACC 1988:18). The first was that AACC member churches should ensure equal representation of women delegates in the Assembly. Second, the women demanded that

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<sup>61</sup> This approach was quite similar to the undertaking by women theologians from Africa, Asia and Latin America at the 1983 international dialogue in Geneva when they demanded that a women’s commission be created within EATWOT (see Fabella & Oduoye 1988:x).

the post of women's desk at the AACC be filled immediately. The third demand called for the need to employ women in other executive positions in the AACC in addition to the women's desk. There was also a demand for the women's department to stand as a separate department since it had continued to operate under the umbrella as the youth department since its creation after the Abidjan Assembly (1969) (AACC 1970:104). The demands of women at Lomé were approved alongside a related resolution that called for the use of inclusive language.

Following women demands at Lomé, a women's desk was established within the AACC and the Zambian activist Omega Bula was appointed as the first Programme Director for the desk in 1988. Bula soon organised a continental meeting of women in Lomé, Togo from 16 – 21 October 1989, under the theme "Arise and Shine for your Light has Come" (see AACC 1989). Deliberations at that meeting placed emphasis on "strengthening the unique role of women in the life and structure of church and society" (see AACC 1989 report). Out of this meeting emerged a process that led to the AACC women's desk economic literacy programme (Bula 1993:433). In this connection, the women's desk organised a consultation on Women and Economic Justice at Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation in Kitwe, Zambia in June of 1990 with the aim of mobilising and educating women around issues of food security and economic justice, amongst others. From a historical perspective, it is interesting to note that these developments coincided with the WCC's declaration on the "Ecumenical Decade – Churches in Solidarity with Women" (1988-1998).

### **6.6.3 Lomé's Ecumenical Vision**

This Assembly appears to have been preoccupied with the task of addressing the institutional crisis that manifested in terms of financial deficits and administrative challenges resulting in low morale amongst AACC staff and waning confidence from its member churches. As a result, the Assembly did not have the luxury of theological reflection on the kind of unity sought. Yet, in its deliberations, it gave ample space to addressing the various social issues that affected its member churches and the African people in general. Ironically, the collective Assembly resolutions pertaining to unity focussed more on relations with churches and bodies outside the African continent. It is therefore rather surprising that Utuk (1997:193) regards this Assembly to have taken "unity far more seriously than previous Assemblies". In my view, the question of unity with regard to foreign bodies was partly if not largely prompted by the financial deficit. This notwithstanding, individual ecumenical visions can be abstracted from presentations made by some African theologians at the Assembly such as Desmond Tutu.

#### *a) The African Value of Community as Basis for Unity*

In his keynote address to the Lomé Assembly, Tutu argued that disunity amongst African churches undermined the struggle for liberation in Africa in general and South Africa in particular. Against this background, Tutu underscored the African value of community and stressed human interdependence. He argued thus: "my humanity is totally incomplete without yours. My humanity is bound up with yours ... We are made for interdependence" (AACC 1988:172).

#### *b) Strengthening Relations with Black Churches in the USA*

The contact between the AACC and African-American churches which began at the Abidjan Assembly continued to advance in remarkable ways (see §6.3.1 above). At Lomé a significant number of representatives of the black churches in America attended the Assembly. Delegation leaders of the African-American team, however, cautioned the AACC not to assume that the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA was the sole

representative of churches in Africa. A call was thus made for the AACC to undertake visits to the USA in order to get better acquainted with the black churches in America (see AACC 1988:18-19).

*c) Moratorium Revisited: A Search for Mature Relations*

The institutional crisis that the AACC was facing at the time posed a serious challenge to the institutional search for unity amongst churches in Africa. The crisis also placed doubts on the quest for selfhood that characterised the call for moratorium at Lusaka (1974) and later revised in terms of “liberating aid” at Nairobi (1981). Lomé’s perspective in this regard is best understood by looking at the Assembly’s letter addressed to partner Churches in Europe and North America in which the desire to cement ecumenical relations with foreign churches was underscored. In view of both the crisis and past resolutions on moratorium, it was proposed that such ecumenical relations needed to be based on “mutual trust, dignity and the struggle for justice” (see Utuk 1997:195; cf. AACC 1988). It appears to me that this was a further attempt at rescuing the AACC from its crisis in much better ways that had been the case at the Nairobi Assembly. To do so, there was a presentation at the Assembly by a management expert who highlighted proper management skills and practices as critical for effectively managing an ecumenical organisation such as the AACC (see AACC 1988:104-105).

Since the AACC is a fellowship of churches, the presentation spoke generally of effective management of church institutions. “The church can no longer be run, administered or managed without sound managerial principles.” In this regard, the need for church leaders to attain management competence was underscored (AACC 1988:116). Thus when it came to the business aspect of the Assembly, an in-depth assessment and reorganisation of the AACC was undertaken and subsequently approved by the Assembly. As intimated in chapter 4 (see § 4.5.5a above), it was significant that the Assembly delegates agreed to transform the AACC from “an instrument of the churches to become an enabling body to the Churches for an effective ecumenical witness and action” (AACC 1988:126). To carry out this mandate, the self-reliance path undertaken at Lusaka was to be enriched with initiatives for revenue generating ventures (AACC 1988:152). While these initiatives were well intended, they were at the same time a sown seed for ecumenical bureaucracy in Africa. Of the many important decisions that the Lomé Assembly took, delegates to that Assembly did the ecumenical movement in Africa a great service when they elected Desmond Tutu and José Chipenda as President and General Secretary of the AACC, respectively. Under their leadership, the AACC re-gained its credibility as a prophetic voice on the African continent.

## **6.7 Ecclesiology and Ethics at Harare (1992)**

If the mood was sombre at the Lomé Assembly due to the crisis that the AACC was going through, deliberations at the 6<sup>th</sup> General Assembly held in Harare, Zimbabwe from 25<sup>th</sup>- 29<sup>th</sup> October 1992 bore witness to a regained confidence in the AACC amongst member churches. The Assembly met under the theme “Abundant Life in Jesus Christ”. The reports of Desmond Tutu and José Chipenda to the Assembly in their capacity as President and General Secretary respectively, clearly illustrate that the measures taken at Lomé to save the AACC had been successful. Tutu paid tribute to member churches whose financial contributions to the AACC had significantly improved (AACC 1994:58). This was indeed a sign of their confidence in the AACC and determination to own the institution.<sup>62</sup> According to Chipenda, Tutu’s “credibility helped the AACC to become credible” again (AACC 1994:64). In his report to the Assembly, the General Secretary told the success story of the many consultations and

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<sup>62</sup> Such support, however, was still meagre compared to the AACC budget. The AACC continued to rely of foreign funding to carry out most of its programmes.

programmes that the AACC was able to undertake in the period before the Harare Assembly. He reported that finally, the construction of the AACC headquarters in Nairobi which was initiated by former General Secretary Burgess Carr had been completed and subsequently dedicated to God in September 1992.

Compared to my analysis of ecclesiology and ethics at Nairobi and Lomé, that of the Harare Assembly will be very brief. This is not only because the Assembly itself was briefer than its predecessors, which it was. Rather, this is because Harare's discussion on issues pertaining to the selfhood of the church and the socio-economic and political concerns on the continent was not uniquely distinct from previous Assembly deliberations to deserve lengthy attention. This notwithstanding, Harare signalled a new concern for democratisation in African countries and therefore stressed the view of the church as power of advocacy.

### **6.7.1 Selfhood of the Church at Harare**

The Assembly was divided into four thematic sections namely on "vision and hope", "justice and peace", "integrity of creation" and "participation of all God's people". Discussions in these sections were enriched by presentations on related topics. Issues pertaining to the selfhood of the church largely emerged from the business committee reports. In a manner reminiscent of the Kampala Assembly's perspectives on the selfhood of the church (§ 5.5.1b above), the report of "Selfhood of the Church Committee" described selfhood as having "to do with the church's "being" in relation to culture and other realities" (AACC 1994:29). If the Lusaka Assembly found the moratorium as one path towards the selfhood of the church in Africa, Harare related the quest for selfhood with the desire for the church in Africa to attain a self-understanding sufficiently clear as to support equitable dialogue and partnerships with others.

While generally affirming previous Assembly resolutions regarding the necessity of the church in Africa to become self-governing as well as to develop her own theology devoid of undue Western influence, Harare was aware of lessons learnt from the Nairobi and Lomé Assemblies in respect of relations with partner churches outside Africa. Nairobi and Lomé cast doubt on the search for authenticity without collaboration with other ecumenical agencies and partner churches. According to the report of the selfhood of the church Committee at Harare, the challenge for the African church was "to continue its re-discovery in relation to others" (AACC 1994:29). In his study of the authenticity quest in the AACC, Utuk (1997:200) has radicalised this view. According to him, what Harare expanded on was the view that a "thoroughgoing, wholesale, authentic African Christianity existing without foreign influence, was no longer seen as desirable or even possible."

Further, the articulation of African theology as part of the authenticity quest received further boost from Harare given AACC initiatives to "encourage contextual theological reflection at sub-regional levels, each responding to local challenges" (AACC 1992c:13). Additionally, there was a growing relationship between the AACC through its Information and Theology Desk (now Theology, Ecumenical and Inter-faith Relations department) and theological associations such as EATWOT and the Association of African Theological Institutions.

### **6.7.2 Church and Society at Harare**

In their respective addresses to the Assembly, Jose Chipenda, Desmond Tutu and Philip Potter (a former General Secretary of the WCC) brought to the attention of delegates various issues facing the African continent at the time. In his opening address, Potter interpreted the theme of the Assembly in light of Africa's challenges including refugees, poverty and

unemployment. For Potter, such a situation could not only be blamed on the history of colonialism in Africa and the dawn of neo-colonialism. Africa's ruling elite have also played a role in bringing about the situation of suffering. Therefore, to proclaim abundant life in Jesus, Potter argued, meant taking the good news of salvation, liberation and abundant life to the suffering (AACC 1994:55). For Potter, such concern was an essential part of the mission of the church.

The report of General Secretary Chipenda provided a synopsis of issues that faced the continent. Amongst others, these included concerns over economic degradation, drought and famine, religious conflicts, and the call for democracy. These and other challenges were also enumerated in the thematic section report on "vision and hope" (see AACC 1994:16-17).

Tutu joyfully spoke of the end of apartheid and the release of Nelson Mandela from prison as well as the independence of Namibia. In light of these developments, Tutu saw the pressing task of church in the area of human rights. Although not discussed in detail at the Assembly, but mentioned in Chipenda's report (see §6.7.3 below), the implications of the changed situation in South Africa had been earlier considered at an AACC Central Committee meeting in March 1990. To stimulate such discussion from a theological point of view, Kenyan theologian Jesse Mugambi had been asked by the AACC leadership to articulate the "historical moment" in which the churches in Africa found themselves in light of the release of Nelson Mandela from prison and the end of the cold war. More specifically, he was requested to reflect on the "Future of the Church and the Church of the Future in Africa" (Mugambi 1995:5). Accordingly, in a paper presented to the AACC executive committee meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> March 1990, Mugambi stated:

We need to shift our theological gear from Liberation to Reconstruction. Thirty years after the establishment of constitutional independence, most African nations are reported to be in deep crises. The release of Nelson Mandela is certainly the most significant historical event of this generation in Africa. Mandela is not only the longest serving political prisoner – he is also the most prominent symbol of the Exodus metaphor in Christian theology (see Chipenda et al 1991:35).

Mugambi went on to propose that reconstruction was the new priority for African nations in 1990's. On that basis he suggested that African churches and their theologians "will need to respond to this new priority in relevant fashion, to facilitate this process of reconstruction" (see Chipenda et al 1991:36). The essays presented to the March 1990 General Committee of the AACC – including Mugambi's paper – were published as *The Church of Africa: Towards a Theology of Reconstruction* (1991). A year later (1991), the AACC convened a conference at Kanamai, north of Mombasa, Kenya, to further explore the theme of "Theology of Reconstruction". A précis of papers presented at that meeting were published as *Problems and Promises of Africa* (1993) edited by André Karamaga. Revised versions of these papers were later published as *The Church and the Future in Africa: Problems and Promises* edited by Jesse Mugambi (1997a). Through the Mombasa symposium, the AACC tried to identify the crucial problems and promises for the African context at the time.

Although the theme of reconstruction was not explicitly stated in any of the Harare Assembly recommendations, Chipenda highlighted reconstruction as one of the necessary concerns for the AACC in the post Harare period alongside the concerns for justice, peace, *koinonia* (read: unity), and reconciliation (AACC 1994:71). Further, as the following subsections will show, the Harare Assembly discussions on the church as power of advocacy were certainly pointing in that direction. Nevertheless, a more explicit treatment of the theme of reconstruction in AACC Assemblies only emerged in the post Harare period (see §7.3.2 below).

*a) The Church as Power of Advocacy: Development, Democracy and Human Rights*

At the Harare Assembly, the interface between ecclesiology and ethics was unwittingly underscored in the discussion on the role of the church in social transformation. Accordingly, the Assembly reflected on its continued participation in development efforts in light of emerging concerns with human rights and democratisation

*i) Human Rights*

The Harare Assembly affirmed the conviction that was gaining currency in AACC circles namely that advocacy for human rights was integral to the AACC development efforts. To this end, the AACC had earlier on organised a major conference on “The question of debt as it affects Human Rights” at Maseru, Lesotho in September 1990. In the declaration from the Maseru conference, the challenges associated with Africa’s debt crisis were interpreted through the touch screen of economic justice (see Maseru Declaration). Amongst other issues, participants traced the roots of this crisis to an unjust world economic international financial system; the irresponsible borrowing and irresponsible lending of loans that were spent on projects conceived and designed through corruption and the acquisition of irrelevant, inappropriate and in most cases obsolete equipment; and the imposition of unacceptable, alien and disastrous development models and plans on African populations without their consent or knowledge. The declaration also named the church as part of the challenge, given the churches’ abdication of the responsibility to train, teach and nurture. The declaration further made recommendations which called for an international ethic on loans and for action by local churches, national churches, the AACC in liaison with the WCC, and churches in the Northern Hemisphere. The AACC Maseru declaration further made a call for a year of jubilee in which Africa’s debts would be cancelled. Thus, when the AACC met at the Harare Assembly in 1992, the concern with economic justice became a central issue for the AACC’s continuing advocacy, policy analysis and intervention. Since the issue of human rights as it relates to debt raises fundamental ecclesiological and ethical issues, I will return to this discussion in the next chapter (see §7.4.2e below).

In continuity with previous Assembly resolutions (see §6.6.2c above), Harare deepened the churches’ concern with human rights and accordingly recommended that the AACC develops a theologically grounded handbook on human rights for use at the grassroots levels (AACC 1994:34). While Lomé had recommended churches to urge African countries to consider the ACHPR, at Harare the churches were to translate the charter into major African languages with the assistance of the AACC.

*ii) Democracy*

The Assembly met at a time of widespread calls for democracy across the continent. In 1990 for instance, there were uprisings in about fourteen African countries calling for democratisation and liberalisation. In view of such incidences related to the call for democracy as well as the sad stories of coup d’états in many African countries, General Secretary José Chipenda noted the need to consider the struggle for democracy as one of the key concerns constituting the mandate of the AACC in the post Harare period. While Chipenda placed emphasis on the role of the churches in advocacy for democracy, he warned that it would be false to assume that democracy and multi-partyism would immediately bring about prosperity (AACC 1994:67). In his view, the democratic system could be manipulated by forces within and outside thus bringing new sources of conflict in Africa. In this regard, the role of the churches would also include strategies for peace and reconciliation (see §6.7.2b below).

Within the ambits of the AACC, the democratic impulse signalled a new emphasis on the

role of the church as part of civil society. Although a detailed discussion of the AACC vis-à-vis civil society will be discussed in detail in the next chapter, I will briefly point out the genesis of this concern here. The expanding view of the role of the AACC in society alongside other non-state actors was essentially an outcome of the work of the AACC RDCS. Given the proliferation of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) especially in the 1990s, the AACC had to rethink its place vis-à-vis civil society. The RDCS therefore commissioned a study on “The Receding Role of the State in African Development and Emerging Role of NGO’s” conducted between 1991 and 1993. The results of the study include a research document by political scientist Julius Nyang’oro entitled “The Receding Role of the State and the Emerging Role of NGOs in African Development.” Further, a workshop was held in Arusha, Tanzania in August 1992 under the theme “Emerging Power of Civil Society in Africa” and the report of this consultation was published as *Emerging Power of Civil Society in Africa* (1992) edited by Chanya Mwaikio-Blumenkrantz and Mosi Kisare. Another workshop was held in Arusha in August 1993. A final report of the study (and workshop) was published in 1993 as *Civil Society, the State & African Development in the 1990s* (see Nyang’oro 1993).

Although the study was still under way at the time of the Harare Assembly (1992), some perspectives that emerged from the 1992 Arusha workshop found expression in the Harare Assembly recommendations regarding the view of the church as power of advocacy. One of the stated objectives for that workshop was to provide participants with a functional understanding of the meaning of advocacy, from theological, political, legal and development, economic justice perspectives. Former AACC staff Kondwa Ankrah and church development worker Rogate Mshana presented papers at the Arusha workshop that focussed on the theological perspectives. Collectively, the workshop came up with three broad views of advocacy (see AACC 1992b:14). The first view described advocacy as

a process of social analysis rooted in political spirituality. It entails the development of a vision and commitment to monitor the legitimacy of governing institutions and the efficacy of policies they enumerate.

Regarding this view, it was observed that a theological approach that involves the church in people’s struggles must be developed as an integral part of its advocacy work. The second view of advocacy entailed seeking to shift power away from centralised state institutions to non-state actors. The emphasis in the second view was on strengthening and empowering civil society. The third view attempted a theological perspective. It portrays advocacy as a comprehensive concept that encompasses the search for justice, peace and integrity of creation. These views of advocacy found expression at the Harare Assembly. At both the workshop and Assembly, it appears to me that deliberation on the theme appears to have been prompted by pragmatic concerns. Accordingly, in one of the Harare Assembly recommendations, “direct and organised participation in civic affairs” was seen as belonging to the mission of the church in society (AACC 1994:31). More specifically, involvement in economic and political development – indeed central concerns amongst NGOs – was seen as important area of the churches’ engagement. In the current struggles for the democratisation of Africa, the report says, “it has become necessary for every church to undertake civic education programmes alerting citizens to their rights and responsibilities in society” (AACC 1994:31). However, mindful of the theological concern on the identity of the church vis-à-vis its role in society the Assembly called on churches to “develop civic education programmes, re-defining the theological basis for participation in the larger issues of society” (AACC 1994:32).

In view of the foregoing, a question may be posed regarding the AACCs self-understanding in relation to its role in social issues. This question was indeed pointedly raised

at the Harare Assembly. According to the Assembly report of the “selfhood of the church committee”, there was need to clarify the self-understanding of the church in light of its involvement in social issues (see AACC 1994:31). This concern, however, was framed as a post Assembly task. In a sermon at the end of the Assembly delivered by the then vice President of the AACC, Kwesi Dickson, the question of the self-understanding of the church came up.

According to Dickson, while the church must engage in programmes and projects through which it offers its social service, it was not another United Nations Development Programme. While the AACC must bring its members together to share and exchange ideas as happens at AACC Assemblies, it was not another kind of parliament. With a theological concern, Dickson proceeded to juxtapose worship and service and noted that emphasis could not be placed on one at the expense of the other (AACC 1994:84). The church is the body of Christ Dickson said. And since Christ came that we may have life and have it more abundantly, there is no distinction between worship and service. In Dickson’s analysis therefore, we find a stress on the inter-relatedness of ecclesiology and ethics. The issues raised by Dickson parallel concerns that emerged regarding the self-understanding of the AACC vis-à-vis NGOs. This will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

#### *b) Peace and Reconciliation*

The churches’ ministry of peace and reconciliation was also sharply underscored as part of the mission of the church as power of advocacy. This was necessitated by conflicts in some African countries and by the alertness of the churches to potential conflicts that may arise out of democratic processes. In this regard, the Harare Assembly reminded the churches that to effectively carry out their ministry of reconciliation, they were to be exemplary in this regard. In the run up to the Harare Assembly, the AACC organised workshops on peace and reconciliation in a number of countries, including Burundi (1989), Angola and Mozambique (1990), Rwanda (1991), Liberia (1991), and Togo (1992).

As a gesture to express its commitment to peace and reconciliation, the AACC awarded a peace prize to two Mozambican Bishops, namely the Anglican Denis Sengulane and the Roman Catholic Jaime Ngoçalves.<sup>63</sup> This gesture went a long way to demonstrate the role of churches in the peace processes in Africa.

Following concerns of religious conflicts highlighted in the report of the General Secretary as well as in a paper prepared for the Assembly by Modupe Oduyoye – husband to theologian Mercy Oduyoye – on interfaith dialogue, the Assembly also affirmed the need for peaceful co-existence with non-Christian religions. The Assembly further emphasised the need to revisit Muslim-Christian dialogue project – now Programme for Muslim Christian Relations in Africa (PROCMURA) – to address issues affecting African Christians.

#### *c) Christian and Theological Education*

The Assembly also discussed Christian and theological education in relation to the mission of the church (see AACC 1994:30). The transformative role of such education was highly emphasised. This emphasis was partly derived from discussions on the role of Christian education in development which became the focus of a workshop on “Christian education and

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<sup>63</sup> In 1988 and 1989, a process started in Mozambique in which churches – with President Chissano’s permission – engaged in open discussions with RENAMO. The AACC offered its support towards the peace effort in Mozambique by assisting church leaders in that country to establish links with RENAMO representatives in the United States of America and in Kenya. Later in September 1990, the AACC organised a Lusophone consultation on “Peace and Reconciliation in Angola and Mozambique” held in Limuru, Kenya (see Butselaar (2001:20-21).

development in Africa” convened by the AACC (under the auspices of its RDCS) earlier in April 1992 in Banjul, Gambia. The Banjul consultation pointed out the need to see Christian education as a vital component of development education (see AACC 1992a:21). Participants in the consultation saw Christian education as part of the socialisation process thus requiring a contextual approach. In this vein, it was proposed that the AACC works with the churches in Africa to develop a “new Christian/development education initiative”. The Harare Assembly proposal for Christian and Theological Education is therefore better understood in light of such earlier precedents. No wonder the emphasis of the Harare Assembly that such education be oriented towards issues of peace and justice.

The Harare recommendation must also be seen in light of previous Assembly mandates. The need for contextualised theological education had been explored at the Abidjan Assembly already in 1969. Several recommendations at the Nairobi Assembly (1981) called for the need to tailor theological education to the needs of society including questions of the relationship between the mission of church and politics (see AACC 1982:70). At Lomé (1987), theological education was discussed in relation to development and ministerial formation (see 1988:54, 71). Contextualisation of theological education also featured as a central concern at the WCC’s Programme on Theological Education (PTE 1978-1991) consultation on “Theological Education in Africa” held in Accra Ghana, in 1986 (see Pobee & Kadadjie 1990:189-190). From this brief overview, it is clear that the need for the contextualisation of theology has not been absent in AACC deliberations.

Perhaps a new emphasis at Harare regards the pragmatic side of its resolution on Christian education namely, the need to create opportunities for the education of girls given the exclusion of women in profitable employment. However, the mandate derived from this resolution does not appear to have taken into account previous Assembly recommendations especially that of its predecessor Assembly at Lomé. At Lomé, AACC member churches were urged to study the result of the AACC research on a “New Vision on Christian Education” (see AACC 1988:116). This apparent limitation at Harare of failing to link its resolution to previous mandates notwithstanding, the positive side to the Harare call was that emphasis was placed on the training of women, youth and children in the training agenda of churches. Such a focus lends testimony to the progress which the women’s desk had made since its establishment at the Lomé Assembly. The desk organised numerous consultations on women issues. A significant meeting in this regard was the consultation on Women and Economic Justice already mentioned in § 6.6.2d above. The women’s desks’ initiative of holding consultations on consultations on the impact of economic policies on women led to the formation of a continental initiative called African Women’s Economic Policy Network (AWEAPON) that is registered as an NGO in Uganda.

The women’s desk later published *The Ecumenical Literacy Manual* (1997), which was officially launched at the 7<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the AACC in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in 1997.

### **6.7.3 Harare’s Ecumenical Vision**

Compared to previous Assemblies, the Harare Assembly did not explore collective ecumenical visions regarding the theological question around church unity. This is probably because much attention had been paid to institutional restructuring on the basis of the mandate from the Lomé Assembly. In this regard, visits were undertaken to the AACC constituency by the AACC leadership and staff in an attempt to foster closer relationship between the AACC secretariat and the member churches. Such visits were indeed necessary given the rescue measures put in place at the Lomé Assembly.

The imperative of unity was nevertheless highlighted in the report of the General Secretary. Chipenda's perspectives on unity were tied to his understanding of the mission of the church in society. He thus presented unity as a necessary requirement amongst churches in the new era of multiparty democracy. "If Christians remain divided, in the era of multiparties, how will they advise heads of state and leaders of political parties?" Chipenda asked (AACC 1994:71). He thus proceeded to speak of church unity in relation to the churches' prophetic ministry. According to Chipenda:

We should stretch out our arms to bring to the Church men and women of different languages, young and old, citizens of many countries representing all races, tribes and nations in Africa. As God loved the world and gave his Son to liberate us from sin, guilt and death, our concern for people should be deep, our hearts wide, our ministries vast, our parishes extensive to include people from Cairo to Cape Town, from the Indian Ocean to the shores of the Atlantic.

In his view, it was necessary to struggle together if the churches in Africa were to give an effective witness to God in Africa. Here, we find a view of unity prompted by the witness of the church in society. Chipenda further underscored the relationship between ecclesiology and ethics when he called for a shift from what he described as "a development orientation in most AACC programmes" (AACC 1994:69) to an emphasis on "justice, peace, reconciliation, reconstruction and *koinonia*" (AACC 1994:71). In this regard, Chipenda saw the quest for the visible unity of the church as a continuing task (AACC 1994:76). He placed the task of visible unity together with that of justice and peace in African countries and of reconciliation amongst political parties, tribes and nations. Although Chipenda related *koinonia* to the African concept of extended family, he did not specifically explain the nature of the unity that he spoke about (AACC 1994:73).

## **6.8 Ecclesiology and Ethics from Nairobi to Harare: A Shift from a Quest for Authenticity to Advocacy**

Having analysed AACC General Assembly proceedings in relation to the relationship between ecclesiology and ethics, this last main section of the chapter will specifically tease out the AACCs handling of ecclesiology and ethics in view of what Chipenda described as "a development orientation in most AACC programmes".

### **6.8.1 A Very brief Analysis of AACC Development Discourse**

Although the AACC has dealt with several themes in its history between 1975-1992 such as peace, reconciliation, justice, development, and the place of women in church and society amongst others, the concern with development was a central concern in its discourse and programmatic arrangements. This focus resonated with general developments in African theology regarding the need for theological reflection to take into account the socio-political situations of the African context. As discussed in the first part of this chapter, this came to be known as liberation theology and was variously articulated in the form of South Africa Black theology, African liberation theologies in independent Africa and in African women's theology. In what follows, I will therefore offer a concentrated discussion on the development efforts and discourse in the AACC bearing in mind my analysis of the history of the AACC in the foregoing sections of this chapter.

A historical analysis of the AACC development discourse and engagement – which may be traced back to the Abidjan Assembly – shows a growing profile of reflection drawing on both secular and wider ecumenical discourse on development including the social analysis of

liberation theology.<sup>64</sup> At the Abidjan Assembly (1969), the report of section 1 on “working with Christ in the contemporary social, economic and political situation” in Africa recommended inter alia, training for development and the involvement of the church in development (see AACC 1970:111). Following the Lusaka Assembly (1974) recommendation to take seriously the role of the church in development, a department of development was created bringing together former departments of youth, education, urban industrial and rural mission and church.

The concern with development became a central feature in the programmatic arrangement of the AACC especially in the 1980s. Formative for the AACC’s focus in this regard was the working session of the RDCS that was held in Harare in May 1983. Participants at that meeting underscored the view that the first responsibility of the churches is to the poor and underprivileged. Accordingly development was described as “a specific way of looking at and promoting social change, with the understanding that change should bring improvement to all categories of people.” This necessarily implied that development is “concerned with justice, as well as means by which a fulfilling life can be sustained for all” (RDCS 1983:19). In light of the three theoretical inputs given at meeting mainly dealing with theology, political and economic constraints to development and integrating development into church structures, development education was noted as a priority if churches are to fulfil their role as a catalyst for development. The outcome of this meeting is document in the report on “Churches’ Commitment to Development”. During this period, most national councils and some churches in Africa created departments of development and employed either project officers or development officers.

From 1986-1988, the AACC initiated the programme on “quality of rural life”. While recognising the dependency of the African churches on foreign funding for development projects, the RDCS insisted that “if a new partnership between the African churches and external donors can commit its effort and resources to programming for participation, then the wish of the churches to promote self-reliance and self-determination through development will have a basis for realisation” (RDSC 1986:8). In my view, although this talk about partnership was indeed necessary as a new way of addressing the desire of African churches to attain selfhood given the history of debates on moratorium, the concept of partnership is problematic if those involved perceive the other exclusively in terms of a donor-receiver relationship (see Kobia 2003:147; Riddell 1993:4). This is especially so if partnership implies inter-alia notions of sharing, a sense of mutuality and equality of the parties. Put differently, I think that the partnership relationship is at the same time political and involves questions of power. As Kobia (2003:147) notes, “any authentic relationship between partners must include dialogue on the structure of such relationship ... if ... how to allocate and administer resources for particular projects in the third world are to gain in meaning, they should engage the sociology of power.”

The emphasis on self-reliance was indeed evident in the AACCs programmes on education for development in the 1980s. According to the Report of the 1987 Pre-Assembly Workshop on Church and Development for instance, education for development “should aim at assisting people release their own creative energies; assume responsibility for their own development; promote more mature behaviour; and teach people to know how to live and work with others” (RDCS 1987b:17). Although there was an emphasis on the concepts of self-reliance and self-

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<sup>64</sup> For instance, in its 1988 issue, the RDCS observed that most African churches lacked a “social analytical framework” for engaging in development (see RDCS 1988:4). This was also discussed at an AACC Pre-Assembly Workshop on development held in 1987 where it was observed that “a prophetic church needs social analysis as a tool of pastoral action” (RDCS 1987b:33).

determination within the RDCS, the AACC was ironically dependent on foreign funding to carry out its programmes, while the churches continued to be the channel through which to finance development projects in health, education, agriculture and water supply (cf. Mugambi 2003:198).

The AACC development programme was most specifically tailored towards assisting member churches through evaluation of project activities of the churches, appraisals of the feasibility of establishing development programmes and the building of a network amongst the development programmes of member churches and affiliate Christian councils (see RDCS 1987a). The conviction behind this was that the AACC could not really do that which the churches were not able to do in their own national situations. The emphasis on development for education was therefore crucial in this context. This was later affirmed in the Lomé Assembly resolution that encouraged churches to promote educational programmes that meet the needs of the society (AACC 1988:116). The Harare Assembly made a similar recommendation albeit without reference to previous Assembly deliberations on the matter.

In view of this historical overview of the trajectory of development discourse in the AACC, it may be asked how the AACC has conceptualised its development efforts theologically.

### **6.8.2 An AACC Theology of Development?**

On the basis of the foregoing, it is my view that the concern for development has emerged at all the Assemblies that have been analysed in this chapter. Further, in my historical analysis, I have highlighted a number of contexts in which the inter-connection between ecclesiology and ethics was either wittingly or unwittingly underscored. In this vein, I think that the AACC's handling of the tension between ecclesiology and ethics in the period after the Lusaka Assembly to the Harare Assembly (1992) may be understood in terms of prevailing concerns regarding development. Indeed, as General Secretary José Chipenda observed in his report to the Harare Assembly, most AACC programmes had been "development oriented" (AACC 1994:69). If this is so, the question how the AACC has envisaged the churches' ecumenical task in this regard necessarily arises. Put differently, what has been the theological basis for its engagement in development work as an ecumenical institution whose constituency is ecclesiological in nature? The significance of such a question is relevant not only within the context of this study but also in terms of the *raison d'être* of the ecumenical movement in Africa.

Although the AACC has not hitherto developed any theology of development, the need to proceed from a theological point of view has always characterised the AACC's involvement in development. More specifically, the need to relate the churches' involvement in development to the essence of biblical mandate has emerged at several points in the history of the AACC (see RDCS 1983:24). At the Abidjan Assembly (1969), it was emphasised that "in dealing with the problem of development, the church must have a vision that is rooted in biblical theology" (AACC 1970:107). The Abidjan Assembly's statement on development appealed to creation in its search for a viable theology of development. In the statement, the Assembly affirmed that "All men [sic] are created in the image of God, are equal before Him, and are each entitled to a share of the world's wealth according to their needs, and are stewards of the same" (AACC 1970:108).

Ecclesiologically, Abidjan understood the church in relation to development as representing a moral and spiritual force which must have its effect on human life (AACC 1970:108). Concern for a "theology of development" was also echoed at the Lusaka Assembly (1974). In his address to that Assembly, then General Secretary of the AACC Burgess Carr observed that one area in which there was urgent need to work out a clear

theology was in the area of development (see AACC 1975a:79). In the Lusaka Assembly statement on “The Prophetic and Serving Church”, the Assembly appealed to creation (view of human persons) as a theological warrant. It also related development with the search for justice.

With the creation of the RDCS in 1982 as a department responsible for development issues in the AACC, development was envisaged under the rubric of the prophetic role of the church. Although the Nairobi Assembly issued a statement on development entitled “The Gospel and Education for Liberation”, development was discussed without a very clear theological basis (see §6.5.2d above). The focus of the statement was on economic justice. The Lomé Assembly viewed the churches’ involvement in development as part of their Christian witness. Given the emerging role of NGOs in development efforts in Africa in the 1990’s, the Harare Assembly (1994) spoke of the church as power of advocacy without necessary elaborating on the view. Interestingly, however, the need for a clear theology regarding the role of the church in society was raised (AACC 1994:31). Evident of the lack of clarity on what advocacy entails theologically, the recommendation that called for the need to highlight the basis of the church’s participation in social issues is ends with a phrase in brackets as follows “(a theology of society?)”. The question mark at the end is indicative of the need for further reflection on what such a theology may look like. The report envisaged that such a theology would help clarify the church’s self-understanding. In my view, although AACC developmental efforts are laudable as the above historical account attempts to illustrate, its involvement in development remained ambiguous theologically speaking. The basis for ecumenical corroborative action was also not grounded on a clear ecclesiological basis.

### **6.8.3 A Theology of Development in wider Ecumenical Discourse**

The challenge of articulating a clear theology with regard to development is not unique to the AACC. With qualification, the same may be said of ecumenical discourse within the circles of the WCC. Thus put, this is not to suggest that developments in the AACC must be understood in light of developments in the WCC. For, as Mugambi (2015) observes, these “two institutions are not comparable, although they are both illustrations of the modern ecumenical movement”. A very brief overview of the WCC efforts and discourse on development is necessary for a proper perspective on my argument regarding the quest for a “theology of development”. Such a comparison is significant since in addition to local initiatives inspired by the African socio-political context within which its member churches operate, the AACC collaborated with the wider global ecumenical fraternity such as the WCC<sup>65</sup> in its development efforts (Kisare 1992:47).

Most commentators on ecumenical discourse on development point to the WCC’s World Conference on Church and Society that was held in Geneva in 1966 as the key landmark in protestant theological and ecclesiastical concern with development (see Itty 1974:6; Swart 2006:1-3). According to Ans van der Bent (1995:121), it was the Geneva conference “that put the issues of world economic development ... on the agenda of the churches in a major way.”

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<sup>65</sup> The relation was sometimes also characterised by tension given concerns over power in ecumenical relations. The story of the creation of the African network for the Churches participation in Development (ANCPD) is illustrated of such tensions. The ANCPD was initiated in 1980 by the WCCs CCPD as a network of church development departments, agencies and organisations working in conjunction with regional and national ecumenical organisations. One gets the sense that for the AACC, the ANCPD was seen as a replication of the operational structures of National Councils of Churches in various African countries. This tension was heightened when the WCC’s CCPD encouraged the AACC to participate in the activities of ANCPD (see Kisare 1992:49-50).

The conference highlighted the real struggle between “north vs. south, rich vs. poor, white vs. coloured struggle”. It brought to the attention of the churches the structural factors which are at the roots of underdevelopment. The conference also charged that “[T]he Church must say clearly and unequivocally that there is a moral imperative behind international economic development” (Abrecht & Thomas 1967:66). The churches were thus challenged to speak with a genuinely prophetic voice, to proclaim that “God has created and redeemed the whole world.” According to delegates at the Geneva conference, this implied “a more just distribution not only of wealth but also of health, education, security, housing and opportunity” (Abrecht & Thomas 1967:89).

The WCC Assembly at Uppsala (1968) endorsed most of the conclusions of the Geneva Church and Society Conference. Section III on “World Economic and Social Development” at the Uppsala Assembly accordingly urged that development must be at the heart of the churches’ social witness (Goodall 1968:46). Post the Uppsala Assembly, the conviction grew that “justice should be the focus of the churches’ participation in development” (Van der Bent 1995:123). Later, at a consultation on Development Projects organised by the WCC at Montreux in 1970, a view emerged in which development was understood as aimed at three inter-related objectives namely, justice, self-reliance and economic growth. The third objective was perceived to be a means of promoting the first two. A major influence behind this thinking was Indian economist Samuel Parmar whose stress on the above three aims of development proved formative for ecumenical thinking around development during this period. The intuitions behind this new emphasis soon led to the establishment, in 1970, of the Commission on the Churches’ Participation in Development (CCPD).

It was under the auspices of this commission that the development debate within the WCC gained focus. Following its Nairobi Assembly (1975), the WCC started an action-reflection programme that focussed on the theme “The Church and the Poor”. The outcome of this study programme was a trilogy published between 1977 and 1979.<sup>66</sup> Through this study, the CCPD developed the theological concept of the “church of the poor”. In the second volume produced from that study, the different contributors to the volume variously underscored the view that in the period before the development era, the efforts of the churches towards the poor did not in generally go beyond the works of charity. In the concluding essay to the volume, written by Julio De Santa Ana (1978:174), it is argued that with charity as the churches mode of response to the question of poverty, “the poor were served, but the social reality of poverty and its underlying causes went practically unchanged.” In his study *The Churches and the Development Debate*, South African theologian Ignatius Swart (2006:84-87) succinctly captures the historical trajectory of ecumenical discourse on development from the initial focus on charity to the so-called debate initiated by Charles Elliot in his 1971 book *Comfortable Compassion: Poverty, Power and the Church*. Swart juxtaposes the ecumenical debate with the so-called NGO development debate that emerged already in mid-1980s.

For purposes of the present study, it is important to note that the WCC study on “The Church and the Poor” initiated attempts within the WCC to relate the Christian faith to the struggle against poverty. This attempt highlights the need to reflect on the theological basis of the churches concern with development. Another attempt within the WCC involved the work

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<sup>66</sup> The first results of the study were published in *Good News to the Poor: The Challenge of the Poor in the History of the Church* (1977) in which the problem of the relation of the poor in the early church and in the medieval period was examined. The second publication, *Separation Without Hope* (1978), examined the relations between the poor and churches during the industrial revolution. The third publication namely, *Towards a Church of the Poor* (1979) was an outcome of a workshop held in Cyprus in 1978 at which the problem of the poor was further analysed and new theological perspectives and actions to be undertaken by churches formed the bulk of the publication (see Santa Ana 1979:195-202).

of its Commission on Inter-Church Aid, Refugee and World Service (CICARWS). CICARWS emphasised the principle of *diakonia* that was variously underscored at consultations in Swanwick (1966), Crete (1978), Geneva (1982), Larnaca (1986) and at the WCC Central Committee that met in Johannesburg in 1994 (see Taylor 1995:111-117).<sup>67</sup> Apart from these two WCC initiatives, the Committee on Society, Development and Peace (SODEPAX), a joint venture between the Holy See and WCC through the Pontifical commission Justice and Peace and the CCDP (and later through the Programme Unit on Justice and Service) respectively, was yet another ecumenical initiative that made attempts to set up programmes on education for development and development research amongst others (see van der Bent 1995:159). SODEPAX had an original remit of three years during which period a number of international conferences were held on development (Beirut, 1968; Montreal, 1969), the theology of development (Cartigny, 1969), the communication media in service of development and peace (1970), and the churches' role in the development of Asia (1970). For the purposes of this study, the Cartigny consultation on "In Search of a Theology of Development" will be briefly discussed.

The Cartigny (1969) consultation discovered many and not one theological approach to development. These include prophetic, pastoral, systematic, ethical, spiritual and ecumenical (see Taylor 1995:118-121). At that meeting for instance, Gustavo Gutiérrez questioned the concept of development and in turn, favoured the concept of liberation (see SODEPAX 1969:152). On that basis Gutiérrez reached a debatable conclusion namely that "to work to transform this world is in itself salvation" (SODEPAX 1969:146; cf. § 6.3.4 above).<sup>68</sup> The motif of liberation soon became a crucial concept in ecumenical discourse on development in many contexts especially in Latin America, Africa and Asia. Thus, by the time of the WCC Assembly in Nairobi (1975), the CCDP stressed the view of development as "a liberating process aimed at social justice, self-reliance and economic growth."

Although the ecumenical debate on a "theology of development" intensified in the five years after the Geneva Conference (1966) as shown in the foregoing, the various initiatives in this regard did not lead to an overall consensus on a "theology of development" (see Itty 1974:16). From the mid-1980s to the early 1990's, a view emerged within the WCC that linked *diakonia* intimately with *koinonia* (see Dickinson 2004:413; Robra 1994:283). Practically, this soon led to the establishment and strengthening of alliances amongst so-called ecumenical "agencies", "specialised ministries" and some National Councils of Churches in the mid-1990s. The creation of the Action of Churches Together (ACT) as an instrument of ecumenical emergency response by the WCC in collaboration with the Lutheran World Federation in 1995 was partially an outcome of such efforts. Such efforts need to be further understood within the framework of the WCC process "Towards a Common Understanding and Vision of the World Council of Churches" in which the concept of a "polycentric" ecumenical movement was emphasised (cf. §2.4.1 above).

The above comparison of the development debate within churches shows that the search for a "theology of development" may best be understood as a quest for a theological understanding of the churches' response to the challenge of poverty. In a way, it brings to

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<sup>67</sup> For a critical historical account of discussions on *diakonia* within the ambits of the WCC, see Robra (1994) and Belopopsky (2002).

<sup>68</sup> See also his *A Theology of Liberation* (1974). Gutiérrez advances a view of development in terms of liberation. He defines liberation as a process of the struggle to construct a just and fraternal society, where people can live with dignity and be the agents of their own destiny (Gutierrez 1974:24-26).

light the tension between ecclesiology and ethics (cf. §3.2.8 above).<sup>69</sup> Within the AACC, how to respond to such a challenge underwent a number of shifts since the mid-1980s when issues of human rights and later the concern for democracy (in the early 1990s) became serious concerns for the AACC and its member churches. As Paul Gifford rightly observes, the 1980s witnessed increasing involvement of the church in wider society. The role of churches was not only limited to the traditional areas of education, health and development but also began to encompass direct political involvement. In his words, this “has involved challenging political structures, urging reforms, advocating political change, and even presiding over the change itself” (Gifford 1995:3).

## 6.9 Conclusion

This chapter provided an historical analysis of the AACCs handling of ecclesiology and ethics between 1975 and 1992. It was argued that beginning in the 1970s, the ecumenical movement in Africa promoted a liberative type of Christianity. To illustrate this, the chapter started with a discussion of the diversification of approaches to African theology. This was understood in terms of the emergence of various liberation theologies including South African black theology, African women’s theology and liberation theology in independent Africa. My analysis of official documents and reports of AACC General Assemblies, consultations and conferences showed that the concern of these various theologies with issues of poverty and oppression found expression in several resolutions and initiatives within the AACC. Further, the chapter demonstrated that AACC General Assembly themes and discussion topics reflected to a larger extent contemporary issues which member churches wrestle with. Successive mandates of the AACC in the period covered were thus influenced and informed by challenges facing member churches between the General Assemblies.

In my analysis of AACC Assembly and consultation reports, I highlighted the role of the AACC in providing space for the exchange and expression of ideas regarding theological perspectives prompted by concerns for the poor and oppressed. Thus, in most Assemblies, there was an emphasis on the prophetic role of the church. This found expression in several recommendations that called on member churches to participate in transformative programmes in their local contexts. Most specifically, I argued that the AACCs handling of ecclesiology and ethics in the period after the Lusaka Assembly (1974) to its Harare Assembly (1992) may be understood in terms of prevailing concerns with development and therefore the focus was more and more on ethics. At the institutional level, the AACC participated in development programmes through its RDCS.

Tracing the AACC’s most sustained engagement with the theme of development to the Nairobi Assembly in 1981, I showed how the concerns for peace and justice were at the heart of its engagement in this regard. To a large extent, the concern for justice (read: social justice) is illustrative of the liberative thrust that characterised much of AACC discourse and engagement.

Navigating through the Assemblies of the AACC, I argued that by the time of the Harare Assembly, there was an emerging tendency within the AACC to talk about the church in functionalist terms as another NGO, given the need for cooperation with groups other than church and with the real issues on the ground. Arguably therefore, the Harare Assembly marked a shift towards increasing emphasis on the role of the AACC in providing civic education programmes in relation to concerns for democracy and human rights. Therefore,

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<sup>69</sup> Indian ecumenical scholar Chirapurath Itty (1974:16) succinctly shows how that it was within the context of growing diversity of views on social ethics that the quest to evolve a ‘theology of development’ had to be pursued.

while authenticity was markedly emphasised from Kampala to Lusaka with a few traces of the quest lingering on until the Nairobi Assembly and even dimer traces by the time the Lomé Assembly, development characterised much of the focus of the period after Lusaka to the Harare Assembly. At Harare, democratisation was becoming the catchword within the AACC.

While development had characterised the programmatic emphasis of the AACC in the period covered in this chapter, theological reflection on unity tended to focus more on the social responsibility of the church. Much the same as my preliminary conclusion in the previous chapter therefore, a similar trend is discernible in this chapter. Churches found a practical outworking of their common calling through ecumenical responses to issues affecting member churches. Indeed, as General Secretary José Chipenda observes in his foreword to the AACC publication *Perspectives on Africa*, the mandates and activities of the AACC are informed by and large by “the turbulence and promise of the times” (AACC 1996:i). In view of this, it may be concluded that in the period covered in the present chapter, the search for unity amongst churches under the umbrella of the AACC was built around common action on social issues in the African context. Matters of doctrine, faith and church order did not so much constitute the rallying point for the ecumenical movement in Africa. On this basis, one may argue that in the AACC, unity has often referred to common concerns and common goals. Deliberate theological reflection on the nature of the unity sought after has not received significant attention. Nevertheless, this is not to suggest that such reflection has been absent.



## **Chapter 7: Ecclesiology and Ethics in an Era of Globalisation (1992-2013): An Analysis of the History of the AACC**

### **7.1 Introduction**

The present chapter explores the ways in which the AACC addressed the ecumenical tension between ecclesiology and ethics in the period after its Harare Assembly (1992) to the Jubilee Assembly held in the Kampala (2013). The chapter will highlight key theological and socio-political developments in Africa as one way of mapping the context in which the AACC has carried out its mandate for the period under investigation. Many of such developments took place against the background of the impact of democratic revolutions in Eastern Europe, the end of the cold war and the emergence of the phenomenon of globalisation. Within the AACC in particular, increasing attention was paid to collaboration between churches and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in addressing issues affecting African humanity amidst major global changes. In this regard, the AACC promoted the theology of reconstruction that was initially proposed by Jesse Mugambi at its executive committee meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> March 1990.

By means of a theological historical analysis of the AACCs programmatic arrangements in the period after its Harare Assembly (1992), this chapter will discuss ecumenical action and reflection within the AACC with specific reference to challenges posed by neo-liberal globalisation. To do so, I will first offer a very brief conceptual analysis of the notion of neo-liberalism after which a brief historical discussion on globalisation and the democratic impulse in Africa will follow. Such analysis is germane to a meaningful examination of the underlying hypothesis for this chapter namely that the AACCs handling of the ecumenical tension between ecclesiology and ethics during this period may be best understood in terms of neoliberal globalisation. In view of this, a brief discussion on the theology of reconstruction will be offered. The purpose of such a discussion is to indicate initial lines of thinking around the ecumenical response to a changed situation in Africa brought about by the end of the cold war and the emergence of new global realities. The underlying hypothesis of this chapter will then be tested on the basis of a detailed historical analysis of official reports of the AACC General Assemblies at Addis Ababa (1997), Yaoundé (2003), Maputo (2008) and Kampala (2013). My analysis will also draw on other official documents and publications of the AACC.

### **7.2 Neoliberal Framework in Africa: Democracy as Africa's Second Liberation**

In Chapter 5 of this study, the analysis of ecclesiology and ethics within the AACC was placed within the broader context of the decolonisation processes. Chapter 6 placed emphasis on development as a characteristic of the socio-political context of the time. In the present chapter, it will be argued that the African socio-political context of the period 1992-2013 has arguably been characterised by the pervasive influence of neoliberalism (see Harvey 2005:3). In the following section therefore, I will offer a brief discussion on neo-liberalisation in order place this argument in proper perspective.

#### **7.2.1 Neo-Liberalisation: In Search of a Working Frame of Reference**

Many commentators acknowledge the polysemic nature of the term neoliberalism (Larner 2000:5; Mudge 2008:704-705; Saad-Filho & Johnston 2005:1). With this in mind, this section offers a very brief conceptual analysis of the notion as discussed in standard texts on the subject. Historically, the emergence of neoliberalism is often associated with the rise of the political-economic ideology in the Western world (see Harvey 2005:2). The ascendance of the

so-called Chicago School of political economy – Friedrich von Hayek, Milton Friedman, and others – is often associated with its emergence in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (see Mayo 2005:18). Its roots may however be traced to the economic liberalism of Adam Smith and David Ricardo (Jones 2010:139; Stiglitz 2002:73-74).

According to Wendy Lerner (2000:5), the term neoliberalism denotes “new forms of political – economic governance premised on the extension of market relationships”. A number of commentators have often construed neoliberalism as a framework for explaining contemporary capitalism and the politics associated with it. David Harvey (2005:2) offers a helpful definition of neoliberalism:

Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade.

Neoliberalism therefore entails a “free market economy” in which the state is assigned a very limited role. According to Harvey, the “role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate” for “liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework as characterized in his definition above. Practically this entails “deregulation, privatisation and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision” in order to increase the freedom of the market (Harvey 2005:3; cf. Van Drimmelen 1998:12-13). Beyond these tasks, Harvey argues, the state should not venture. Representing this kind of thinking, the Berg Report of the World Bank (1981) interpreted Africa’s economic problems in the 1970’s as having been caused inter alia by excessive state regulation of economies and thus called for a reduction in state interference (cf. Mkandawire 2001:294).

Against the background of the African debt Crisis, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) soon began to promote neoliberal policies through their Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) of the 1980s (see Stiglitz 2002). In much of the 1980s, the World Bank and the IMF influenced international donor policy emphasising such elements as macroeconomic prudence, outward orientation, and domestic liberalisation (see Williamson 1990). The cooperation of these institutions in this regard came to be generally comprehended under the rubric of “Washington Consensus”, a term coined by John Williamson (1990) to refer to the set of policy reforms imposed on debtor countries in Latin American (see also Peet 2009:15-16). From the foregoing, it may be argued that the travails of neoliberalism in Africa may well be associated with the rising power of the Bretton Woods institutions in the 1980s.

### **7.2.2 Neoliberal Globalisation**

Having described the roots of neoliberalism above, I will now discuss neoliberalism in light of globalisation. My discussion takes cognisance of the definitional complexity of the phenomenon of globalisation (see Smit 2007:125-126). The sheer number of publications on the globalisation debate might lead one to conclude that globalisation “has reached a concept ‘life-cycle’ stage where it risks becoming *passé*” (Jones 2010:1). This is however not the case. For purposes of this study, this section focuses on political and economic analyses of neoliberal globalisation and will end with a very brief allusion to theological discourse on the subject. A sustained theological discussion on the issue will become apparent in my analysis of the AACCs handling of the tension between ecclesiology and ethics.

#### *a) A Definition of Neoliberal Globalisation?*

Following sociologist Roland Robertson (1992:8), this study employs the term globalisation

to refer to “the compression of the world and intensification of the consciousness of the world as a whole” (see §2.2.4 above). However, a distinction needs to be made between the expressions globalisation and neoliberal globalisation. In the vast literature on globalisation, the neoliberal globalisation is variously explained as a political project, a socio-economic reality or even as an ideological concept. Richard Peet (2009:23) has distinguished between globalisation “as humanitarian potential” and neoliberal globalisation “as dominating reality”.<sup>70</sup> Such a distinction is indeed useful. In this vein, my analysis in this section will focus on “neoliberal globalization” and not just “globalisation as a neutral spatial process.” This obviously implies a view of neoliberal globalisation as a dominant reality. In this sense, neoliberalism may also be understood as the ideational force behind the politics of globalisation (Cerny 2010:129).

The above distinction between globalisation and neoliberal globalisation is helpful in underscoring both the “promise and peril of globalisation” (see De Gruchy 2004:246). As Conradie (2010:57) notes, globalisation should not be merely demonised. Conradie argues for instance that the globalisation of products and services is by itself ethically neutral. In this regard one could add that amongst other benefits of globalisation, the advance in communications technology is generally positive. What is crucial therefore is the recognition of the undersides to globalisation. Seen in this way, the “neoliberal” in “neoliberal globalisation” is very much a critics’ term.

#### *b) Consequences of Neo-liberalisation: Questioning the Benefits of Globalisation*

In light of the foregoing, it must be noted that discourse on globalisation may arguably be categorised in at least three ways. That is to say, accounts on globalisation may fall into pro-globalisation discourses, reform globalisation discourses and anti-globalisation discourses (cf. Jones 2010). In the pro-globalisation accounts of writers such as Martin Wolf (2004) and Thomas Friedman (2005), robust arguments are advanced in favour of globalisation in total. Other scholars take a more reformist perspective. For instance, in his bestselling book *Globalisation and its Discontents*, economist Joseph Stiglitz (2002:20) argues that globalisation “is itself neither good nor bad” and has “enormous power to do good”. To buttress this point, he gives an example of countries in East Asia where globalisation was embraced under their “own” terms and “own pace”. Nevertheless, Stiglitz contends that globalisation has not brought comparable benefits in much of the world. Given such a view, Stiglitz has been described by some thinkers as a reformist (see Jones 2010:149). That is to say, Stiglitz highlights the limits of globalisation while at the same time acknowledging its benefits. Accordingly, he proposes policy recommendations to reform globalisation. Stiglitz offers a critique of both the neoliberal free market ideology behind economic globalisation as well as the anti-globalisation discourse.

The benefits of globalisation notwithstanding, several critiques of neoliberal globalisation have been raised. Neoliberalism has thus spawned several movements that opposed its hegemony. Some of these movements, such as those related to protests against the policies of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in Seattle in December 1999, can be generally lumped under what may be termed as anti-globalisation movements. Some such movements identify links between globalisation, poverty and inequality. For some so-called radical anti-globalists,

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<sup>70</sup> Others construe the distinction in terms of “globalisation” and “globalism” (e.g. Lombard 2010:244). Such a distinction is however contested owing to the different ways in which the term globalism is employed. For instance, Mark Ritchie (1996) argues that while “globalism incorporates the idea of the global commons to describe the ozone layer, oceans and genetic diversity, Globalisation is the acquisition and exploitation of these resources by giant corporations. For a detailed discussion on the different ways in which globalism has been employed, see Harris (2002:6-11).

the very idea of globalisation being a neutral phenomenon is highly problematised. Representative of such a perspective, Micheal Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000:xi-xv) have articulated a “global empire” thesis which stresses that globalisation is a form of imperialism that must be resisted. Similarly, others argue that neoliberal globalisation is a form of re-colonisation and imperialism through global financial structures. Such views are predicated on the view that neoliberal globalisation contributes to making competitive-market ideologies hegemonic (Harvey 2005).

As intimated in the foregoing however, it should be pointed out that it may not be fruitful to hurriedly reject globalisation. It is against this background that I insist on making a distinction between globalisation and neoliberal globalisation. In this study therefore, the latter term is employed to denote the dominating impact of neoliberal ideology on many spheres of life especially for the so-called third world countries. Put differently, neoliberal globalisation may be understood in relation to the movement of deregulation that is associated with the market economy undergirded as it is by neoliberal theories of trade. In light of such developments, new terms found expression particularly in the field of economics. Phrases like “under-development” and “developing countries” were soon replaced with the phrases “emerging markets” and “market actors” respectively.

### c) *The Voice(s) of Churches on Neoliberal Globalisation*

While there have been many critiques of neoliberal globalisation from various perspectives, this section focuses on the prophetic role of churches as this has come to be expressed in the history of the AACC. Given the nature of the ecumenical movement, I will briefly note past efforts to address neoliberal globalisation by ecumenical structures such as the WCC<sup>71</sup>, the European Conference of Churches<sup>72</sup>, and some Global Confessional Bodies such as the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC)<sup>73</sup> and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF)<sup>74</sup>. These institutions have highlighted the distortions of neoliberal globalisation particularly in relation to issues regarding the debt crisis, the ecological debt, consumerism and economic justice, amongst others.

The ecumenical movement has not necessarily demonised globalisation or for that matter the market. A critical issue that has often emerged is the need for a just and sustainable economic model. For example, the WARC’s Accra Confession employs the notion of empire to describe systems of economic and political domination associated with economic globalisation. In a similar vein, but with less focus on the question of *status confessionis*, the WCC (2005b:3) AGAPE document describes neoliberal globalisation as an “economy of death”. The phenomenon is further described as a “dramatic convergence of economic globalization with political and military hegemony in one imperial power network” (2005:12).

Following its Port Porte Alegre Assembly in 2006, the WCC started a study process on “Poverty, Wealth and Ecology: The Impact of Economic Globalization” as a follow up to the

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<sup>71</sup> See AGAPE document of the WCC (2005). See also the WCC statement on “eco-justice and ecological debt” (2009).

<sup>72</sup> See the document “European Churches Living Their Faith in the Context of Globalisation” (2005).

<sup>73</sup> See the Accra Confession (2004). The confession is best understood in light of the call for a committed process of recognition, education and confession (*processus confessionis*) regarding economic injustice and ecological destruction issued at the WARC general council that met at Debrecen in 1997 (See §3.2.4). For useful resources on the possible implications and challenges of the Accra Confession, see Boesak & Hansen (2009, 2010) and Boesak, Weusmann & Amjad-Ali (2010).

<sup>74</sup> For a useful collection of documents on the LWF engagement with economic globalisation, see Bloomquist (2004).

AGAPE process (Mshana 2007:2).<sup>75</sup> This study led to reflections on greed as a problematic issue just as poverty is. Thus, in a related WCC study on “Wealth Creation, Poverty and Ecology in Africa”, a methodology for measuring a “wealth Line” and “greed Line” was proposed for the African continent (WCC 2007b:35-37). Later in September 2009, the central committee of the WCC issued a statement on “just finance and the economy of life” in which greed was highlighted as a hallmark of the current financial system. It must be noted however that there were divergent opinions regarding the challenge of defining a “greed line”. To address this, the WCC convened a “Greed Line Study Group” in December 2009. The October 2011 issue of the *Ecumenical Review* was devoted to the first contributions of the study group member. As part of this emphasis on greed, the WCC later published a collection of essays by members of its Advisory Group on Economic Matters under the title *Justice Not Greed* reflecting various perspectives on how to address the 2008 financial crisis (see Brubaker & Mshana 2010; Peralta & Mshana 2016).

In the context of the AACC, the Yaoundé Assembly (2003) marked a watershed in the resolve of African churches to ponder on neoliberal globalisation. The Assembly made an urgent call for a new vision for overcoming poverty in Africa. With specific reference to neoliberal globalisation, the AACC collaborated with the WCC on an initiative to Overcome Poverty in Africa within the framework of the WCC study on “Wealth, Poverty and Ecology” mentioned above. The AACC initiative published a study document entitled “An Ecumenical Framework for Overcoming Poverty in Africa” (EFOPA) in which proposals were made on how the AACC would induce an alternative globalisation (see AACC 2005b:20-21).

The AACC also actively participated in the WCC Africa Regional Consultation on “Linking Poverty, Wealth and Ecology” held in Dar es Salaam in November 2007. The consultation produced several statements including one by African theologians. In this statement, the African theologians highlighted the potential of African principles such as *ubuntu* (humaneness), *ujamaa* (family hood), *uzima* (life in wholeness) and *baraza* (consultative decision making) as a basis for constructive critique of global capitalism (WCC 2007a:12). I will say more on ubuntu in the next chapter (see § 8.3 below).

Critiques of neoliberal globalisation have also been a focus of reflection by some Christian theologians especially, but not exclusive, to those working closely with ecumenical institutions (e.g Santa Ana 2006, 1998; Mshana 2008, 2002; Duchrow 1987; Taylor 1995). Other useful theological works dealing with globalisation include inter alia, Cynthia Moe-Lobeda’s (2002) *Healing a Broken World: Globalization and God*, the four volumes published as part of the Max Stackhouse project on God and Globalisation sponsored by the Centre of Theological Inquiry at Princeton (see Stackhouse 2000, 2007), and the three volumes on the globalisation project led by Allan Boesak (see Boesak & Hansen 2009, 2010; Boesak, Weusmann & Amjad-Ali 2010).

Having discussed the background to both neoliberalism and neoliberal globalisation, it is significant to note here that the African social political context in the period 1992-2013 cannot be discussed in isolation from the democratisation process and the related discourse on civil society. The context of globalisation formed the nexus for developments related to democracy and civil society. The next section will therefore focus on these issues.

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<sup>75</sup> Given the experience of the AGAPE process in which differing regional perspectives on neoliberal globalisation emerged, the new project held five regional consultations beginning with Africa (in Dar es Salaam, 2007), Latin America and Caribbean (in Guatemala City, 2008), Asia/Pacific (in Chiang Mai, 2009), Europe (in Budapest, 2010) and North America (in Calgary, 2011). The study project is chronicled in Mshana & Peralta (2015).

### 7.2.3 The Democratic Impulse in Africa

Although a problematic relationship, it may be argued that the era of widespread debate on globalisation as it relates to Africa coincided with the democratisation movement (see Li & Reuveny 2003). In what follows, I will briefly discuss the democratic impulse in Africa with specific reference to the role of the churches in the promotion of the democratisation movement in Africa. To do so, a very brief discussion on the nature and meaning of democracy is germane to a meaningful analysis of the role of churches as represented in the AACC.

#### *a) Searching for a Definitions of a Malleable and Contested concept*

This is not the place to review the emergence of democracy in Africa. That has been addressed variously in a number of studies (Ake 1996, 2000; Diamond 1999; Huntington 1991a). Suffice it to note that an influential thesis on democracy has been developed by political scientist Samuel Huntington (1991a) namely “waves of democratisation”.<sup>76</sup> Following Huntington’s thesis, many scholars point to the 1990s as the watershed for democratisation in Africa beginning with the March 1991 election in Bénin. Some however argue that democracy has been known to Africa well before the 1990s and that there were elections as well as multi-party regimes in Africa prior to this period. On that basis, some argue that we should rather speak of re-democratisation (Decalo 1991) while others elect to speak of the return of democracy (Southall 2003:9). The counter argument has often been that these were not marked by greater electoral competition (Bratton & Van de Walle 1997:6-9).

Some distinguish between democracy in relation to the state and democracy in traditional African societies. With regard to the latter, Julius Nyerere (1961) has described Africans as natural democrats; “they talk till they agree”. This view is however a subject of debate (see Ayana 2002:28; Simiyu 1988:69). Such varied perspectives beg the question what is democracy.

Following Huntington (1991a:7), I will employ the term democracy to refer to the procedural minimum definition of democracy.<sup>77</sup> This notwithstanding, I do not imply that democracy be limited to processes such as an election for that would simply be façade democracy. Given the focus of this study on Africa, I will more specifically follow Ali Mazrui’s description of democracy on the continent as “Africa’s second liberation struggle”.<sup>78</sup> According to Mazrui (1992:544-545),

If the first one was against alien rule, this new crusade is for African democracy. If the first liberation effort was for political independence, this struggle is for wider human rights. If the first endeavour was for collective self-determination, this liberation struggle seeks individual fulfilment.

The view of democracy as Africa’s second liberation appears to be one of the original

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<sup>76</sup> He distinguishes three waves of democratisation since 1828 and describes the democratic impulse in Africa as belonging to the third wave. He locates the first wave in the period 1828-1926, the second between 1943 and 1962, and third wave beginning in 1974. Huntington (1991a:16-21) argues that the first and second democratic waves were followed not merely by some backsliding but by major reverse waves during which most regime changes throughout the world were from democracy to authoritarianism in period 1922-1942 and 1958-1975, respectively.

<sup>77</sup> Huntington defines democracy in terms of institutional and electoral processes. In his view, a 20<sup>th</sup> century political system may be defined as democratic “to the extent that its most powerful collective decision makers are selected through fair, honest and periodic elections in which candidates clearly compete for votes and in which virtually all the adult population is eligible to vote.”

<sup>78</sup> For a detailed discussion of the concept of “second liberation” as an analytical tool for democracy in Africa, see Osaghae (2005).

contributions by African scholars on the democratisation debate (see Ekeh 1997:96; Osaghae 2005:2). Nevertheless, the concept of second liberation has been least acknowledged and later on interrogated in the literature on democracy in Africa. Paying attention to concepts such as this is necessary not only for reasons discussed in chapter 4 of this study regarding African historiography but also as a gateway into African political thought (cf. §4.2.2 above). Further, it best captures Africa's ongoing struggles against new forces such as those associated with neoliberal globalisation.

b) *Democracy: Africa's Second Liberation?*

Scholarly works on democracy in Africa advance several factors to explain the popularisation of the democracy movement on the continent. According to Bratton and Van de Walle (1997:151), "the onset of African regime transitions was driven principally from within but against a background of political and economic influences from abroad." The end of the cold war was very significant in this regard. Additionally, the economic and political conditionalities that Western funding and donor agencies attached to foreign aid contributed to widening the calls for democratisation (cf. §7.2.4a below). Under the rubric of "good governance", donors required recipient countries to enforce institutional reforms to support democratisation. However, democracy promotion through economic and political conditionalities was ambiguous. Studies devoted to the question of evaluating donor aid in promotion of democracy are instructive in this regard (see Carothers 1999:342-348).

According to Bratton and Van de Walle (1997:219), of the 25 cases of politically conditioned aid in Africa that they have studied, only eight resulted in a democratic transition. Their analysis suggests that domestic factors were probably more crucial than international ones (1997:220-21). This view was earlier underscored by Ake (1996:137) who argues that impetus for democracy in Africa lies in the internal motivation namely "the failure of development strategies in Africa and the politics associated with them" (cf. 2000:155). Put differently, the popular struggles for democracy in Africa were partly incited by economic decline in the 1980s and the impact of SAPs (cf. Bratton & van de Walle 1997:100,104; Decalo 1991:154). Given arguments presented in my discussion of the illusion of the political independence (first liberation struggle) in the previous two chapters, agitation for a second liberation was obvious (see Ekeh 1997:96-97). In the book *Popular Struggles for Democracy in Africa* edited by Peter Anyang' Nyong'o (1987), a number of country specific examples of such agitation are articulated.

In light of the above, one may argue that the notion of the democratisation movement in Africa as "the second liberation" is sharpened in view of the complex connection often made between development and democracy. Hence for Ake, (1996:138) the democracy movement in Africa is "trying to initiate the kind of politics that will make development possible."

The linkage of development and democracy has been observed severally (see Ake 1996, 2000; Mugambi 1997b). At a conference of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) that met in Arusha, Tanzania in 1990, the "absence" of democracy in Africa was seen as the cause of the crisis of underdevelopment in the continent. Thus, in its document, *The African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation*, the UNECA affirmed that

Nations cannot be built without the popular support and full participation of the people, nor can the economic crisis be resolved and the human and economic conditions improved without the full and effective contribution, creativity and popular enthusiasm of the vast majority of the people (1990:17).

The connection that is often made between development and democracy partly accounts for

the significance of churches and other non-state actors (read: civil society).

#### **7.2.4 Democracy and Development in Africa: The Role of Churches**

Having described democracy as Africa's second liberation above, this section entails an analysis of the role of churches in the promotion of democracy in Africa. In order to capture the distinctive role of the churches, my discussion will begin with a brief conceptual analysis of the notion of civil society and then proceed to discuss the role of the churches in the promotion of democracy with specific reference to the AACC.

According to Bratton & Van de Walle (1997:195), democratisation presupposes political liberalisation. They further argue that democratisation is "theoretically and practically impossible without liberalisation because democratic institutions can flourish only in a context of civil liberties." Such considerations beg the question of the relationship between political liberalisation and economic liberalisation given that these two have tended to go hand in hand as highlighted in the above discussion on foreign democratic assistance (aid). Scholarly debates on this issue have revealed underlying paradoxes and contradictions (see Li & Reuveny 2003:35-37). While it is outside the scope of the present study to offer a detailed discussion on this, suffice it to note that this debate attains significance for an understanding of the role of civil society in democratisation given the fact that democracy in Africa emerged in the era of globalisation. The civil society movement has undoubtedly benefited from networks and synergies made possible in a global context. At the same time, civil society organisations and churches have been critical of underlying tensions between neoliberal globalisation and democracy. Such critiques are a subject of scholarly analyses unravelling problematic connections between neoliberal globalisation and democracy (see Brown 2003:46; Goodhart 2001:531-536).<sup>79</sup> Harvey (2005:176) notes this problematic pointedly when he argues that given the neoliberal concern for the individual which often trumps any social democratic concern for equality, democracy, and social solidarities, neoliberalism would prefer the lead of the economic elite or executive rather than parliamentary powers.

##### *a) Civil Society and the Democratisation Movement in Africa*

In what follows, I will briefly discuss the notion of civil society as it relates to the promotion of democracy and locate the role of churches in that regard. Civil society is a rather ambiguous concept that has been defined variously. According to Bayart (1986:112), it is a conceptual construct that is "not necessarily embodied in a single, identifiable structure". Definitional differences regarding its meaning largely relate to how the actors and activities of civil society are construed. In this regard, although some tend to use the phrase Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) interchangeably with civil society, such conflation is problematic. In this study, I follow Larry Diamond's (1999:221) comprehensive definition of civil society as:

the realm of organised social life that is open, voluntary, self-generating, at least partially self-supporting, autonomous from the state, and bound by a legal order or set of shared rules. It is

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<sup>79</sup> For Goodhart (2001:531-536), this is best understood in terms of "democratic deficits and disjunctures" created by the seemingly relentless advance of globalisation. He speaks of disjunctures to refer to how states, as a result of globalisation, struggle to influence many supranational activities and transactions such as terrorism, public health and economic integration. In short, these issues often escape state jurisdiction. He speaks of deficits to refer challenges associated with state inability (in many cases) to hold supranational institutions such as transnational companies in view of concerns regarding transparency and accountability on economic questions which often elude direct control and regulation of the state. In similar vein, theologian Cynthia Moe-Lobeda (2002:30) argues that economic globalization "removes from more or less democratically constituted and accountable political bodies the power to influence decisions that shape common life and places that power into the hands of relatively few unaccountable economic players."

distinct from 'society' in general in that it involves citizens acting collectively in a public sphere to express their interests, passions, preferences, and ideas, to exchange information, to achieve collective goals, to make demands on the state, to improve the structure and functioning of the state, and to hold state officials accountable.

Within this broad framework, civil society would encompass diverse forms of associational life that may include the media, trade unions, student, business and other interest associations; para-church organisations; and various types of NGOs (see Chazan 1992:288). In the late 1980's and much of the 1990's, it was generally believed that civil society is a necessary if not sufficient condition for democracy to thrive. Some argued that civil society is the "cutting edge of the effort to build a viable democratic order" (Diamond (1988:26). Such views stressed the potential of civil society to deepen and consolidate democracy once it is established (Diamond 1999:233). However, the extent to which this is the case is a subject of debate amongst scholars (Bratton & Van de Walle 1997:147-149; Ake 2000:152-154).<sup>80</sup> In light of such discourse, one may have to acknowledge the limitation of civil society as the midwife of democracy. This notwithstanding, the significant role of civil society in both facilitating and consolidating democracy has been emphasised, especially amongst Western donors, given the link often made between development and democracy.

The linkage between development and democracy is best understood against the background of the debate on state led development that may be traced back to the 1970s and 1980s. Donor countries often judged the failure of development in African countries at the time as a failure of state led development. This resulted in the reduction in foreign aid given directly to African governments and the unprecedented rise of development aid channelled through international and domestic NGO's and civil society organisations (CSOs). NGOs came to be seen as alternative development players and later hailed as vehicles of development, democratisation and empowerment (see Dicklitch 1998:ix).<sup>81</sup> Accordingly, NGO received not only financial support but also technical assistance in some cases. Increasingly, NGO's came to be seen as the vehicle for building stronger civil society which in turn promotes democracy.

For some scholars, this may imply that to a large extent, NGOs were propelled by economic and political liberalisation (see Osaghae 2005:17). Others even contend that civil society is a global neoliberal reinvention of an alternative to the state. The latter view leads to concerns regarding the "competing approaches to the concept of civil society and civil society's relations with the market as well as with the state, at different levels" (see Mayo 2005:35). This highlights a neoliberal problematic in at least two ways. Firstly, one may raise concern regarding the unequal relationship between NGOs in Africa and their counterparts and donors in Western countries (see Makumbe 1998:315). Secondly, there is an apparent contradiction between the liberal democratic emphasis on "political and economic liberalisation" on the one hand and the priority given to economic liberalisation over the political in the contemporary context of neoliberal globalisation.

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<sup>80</sup> Some scholars highlight contradictory tendencies within civil society organisations in certain countries owing to questionable relationships with the state. According to Fatton (1995:93), for instance, civil society is "neither homogeneous, nor wholly emancipator." In his view, civil society is "contradictory, exhibiting both democratic and despotic tendencies ... is conflict-ridden and prone to the devastating violence of multiple forms of particularisms." For a detailed review of literature on the role of civil society in strengthening (liberal) democracy and counter arguments, see Mercer (2002:8-12).

<sup>81</sup> David Korten (1987:147-150), for instance, has formulated an influential theory on the role of NGOs in development based on a generational approach. He describes four generations of voluntary development action. The first generation focussed on relief and welfare, the second on community development, the third on sustainable systems development, and the fourth on people's movement with a global agenda. Korten initially developed this framed in his 1987 article and elaborated on it further in his 1990 major publication.

### b) *The Churches and Civil Society in Africa*

As intimated in the previous chapter, discourse on civil society entered the AACC in the period leading up to the Harare Assembly (1992). The AACC publication *Civil Society, the State & African Development in the 1990s* (1993) is therefore instructive on the AACCs burgeoning perspectives on the place of the church in wider civil society.<sup>82</sup> In a different but related ecumenical context, former coordinator of the WCC programme on Justice, Peace, and Creation, Israel Batista (1995:246) argued that since civil society was hitherto approached mainly from social, philosophical, economic and political consideration, “more systematic ecclesial and theological considerations are still awaited.” The theological concern that emerged in this regard pertains to the self-understanding of the church vis-à-vis civil society (cf. Raiser 1994b:42). Although this question has featured prominently in a number of recommendations in AACC Assemblies and consultations since the Harare Assembly (1992), it remains largely unresolved.

At an AACC consultation on democracy and development held in Nairobi in August 1994, the need for clarity in the churches’ self-understanding with respect to engagement within civil society was recognised. Yet, the consultation participants merely affirmed that “the church in social action is seen to be very much part of the civil society” (see Mugambi 1997b:184). In light of the changing configuration of funding to churches and ecumenical structures during the late 1990s, AACC General Secretary José Chipenda noted during the organisation’s General Assembly at Addis Ababa (1997) that there was some confusion of identity given that the “difference between church and non-church related NGOs” was no longer clear (see AACC 1997:34). Programmatically, the AACCs promotion of the theology of reconstruction within its constituency placed the institution in an amicable position to engage in programmes and activities that would appear as typical civil society issues. As I will show in my discussion of the theology of reconstruction as promoted within the ambits of the AACC, this new theological hermeneutic did not however help resolve the tension between what the church is and what it does. How then should the role of the AACC (and the churches it represents) in democracy promotion be understood?

### c) *The Role of Churches in the Democratisation Process in Africa*

African church history reflects a profile of ironies in the relationship between Christianity and politics in general and between the church and the state in particular. At times, there has been tacit complicity by churches to the schemes of those in power. Yet, examples also abound on how the ecumenical churches have faithfully witnessed to their prophetic role in society (see De Gruchy 1995a:175). With regard to complicity, Freston (2001:111) notes that “mainline denominations have supported far more years of authoritarian rule in independent Africa than other churches.” The hazy relationship between the Anglican Church in Kenya and Arap Moi’s government is an apt example (Benson 1995:186-188). In the Zimbabwean context, Hallencreutz (1988:256:290) tells the story of the ambiguous relationship of the Zimbabwe Christian Council with the state in the 1980’s.

During the 1990’s, ambiguous relationships between the churches and the state were observed particularly amongst a variety of Pentecostals type churches and the so-called evangelical churches in many parts of Africa (see Gifford 1995:5). Several essays in the book *Evangelical Christianity and Democracy in Africa*, edited by Terrence Ranger (2008), succinctly underscore this observation. Ellis and Ter Haar (2004:108) have also observed the political acquiescence of such churches and noted their susceptibility to lending support to

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<sup>82</sup> For discussions on civil society in the wider ecumenical movement, see the essays by Julio de Santa Ana (1994), Konrad Raiser (1994b) and McFee (2003).

regimes “considered unsavoury in liberal quarters”. According to Kalu (2008:213), however, it is plausible to speak of a Pentecostal political practice in recent times. Given the divergent interpretations on Pentecostal political engagement, I affirm with Joel Robbins (2010:172) – an anthropologist of Christianity – that the results “of studies of the way Pentecostalism shapes political attitudes and practices is at this point utterly inconclusive.”

However, that the mainline churches in Africa have played a decisive role in the democratisation processes in Africa has been underscored severally (De Gruchy 1995a:181-182; Gifford 1995:8-10; Lumumba-Kasongo 1998:64; Phiri 2001:133-138; Ross 1993). Gifford (1995:3) explains the role of churches in this regard to have “involved challenging political structures, urging reforms, advocating political change, and even presiding over the change itself.” The avenues through which the churches carried out this role included the issuance of pastoral letters<sup>83</sup> (in Malawi and Zambia) and publications of National Christian Councils on democracy. Others were the more pragmatic aspects such as advocacy for human rights, civic education, leading national conferences<sup>84</sup> (mainly in Francophone Africa), monitoring democratic elections in places where founding elections were held, and serving on critical committees and structures focussing on national reconciliation such as the case of Tutu in the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Although Protestant churches took an active role in promoting democracy as was the case with protestant churches belonging to the South African Council of Churches (SACC), the National Council of Churches in Kenya (NCCCK) and individual Kenyan clergy men (such as the Anglican Bishops David Gitari, Alexander Muge, and Henry Okullu, as well the Presbyterian minister Timothy Njoya), and the Christian Council of Namibia (CCN), the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) was generally on the forefront (see Lumumba-Kasongo 1998:64-65).<sup>85</sup> It must be noted that much of the literature on the advocacy role of protestant and Roman Catholic churches, documents experiences at national level. Few studies explore the question at the grassroots level. According to a case study on the advocacy role of churches in Kenya, Malawi and Zambia, at least four reasons may be identified for the success of the churches’ advocacy. These are namely,

the authority and legitimacy of the churches; the national-level linkages between churches and other institutions; the links churches have internationally, and the skill and capacity of individuals within the churches and ecumenical bodies to engage in advocacy work at the national level (Gibbs & Ajulu 1999:82).

From the perspective of the AACC, one may argue that the organisation provided solidarity with and for the actions of its member churches nationally. Programmatically, democracy became part of the AACCs formal mandate in the period 1992-1997 following

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<sup>83</sup> This has particularly been a strategy of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) in many African countries. An instructive example here is the March 1992 letter of the Catholic Bishops of Malawi, in which they made a call for democracy and condemned human rights abuses (see Ncozana 1995:36).

<sup>84</sup> Bratton and Van de Walle (1997:111-112) hail the idea of national conference as an indigenously generated African contribution to political institution building and regime transition. Bratton (1994:6) describes a national conference as “an assembly of national elites, between several hundred and several thousand strong, which includes representatives of all major segments of society and is often chaired by a church leader.” Eight countries in francophone Africa held the so-called sovereign national conferences with the first one held in Benin in 1990 and others soon followed in Burkina Faso, Chad, Congo Brazzaville, Gabon, Mali, Niger, and Togo. Church leaders presided over the conferences held in Niger, Gabon, the Congo and the later conference in Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Congo).

<sup>85</sup> In the history of Christianity, Protestantism favoured democracy than did the RCC. For the basis of Protestant support, see Huntington (1991b:30). See also Haynes (2001:149-152) for a discussion on the RCC as a transnational religious actor in support of democracy.

recommendations of its Harare Assembly (1992). Accordingly, from 18-23 July 1993, the AACC organised a conference on “The Role of Religious Leaders in Peace Making and Social Change in Africa” in close cooperation with the Catholic Bishops’ Association for East and Central Africa (AMECEA) in Nyeri, Kenya. Amongst other issues, the consultation called on the church in Africa to engage itself with the renewal of all aspects of the African identity including politics, economy, ethics, aesthetics, and metaphysics (see AACC 1993:273).

The AACC later organised a conference on “Democratisation and Development” in Bujumbura, Burundi from 23<sup>rd</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> August 1993. In what used to be its monthly publication, the AACC later devoted the entire issue of the November 1993 *Baobab* to the issues of democracy and civil society. In collaboration with the WCC, the AACC soon organised a major consultation on democratisation and democracy in Nairobi, Kenya from 1-5 August 1994. The report the consultation was published as *Democracy and Development in Africa: The Role of Churches* edited by Jesse Mugambi (1997b). The participants at the Nairobi consultation highlighted four areas that needed the actions of churches namely globalisation, democratisation, development and ecumenical renewal. AACC member churches and National Councils of Churches (NCCs) were urged to resist the negative impact of globalisation through advocacy and theological reflection on the relationship between theology and economics. Regarding development, participants highlighted the potential of ecumenical unity for adding a moral tone to political imperatives in the realm of social development (see Mugambi 1997b:41).

On democratisation, the Nairobi (1994) consultation urged churches and NCCs to affirm their commitment to principles of democracy including the independence of an electoral commission, adherence to democratic constitutionalism and the rule of law amongst others. An analysis of the papers presented at that consultation indicates that the role of the church was mainly underscored in terms of advocacy. The paper by Aaron Tolen is worth mentioning given its emphasis on a theological understanding of the churches’ involvement in promoting democracy (see Mugambi 1997b:71). Following Jürgen Moltmann’s perspective of political theology, Tolen suggested that the “Church must become aware of its political existence and its current social duties”. Given the general neglect of this aspect in reflections on the role of the church in democracy promotion, it was significant that the consultation recommended that churches and NCCs should commit resources to “deepening their theological understanding of ‘democratisation’ with Africa in its economic, political, cultural and ecclesiological aspects” (see Mugambi 1997b:40).

From the foregoing, one may ask why and how churches were drawn into the role they played in promoting democracy. This question forms the basis of an informative study by Isaac Phiri (2001) on the role of churches in political transitions in Africa. Following a conceptual model of analysing church and state relations in Africa proposed by Africanist scholar Jean François Bayart, Phiri (2001:1) argues that the “intervention of churches into national politics is linked to the vacuum that occurs in African political systems, resulting from state repression of civil society” (cf. Haynes 1996:107). For the most part, Phiri (2001:7) conceptualises churches as one element of civil society albeit one that has the institutional and organisational structures, communications resources, leadership capability, and transnational contacts necessary to resist or even rival the state” (cf. Gifford 1998:308).

For purposes of the present study, it is worth noting that Phiri inadvertently accentuates the tension between the church’s self-understanding vis-à-vis its role in society. However, it seems to me that Phiri does not pay sufficient attention to the theological basis of the churches involvement in the promotion of democracy. For instance, while his thesis may arguably be

applicable to the South African experience,<sup>86</sup> one would have to concede that theological conviction was probably critical for the churches' ecumenical struggle in South Africa. The emergence of contextual theology in South Africa – encapsulated in the South African black theology of liberation, the formation of the Institute of Contextual Theology, the Kairos Document (1985), and the Belhar confession – was critical for the churches' self-understanding in the struggle against apartheid. According to Borer (1993:333), “a combination of political change and religious change created the opportunity for the South African Council of Churches to re-evaluate its self-identity and its proper role in society as well as its relation to politics.” De Gruchy (2004:189) has helpfully shown how the SACC under the leadership of Tutu “provided Christian theological and moral support for the liberation struggle.” The South African history is nevertheless ironic given that while the ecumenical church provided a fierce struggle against apartheid, some churches, particularly the Dutch Reformed Church, advanced theological justification for apartheid.

The argument here is that the churches' involvement cannot be explained only in terms of sociological variables as Phiri does. Of course, by admitting that the role of churches is affected by variables such as quality of church leadership, organisational capacity and theological emphasis, Phiri (2001:8) comes closer to an appreciation of theological concerns. Arguably, Phiri's treatment of theological issues at stake in the churches involvement in democracy is at best tangential. In this regard, the volumes by John de Gruchy (1995a) and Paul Gifford (1995, 1998) are more instructive regarding the role of churches in the first stages of the democratic revolution in Africa. This notwithstanding, Phiri's argument that churches lost their distinctive political role subsequent to their contribution in promoting democracy and that they were threatened with either political irrelevance or fragmentation into partisan division is indeed a crucial point.

In South Africa for instance, several theologians have pondered the question regarding the new role of churches in the post-apartheid South Africa (see Gous 1993:266; Maluleke 2000:205). Arguably, the emergence of African theology of reconstruction as articulated by Villa Vicencio (1992:19, 32-49) was an attempt to address the challenge of the role of churches in a changing South Africa. An analysis of the history of the AACC and its promotion of the theology of reconstruction during the 1990's illustrates similar concerns. As I will argue in my analysis of this theology within the context of the AACC, its proponents stress ethics and do not sufficiently anchor their reflections on an ecclesio hermeneutic. In what follows therefore, I will briefly discuss the churches involvement in democracy with reference to theological themes that warrant such participation. Put differently, what ecclesio-political hermeneutic grounded the churches' involvement in calls for democracy?

#### *d) Christianity and Politics in Africa: A Brief Theological Analysis*

The 1990s witnessed a number of publications addressing various aspects of the relationship between Christianity and politics in Africa (Aboagye-Mensah 1994; Kobia 1993; Nürnberger 1991; Magesa & Nthamburi 2003; Twaddle & Hansen 1995). While acknowledging the scope covered in such works, my analysis of the theological basis of the churches' involvement in democracy in this section will significantly draw on a text by John De Gruchy (1995a) in which he offers a constructive analysis of the relationship between democracy and Christianity. The purpose of this section is to provide a useful cue to my analysis of ecclesiology and ethics in the AACC in light of its support of democracy during the 1990s.

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<sup>86</sup> Here, I find partial affinity between Phiri's view and that held by De Gruchy (2004:207) given the latter's assertion that “the ecumenical church leaders in South Africa had assumed a political role by default due to the banning of the liberation movement.”

De Gruchy (1995a:40-46) argues that while Christianity cannot be equated to a particular political system, the democratic vision – understood in terms of the values of equality, freedom, and justice – comes closer to “the best option available for embodying penultimate expressions of the vision of shalom”. He construes the vision of *shalom* as the ecumenical vision and places his own view in resonance with Bosch’s articulation of the emerging missionary paradigm (De Gruchy 1995a:276-277). He vigorously portrays the churches as “the midwives of democratic transition and reconstruction” particularly in the South African context (1995a:193).<sup>87</sup> De Gruchy further describes the role of the churches in democracy to include, amongst others, “exorcizing the past”, “nurturing a democratic culture” and “critical solidarity”. In his view, these roles are derived from the churches’ pastoral, evangelical and prophetic mandate respectively (1995a:215). A deeper analysis of such roles arguably brings to light the ecumenical tension between ecclesiology and ethics. Indeed, at the heart of such roles is the tension between what the church is and what it does.

According to De Gruchy (1995a:277), “it is impossible to conceive of the mission of the church apart from the struggle for a just world order, or to consider the role of the church except in relation to the needs and concerns of humanity and creation as a whole.” Arguably, De Gruchy’s significant contribution to the theological discourse on democratisation lies in his self-conscious effort as a theologian writing on a topic that has been largely dominated by political scientists.<sup>88</sup> Consider for instance his view that the “proclamation of the good news of God’s reign in Jesus Christ addresses situations of social crisis and political transition with a peculiar directness” (De Gruchy 1995a:232). Drawing on the theological heritage of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Karl Barth, the Confessing Church and the Barmen Declaration he proposes a theology for a new world order. His proposal, as intimated above, places emphasis on the prophetic message of the reign of God and the doctrine of the Trinity. In so doing, he notes that there is a creative and constructive tension between the Christian faith and culture as well as between the reign of God and sovereignty of the people. In my view, this highlights the issue of power. Here, my focus is on power as it relates to the relationship between religion and politics in the African context.<sup>89</sup>

#### e) *Power in African Politics*

Within the ambits of the AACC, the issue has only been inchoately touched on. Oduyoye intimated on power in her keynote address to the AACC 7<sup>th</sup> General Assembly at Addis Ababa (1997) when she observed that the use of power in both church and state must serve the interest of all God’s people. It is understandable for an African woman theologian of Oduyoye’s stature to indeed note power as a significant issue in theological reflection on democracy. The variety of perspectives on power in discourse on religion and politics in Africa illustrates the significance of such reflection.

In their reflections on power, Ellis & Ter Haar (2004) developed a hypothesis that religion

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<sup>87</sup> For more on the role of the churches in this regard, see Alberts and Chikane (1991) and the “Cape Town Statement” (1991).

<sup>88</sup> Gifford (1998:26) has however criticised De Gruchy’s approach as prescriptive arguing that it does not actually reflect the theology promoted by churches in their involvement in the democratic movement. Gifford (1998) thus locates his own study as making contribution towards a descriptive approach through case studies of Ghana, Uganda, Zambia and Cameroon.

<sup>89</sup> Admittedly, the notion of power is a complex reality in political theory. One may distinguish between the Gramscian, Foucauldian, Weberian, and Herbermarian notions of power, amongst others. For a helpful analysis of power in light of the tension between politics and religion see Raiser (2013:119-128). In the African context, one may arguably illumine the notion of vital force as described by Placide Tempels and elaborated by Alexis Kagamé and Vincent Mulago, amongst others. For an overview, see Sakupapa (2012:425-428).

is a key to understanding politics in Africa. They offered an analysis of the relationship between religion and politics in Africa and underscored the notion that “African politicians are concerned with power, whatever its source” (2004:89). Such a perspective is of course not entirely new. A number of commentators have addressed this under the rubric of the sacralisation of power in African traditional societies (see Bediako 2000:102-104; Asamoah-Gyadu 2016:353-354).

Sacralisation of power in traditional Africa especially entailed the view that the power held by chiefs was sacred albeit temporal. Against this background, Bediako (2000:103) suggests that historically, Christianity has been a de-sacralising force owing to its emphasis on the derivative character of all earthly power. However, by pointing to the transcendent realm as the source of that power, Christianity affirms African tradition in this regard (cf. Mbiti 1969:32). Theological reflection in African theology has partly addressed this in relation to the notion of vital force (see Mulago 1969:138; Tempels 1959:47). This has also been appropriated in discourse on African pneumatology (see Anderson 1990:73; Sakupapa 2012:423-426). Yet, Christianity pushes the view further when it locates the source of power not in the ancestors but absolutely in God.

Given the appropriation of Christian views in this regard by Africans without necessary giving up their traditions, the sacralisation of power is arguably discernible in several societies to date. For, as Bediako (2000:104) argues, “since the roots of sacralisation in African tradition lie in religion, it is in terms of religion that it can be encountered.” This partly explains why African politicians tend to appeal to religion in their quest for and consolidation of political power. Some analysts have noted the appropriation of this view by a number of first generation African nation-state leaders such as Mobutu Sese Seko and Kwame Nkrumah (see Bediako 2000:102 Gatwa 2005:111,148). In the case of Nkrumah, one may argue that he intended the political takeover of religion through various manoeuvres including the adaptation of the honorific title *Osagyefo* (deliverer) to himself (see Sanneh 2015:95). Recently, Frederik Chiluba, the former President of Zambia who declared Zambia a Christian nation on 29th December 1991 barely two months after taking over presidency from Kenneth Kaunda, used Christian rhetoric during his tenure as republican President (see Gifford 1998:198). Chiluba earlier invited pastors to State House (the official residence of a sitting head of State in Zambia) to cleanse it of evil spirits. By covenanting the country to God and repenting on behalf of the nation of idolatry, witchcraft, immorality, injustice and corruption, it may be argued that Chiluba’s approach was a translation of spiritual warfare into government politics. Ironically, Chiluba spent much of his life after presidency attending to his trial on corruption charges.

The above examples illustrate the widespread use of religious symbols for political mobilisation in Africa. Describing how religious thought informs political action, Ellis & Ter Haar (2004:113) argue that “religious ideology provides believers with a level of understanding that they consider to be deeper than explanations that limit power to its material aspect.”<sup>90</sup> On this basis, they conclude that such modes of understanding have a real effect on politics. This insight finds concise expression in the following observation by Ogbu Kalu (2003b):

Religion is intricately woven into the fabric of politics and provides the compelling touchstone of legitimacy or the love of the ruler by the ruled; the motive for exercising power; reason to be obeyed; the determinant of the moral standards and style of power and the engine that moves governance.

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<sup>90</sup> A case can also be made that religion and politics influence each other (see Chitando 2002). It is interesting that Pentecostalism in Africa proliferated during the period of democratisation.

Behind this contention is the view that religion is a prism through which many people in sub-Saharan Africa view the world (see Bujo 2003:123-125). African politicians thus attempt to either co-opt religious groups with apparent religious influence or simply exert their influence on such groups (see Ellis & Ter Haar 2004:89). In many cases, this has led to the abuse of 'power' by both political and religious leaders.

Such dubious approaches to the quest for power must certainly be challenged. In this vein, a critical Christian theological appropriation of the notion of power associated with the promotion of life has been suggested by a number of theologians. Elias Bongmba argues that the *telos* of power is to work for greater freedom and the empowerment of the society. He calls for a rethinking of power from a theological perspective as part of a critique of contemporary political praxis in Africa. In this regard, Bongmba (2004:126) argues, "we should see power as the shifting potential that is available to individuals as well as to societies to be used to enhance human existence." Drawing on the Yoruba idea of *ase* and Tillich's ontology, Bongmba (2004:129) contends that since "all people derive power from a divine source that gives power to all living and non-living entities," power must be an empowering mechanism. One would add that a specifically Christian perspective on power also entails the perspective of the cross. As Bongmba (2004:109) puts it, "no conception of divine power is complete if it ignores the reality that God is a suffering God."

Laurenti Magesa (1997:66-67) has proposed a view that portrays the exercise of power as directly linked to the promotion of life and service to the community. Such a view has been affirmed Peter Kanyandago (2003:169) who argues that democracy "must be subjected to the conditions which include participation and decentralisation in view of defending the life of individuals and the community." In some cases however, churches in Africa have been culprits by exercising power within the church in ways that exclude and discriminate. Ongoing debates in some church circles on sexuality and women ordination are a case in point. The foregoing brief analysis highlights the need for theological reflection on power as another unique contribution of churches in the discourse on democracy and governance in contemporary African societies.

A critical analysis of the history of the AACC does indeed show that the organisation has provided an ecumenical witness to the call for Africa's second liberation (see AACC 1994, 1997a, 1997b, 1997c). This is severally acknowledged (De Gruchy 1995a:175-181; Gifford 1998:314). However, although the issue regarding the abuse of power has been inchoately highlighted in some AACC Assembly deliberations (AACC 1994:69), theological reflection on power has not received sufficient attention. One may therefore argue that ecclesiology, the AACCs involvement in democracy promotion was to some extent predicated on a particular missiological understanding of the church. The focus was thus placed on what the churches can do together in promoting democracy associated as it was with development. Arguably, the theological warrant for such engagement was predicated on the African theology of reconstruction which the AACC promoted during the 1990's. However, as I will argue below, as the theology of reconstruction got going, it tended to focus more on ethics than ecclesiology at least in practice.

### **7.3 The AACC and the Theology of Reconstruction**

Within the circles of the AACC, the churches commitment to social transformation including advocacy for democracy was generally articulated in terms of a theology of reconstruction at least since the early 1990's. Therefore, further to the brief historic background to the emergence of this theology as discussed in the previous chapter (see §6.7.2 above), this section will provide a detailed analysis of the African theology of reconstruction with specific focus on its implications for ecumenical theology and social ethics. For, as Mugambi (2015)

recently observed, “reconstruction was the mandate of the AACC for twenty years between 1990 and 2010”. In this regard, my analysis of the AACCs handling of ecclesiology and ethics in the period 1992-2013 will further seek to illustrate how reconstruction featured as a theological root metaphor to describe the role of churches in addressing challenges facing the African continent in the post-Cold War period. Since the Kenyan theologian Jesse Mugambi has been at the centre of AACC deliberations on the theology of reconstruction, this section will discuss in more detail some of the key aspects in his articulation of reconstruction. This will be preceded by a very brief overview of similar proposals within African theology.

### 7.3.1 The Theology of Reconstruction in African Theology

Apart from Mugambi, whose theology I will discuss in detail in ensuing subsections (see § 7.3.3), the use of the post-exilic metaphor of reconstruction has found expression in the theologies of a number of African theologians, most notably Charles Villa-Vicencio and Kä Mana. Given that Mugambi made the proposal for an African theology of reconstruction already in 1990, it has become fashionable to regard him as the pioneer theologian in this regard.

#### a) *Villa-Vicencio: A Theology of Nation Building*

In the South African context, Charles Villa-Vicencio (1992) expressed a theology of reconstruction in his book *A Theology of Reconstruction*. The focus of his articulation is to point out what he sees as the role of theology in a new democratic South Africa. Arguably, the changed political context was the single most critical basis necessitating his call for a theology of reconstruction in the South African context (see Maluleke 1994:248).<sup>91</sup> Villa-Vicencio envisages that the prophetic role of the church needed to extend to include the cooperation of the church with the democratic state on socio-economic justice, gender, human rights and national reconciliation issues. Accordingly, Villa-Vicencio (1992:9-10, 280-283) employs the ethical notion of “middle axioms”, a concept originally articulated by J.H. Oldham (1937) and espoused by Christian social ethicists such as Ronald Preston (1983:141-156). As Forrester (2004:12) explains, middle axioms imply “a procedure for handling ethical issues, and a logic of the proper relationship of theology and public policy.” In the view of Villa-Vicencio (1992:9), middle axioms may well serve as a conceptual and contextual device “that integrates the contextual and transcendental demands of the gospel”. Accordingly, Villa-Vicencio argues that in the new South African context, theology needs to engage with the social and human sciences particularly with regard to the issues of law making and human

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<sup>91</sup> For a detailed appraisal of Villa-Vicencio’s proposal, see Maluleke (1994). See also Farisani (2003:30), who expresses ideological uneasiness regarding Villa-Vicencio’s reading of the biblical Ezra-Nehemiah story. Although Villa-Vicencio has been widely criticised in the South African context, the significance of his proposal has been variously noted by some South African theologians of various theological orientations e.g. black theologians (Vellem 2010:554) and theologians stressing the notion of public theology. The latter may also be seen as a post-apartheid theology (see Koopman 2010). Concerned about the seeming jettisoning of liberation from reconstruction in Villa-Vicencio’s theology of reconstruction, South African black theologian Vuyani Vellem (2010:553) suggests reformulating reconstruction as a public theology. However, there debate on the relationship between black theology and public theology, but more importantly, on what the notion of public theology entails within the South African context. As such, Maluleke (2011:83-84), unlike Vellem (although he [Vellem] does note the debate between public theology and liberation theology), is hesitant to make such hasty moves. In an instructive response to a paper on public theology presented by theologian William Storrar, Maluleke (2011:89) argues that “public theology seems to dismiss effortlessly local theologies such as black theology, African theology and liberation theology.” He note only challenges the right of public theology to dismiss such theologies but also questions whether public theology represents the most potent vehicle for dealing with the reality of the South African situation. For a more nuanced proposal on public theology in the South African context, see Smit (2007).

rights. Theology would have to make concrete proposals to deal with the complex economic and political problems (1992:38). This would be theology's contribution to the post-Apartheid nation-building project. However, as some critics show, one of the challenges associated with employing middle-axioms is that they place great weight on the role of the technical expert (Forrester 2004:15). Additionally, it is claimed that middle-axioms do not lead to actions that are prophetic and for that matter not distinctively "Christian" (see Marshall 2001:28-29; Northcott 2004:106-108). According to Duncan Forrester (2004:10-16), middle-axioms tend to be abstract. In his view, what is needed is to turn to the Christian narrative. While Villa-Vicencio recognises the force of Forrester's criticism, he argues that even though story, tradition and biblical teaching are important, they are not sufficient. What is needed, he argues, "is to translate this heritage into concrete proposals" (Villa-Vicencio 1992:283).

b) *Kä Mana: A Theology of Reconstruction as the transformation of African Imaginaire*

The Congolese philosopher and theologian Kä Mana (alias Kangudie Mana) has also developed a theology of reconstruction but one that stresses the transformation of African *imaginaire* (Ngong 2010:50-53). Dedji (2001:254) observes that in the writings of Kä Mana, the French word *imaginaire* is "extensively used as a psycho-anthropological attribute by which he attempts to categorise and analyse a social group's worldviews, their patterns of thought or the 'inner drive' motivating their behaviour in specific circumstances." Given that most of Kä Mana's writings are in French – a language in which I lack competence – the following brief discussion of his theology of reconstruction is based on the English version of his *Chrétiens et Églises d'Afrique Penser l'Avenir* and also on secondary literature on his work (see Dedji 2003:93-154). Kä Mana (2004:1-4) locates his discussion of reconstruction within a soteriological framework. Accordingly, he develops a Christology of abundant life in Jesus Christ as the "ultimate axiom of his theology of reconstruction" (Dedji 2003:153). It is significant to note that Kä Mana was one of the facilitators on abundant life in Jesus Christ at the AACC Harare Assembly (1992) and later participated in the AACC symposium on problems and promises held in 1991 to probe the viability of a theology of reconstruction. With regard to the earlier, Dedji (2003:126, 161) suggests a possibility that Kä Mana's Christology of abundant life could well have been inspired by reflections at Harare whose theme was "Abundant Life in Jesus Christ". Kä Mana (2004:9) reflects on the crisis facing the African continent by pondering a number of questions:

Why, as Africans, can we not respond adequately to the challenges of our destiny? Why are we paralyzed when confronted with problems that only we can resolve? What is wrong with our mental and intellectual capabilities to make us give way to the forces of defeatism so easily, and in such a disturbing manner?

Interestingly, Kä Mana does not explain these challenges by merely pointing to external causes. Rather, he views the African crisis as prompted neither by intellectual capacity nor the knowledge which constitute our cultural legacy. According to him, the problem lies in "the lack of significance that tends to characterise our existence; the inconsistencies and loss of a proper sense of our self-worth which show up in all areas of our lives" (Kä Mana 2004:9). He thus suggests a hermeneutics of resourcefulness whereby African Christians, individually and communally mobilise their resources to build new societies through concrete projects for human advancement (Kä Mana 2004:102). In this vein, he opines the role of theology as "the creation of a visionary, creative and resourceful society for the struggle against all the negative forces that Africa is suffering from" including socio-political and economic powers that are embodied in sterile local and international institutions and social structures (2004:103). He sees theology as contributing towards the churches ministry of hope. Ecclesiologically, Kä Mana (2004:103) locates the church as the site where God's people are "mobilised for new activities and new strategies for social change and for building a new

society.” Such a task, Kä Mana argues, requires practical ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue. While the specificity of addressing his theology of reconstruction to Christians is a strength regarding the earlier, his work does not address the question of how Christians could engage non-Christians in the task of reconstruction (cf. Ngong 2010:58).

To conclude my discussion of Kä Mana, I affirm with Dedji (2003:152) that while Mugambi and Vila-Vicencio predicate their respective proposals for a theology of reconstruction on the end of the cold war and the emergence of the ‘New World Order’, Kä Mana finds the locus of his proposal in the failure of both “identity” and “liberation” theologies to reach their goals in Africa. His theology of reconstruction is therefore articulated with a radical nuance. He draws from both African cultural resources and employs a liberatory hermeneutic that captures Jesus Christ as the liberator. Moreover, Kä Mana (2004:91-100) captures African Pentecostal and charismatic theologies as part of the African discourses on salvation alongside inculturation, liberation and reconstruction theologies. Therefore, instead of dismissing popular quests for salvation encapsulated in the various African Pentecostal theologies, he emphasises the need to reconcile academic theologies and popular practical theologies (2004:97).

### **7.3.2 Jesse Mugambi and the Theology of Reconstruction: A Brief Analysis with a focus on Ecclesiology**

Since a detailed historical background to Mugambi’s call for a theology of reconstruction has been discussed in the previous chapter, this section will be devoted to an analysis of his theology with a specific focus on ecclesiology. It must be mentioned that his proposal attracted significant critical interest with the theme of reconstruction. Examples of this include an edited volume on *Theology of Reconstruction: Exploratory Essays* (2003) – an outcome of theological conversations within the Kenya chapter of EATWOT established in 1993 – edited by Mary Getui and Emmanuel Obeng. The volume *Theologies of Liberation and Reconstruction* (2012) edited by Isaac Mwase and Eunice Kamaara is a festschrift for Mugambi comprising several essays addressing various aspects of his theology of reconstruction. Other works comprise a variety of critiques on his proposal. These will be discussed in the section on Mugambi. In what follows, I will situate Mugambi’s call firstly within the institutional framework of the AACC and then proceed to discuss notable critiques of his proposal. Subsequent sub-sections will entail an analysis of his theology of reconstruction from an ecclesiological perspective.

#### *a) A Very Brief Overview of Mugambi’s Theology of Reconstruction*

Following the positive affirmation of Mugambi’s proposal by the AACC leadership, the AACC convened a consultation on “Problems and Promises of Africa” in November 1991 at which the proposal was further affirmed. In 1995, Mugambi published his book *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology after the Cold War* in which he further developed the theme of reconstruction. His call for a shift from the Post-Exodus to a Post-Exile imagery was anchored on what he considered as the “New World Order” following the collapse of apartheid and the end of the Cold War. Thus, recounting his proposal for reconstruction at the AACC General Committee meeting in March 1990, he writes, “... the 1990s are a decade of reconstruction in many ways, with calls for national conventions, constitutional reforms and economic revitalisation” (Mugambi 1995:5). In his view, African Christian theology in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will thus be characterised by the themes of social reconstruction and reconstruction (1995:40). He construes the process of reconstruction envisaged in his proposal of reconstruction as a new paradigm for African Christian theology that is both ecumenical and multidisciplinary.

For Mugambi (1995:2), the multidisciplinary appeal of the concept of reconstruction makes it “functionally useful as a new thematic focus for reflection in Africa during the coming decades.” He then outlines several levels of reconstruction including the personal, cultural and ecclesial. In his second major work on reconstruction, Mugambi (2003:38) offered an even more developed discussion on these levels of reconstruction by focusing instead on social transformation that entails restructuring of social structures and making the African cultural and religious heritage the basis of politics, economics, ethics, aesthetics and ontology. This forms the background for his discussion of political, economic, aesthetic, moral and theological reconstruction. In what follows, I will offer a brief overview of critiques of Mugambi’s articulation of reconstruction theology. This will be followed by an analysis of ecclesiology in his theology of reconstruction.

#### b) *Critiques of Mugambi’s Theology of Reconstruction*

A number of African theologians have assessed various aspects of Mugambi’s compelling proposal for a theology of reconstruction. Some of these aspects have been criticised most significantly by Maluleke (1996b), Katongole (2002:221-226), Farisani (2012:209-212; 2002), Dube (2002a) and Dedji (2003:72-87), amongst others. A common criticism is that Mugambi misread the so-called “New World Order” (see Maluleke 1996c:43). Katongole describes it as an “uncritical optimism for the New World Order” (Katongole 2002:222). According to Maluleke (2000:199), the “demise of the Cold War and the emergence of the new world order signified as it is by the accelerated globalization, brings no automatic blessings for African countries.” Another critique on Mugambi’s proposal relates to his reading of the Ezra-Nehemiah. Although Mugambi (1995:166) himself notes the hermeneutical limitations associated with the biblical Nehemiah project, Farisani has judged his reading of the Ezra-Nehemiah text wrong. According to Farisani (2012:216), Mugambi fails to identify and critically examine the ideology prevalent in Ezra-Nehemiah namely favouring the returned exiles over against the *am haaretz*.<sup>92</sup> That is to say, notwithstanding Mugambi’s own caution, he read the text from the perspective of the dominant group and not the marginalised.

Within the South African context, some black theologians took issue with Mugambi’s seeming preference for reconstruction over against liberation, a choice seen by many as an underestimation of the theological approaches of liberation in African theology (see Martey 2004:7). In similar vein, African woman theologian, Musa Dube finds Mugambi’s separation of liberation from reconstruction problematic. In her view, it is within the parameters of the struggle for liberation that we [women] are able to call and ask for our rights and for reconstructive efforts that embrace and affirm women and men” (Dube 2002a:4). Mugambi’s perceived undervaluing of liberation in his initial proposal for a theology of reconstruction appeared to some as an attempt to impose a grand narrative. In this regard, to project reconstruction theology as a dominant motif at the expense of other approaches – as Kenyan theologian Julius Gathogo (2007:148) for instance does – is highly problematic. This concern is evident in the Final Communiqué of a Theological Conference held at Mbagathi, Nairobi, Kenya from 14<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> August 2000,<sup>93</sup> in which it was noted as follows:

Recognising that the African situation is rapidly changing, diverse and complex, we note the need to be aware of trying to impose a grand narrative as the basis for our theological reflection.

<sup>92</sup> Farisani describes the *am haaretz* as those “Jews who did not go into exile but remained in Israel.”

<sup>93</sup> This conference brought together representatives and theologians from the Conference of African Theological Institutions (CATI), the AACC, EATWOT, the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, and the Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC).

We therefore urge the AACC to recognise, encourage and nurture the diverse theological models in our continent (Mbagathi 2001:95).

The above critiques partly account for Mugambi's (2003a) publication of *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction* in which he addresses some of the above criticisms. For instance, in the new book Mugambi (2003a:61) portrays liberation and reconstruction as complimentary rather than as mutually exclusive processes. Nevertheless, he sees liberation as preceding reconstruction and not the other way round. Regarding inculturation, Mugambi (1995:72) avers that it is indispensable in as far as it is an aspect of liberation. This is so because the process of liberation is incomplete without cultural liberation.

While I agree with the criticisms of Mugambi's proposal as highlighted above, my sense is that these critiques have not sufficiently addressed the context in which Mugambi made his initial proposal namely, that of a theologian and committed ecumenist articulating a historic moment within the context of an ecumenical institution. Mugambi has been consistent in his contention that ecumenical collaboration is critical for building an authentically African church (cf. Mugambi 1998:7). In fact, his reconstruction theology entails an ecumenical and multidisciplinary endeavour on the part of the churches. Here, an exception is made of Dedji's (2012:116-121) evaluation of Mugambi's theology of reconstruction. In what follows therefore, I will attempt to analyse Mugambi's ecclesiology within the framework of his theology of reconstruction. In doing so, I will highlight the critiques of the theology of reconstruction by Ernst Conradie regarding its soteriological input and by Ugandan Roman Catholic theologian Emmanuel Katongole on rooting Christian social ethics in ecclesiology. Given that a detailed analysis of Mugambi's ecclesiology is not within the scope of this work, my analysis is limited to his views on the church within the framework of his proposal for a theology of reconstruction.

### c) *The Church in Mugambi's Theology of Reconstruction*

My interest in Katongole's critique of African reconstruction theology is prompted by its focus on ecclesiological issues in reconstruction theories articulated by Mugambi and Villa-Vicencio. In what follows therefore, I will engage Katongole's views in my discussion of ecclesiology in Mugambi's theology of reconstruction. It must be noted however that any analysis of Mugambi's (1995) view of the church within the framework of his proposal for a theology of reconstruction is faced with a challenge. Since his book is a collection of revised papers presented in conferences and related meetings, it is difficult to come to a clear picture of his view on ecclesiology given that this would have to be abstracted from different places in the book.

Although the theme of church appears in nearly all the chapters, chapter 10 on "the Future of the Church and the Church of the Future in Africa" offers a more sustained focus on ecclesiology. In the said chapter, which is a revised version of the essay Mugambi presented to the AACC general committee meeting in 1990, he captures the contradiction between the much celebrated numerical growth of Christianity in Africa and the socio-economic challenges confronting Africans. In his words; "How can the most religious continent in the world be abandoned by God to perish in poverty, in debt and under the yoke of the great powers of the world?" (Mugambi 1995:163). Mugambi wonders whether the kind of religiosity that African Christians have embraced can help them cope with the challenges they face. These considerations underlie his call for the "need to shift our [African theologians, churches and the AACC] theological gear from liberation to reconstruction" (1995:165). Behind this reflection is Mugambi's view that the church in Africa remains one of the most influential and sustainable social institutions especially in rural areas.

Given what Mugambi sees as demographic, political and technological changes in Africa,

he argues that the African church of the present will not be relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century unless it transforms into the church of the future. He argues that the frontiers of mission have changed from the geographical – implicit in dominant notion of mission within the modern missionary movement – to new frontiers that are mainly social and conceptual (Mugambi 1995:169). Mugambi captures the role of the church in this regard as “the facilitator of social transformation”. This entails the responsibility – on the part of the church – to prepare the people for social transformation. In this regard, Mugambi highlights the significance of preaching as “a central oral medium for transmission of new ideas and changing attitudes”. Following Karl Jasper’s critique of Rudolf Bultmann’s demythologisation project, Mugambi (1995:37) views the creation of myths as indispensable in cultural constructions of reality. Hence, the task of reconstruction involves remythologisation. The old myths of Africa as ‘the sleeping question mark’ must be replaced by a new one, of Africa as the ‘waking answer’ (1995:49). Mugambi envisions the church as better placed to contribute to new myths and the reinterpretation of the old myth for the transformation of society.

He highlights three levels of reconstruction namely the personal, ecclesial and cultural. Personal reconstruction has to do with the inner transformation of individuals while cultural reconstruction entails the transformation of the political, economical, ethical, esthetical and religious aspects of societies. According to Mugambi (1995:17), ecclesial reconstruction should include “management structures, financial policies, pastoral care, human resources development, research, family education, service and witness.” In this vein, he envisions theology as “the means by which the church rationalizes its process of ecclesial reconstruction.” Mugambi, however, calls for authenticity in theological reflection in Africa. Interestingly, he suggests that churches in Africa need to seriously consider establishing a programme on faith and order as a forum for relevant theological reflection.

Ecclesial reconstruction as Mugambi envisions it is necessarily missiological, ecumenical and multidisciplinary. In his view since most of the welfare services which churches used to render are now provided by the state and probably even better, he suggests that the “ordained and lay ministry of the future will have to be fully integrated with the functions of the state” (Mugambi 1995:242). This entails redefining the social role of the local church (cf. Mugambi 2003a:56). Emmanuel Katongole finds Mugambi’s approach in this regard problematic. He argues that the problem lies with the fact that when it comes to offering recommendations for the future of African theology, Mugambi “shifts his reflection away from the church and her practices and instead suggests a “theology of reconstruction” whose main protagonist and beneficiary is the African nation-state.”

My sense is that while Mugambi highlights the church in his theology of reconstruction, his ecclesiological reflections are largely sociological. This is clear in at least two ways. The first concerns his identification of the church as the most influential and sustainable social institution in Africa. An underlying challenge here is the temptation to conceptualise the church as merely another aspect of wider civil society. The second relates to the way in which he justifies his statement that “the church may have to change its outward character in order to maintain its essential identity” (Mugambi 1995:174).<sup>94</sup> Theologically, one may argue that by speaking of the church’s essential identity, consideration of the church as a theological reality is at stake.

Understandably, Mugambi (1995:167-73, 240) posits the well-established view in missiological circles regarding the close relationship between mission and church. Perhaps,

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<sup>94</sup> Quite clearly, for Mugambi (1997c:231) “the church itself is challenged to find practical responses to these problems, but the Church can only do this when it is itself renewed and redefines itself so that its existence will incorporate within itself and its mission the questions and concerns of the African context today.”

his emphasis on the social responsibility of the church derives in part from his observation that mission is part of the definition of the church. At a deeper level of analysis, however, this highlights the tension between the theological and sociological nature of the church. Put differently, while reconstruction theology may be clearly identified with socio-political concerns, one may rightly argue that such concerns are in part prompted by theological considerations regarding the identity of the church. In this regard, Mugambi explains that “[f]rom a policy perspective, churches are NGOs, but from a theological perspective churches view themselves as unique organs whose mandate extends beyond philanthropy.” With this in mind, I agree with Conradie (2008a:48) when he argues that “in African contributions to ecclesiology, there is an apparent resistance to drawing any clear distinction between the agenda of the church and that of state or civil society.” Conradie’s reflections in this regard highlight a critical question namely how to understand the nature and distinctive mission of the church within the whole household of God.

One may argue that Mugambi’s (1995:208; 1998:5) attempts to highlight the church as a theological reality comes through in at least two ways. The first has to do with his consistent emphasis on ecumenism. While Mugambi is generally critical of the modern missionary movement, he is very positive in his assessment of the ecumenical movement including its institutional frameworks such as the WCC and the AACC. He is nevertheless critical of unequal relations within the ecumenical movement between churches in Africa and those in Europe. His commitment to ecumenism is nonetheless unwavering. He predicates his view of ecumenism on Jesus prayer that all may be one. For Mugambi (1995:172), evangelical unity and ecumenical unity are not only necessary but also complimentary. The challenge for African churches therefore is to ‘revive the process of promoting visible expressions of united Christian witness, fellowship and service – between and amongst Catholics, Protestants, Pentecostals, charismatics, orthodox and independents.’

Mugambi sees the African contribution to the ecumenical movement to lie partly in the reinterpretation of Africa’s religious and cultural heritage. In this regard, he highlights the significance of the African sense of community given its “hermeneutical implications for a strong sense of identity” (Mugambi 1995:198-200; cf. Dedji 2012:121). He thus writes, “the ecumenical movement holds great promise for African Christianity, because it endeavours to rise beyond denominationalism without abolishing or denigrating denominations” (Mugambi 1995:205). While Mugambi refers to Mbiti’s articulation of the African sense of community, it was the latter who clearly articulated the theological and ecclesial dimensions of African communal life (see Dedji 2012:121). In his reflections on the relationship between church and society, he argues that it is necessary for churches in Africa to consider the relationship between the unity of the church and the unity of humankind (1995:44). The foregoing analysis notwithstanding, Mugambi’s reflections on the church are largely sociological.

Secondly, it may be plausible to affirm with Conradie that the notion of reconstruction as articulated by Mugambi may well be regarded as a theological construct (typically *soteriological*) in so far as it serves as a key to Africa’s salvation (cf. Ngong 2010:48). If so, a number of theological questions emerge. Is such salvation the work of God, humanity or both? According to Conradie (2012b:294), the impression one gets from reading Mugambi theology of reconstruction is that “we basically have to save ourselves, even where we may draw on biblical examples to legitimise our struggles”. Here, the caution raised by David Bosch in his discussion of a comprehensive notion of salvation is helpful. Bosch (1991:400) has helpfully observed that salvation needs to be placed in the context of the eschatological vision (cf. Conradie 2005b:118-133). Granted that Mugambi’s understanding of salvation emphasises the integral relationship between salvation and liberation (cf. §6.3.2a above), it appears to me that the eschatological dimension is not sufficiently stressed in his theology of

reconstruction. This notwithstanding, he employs a nuanced version of the prophetic vision of the reign of God that characterised his earlier work (see Mugambi 1989:77-84, 89). Therein, Mugambi argued that “the realisation of the Kingdom of God rests with God alone.” He envisaged total liberation as an eschatological hope yet contending that the potency of eschatological hope is best understood if placed in its historical significance at least for the African context (1989:15).

In view of the foregoing, my sense is that on the whole, Mugambi’s reflections on the church are typically sociological despite his contributions to ecumenical discourse on both faith and order and life and work. The foregoing observations therefore highlight the need for theological metaphors that does justice to both the *being* of the church (ecclesiology) and what it *does* (ethics) as part of the quest for an adequate ecumenical vision for 21<sup>st</sup> century Africa. Thus argued, I do not imply a “total sociological uniqueness” (Preston 1994:80) for the church. Rather, my argument relates to the need to do justice to both the sociological and theological nature of the church.

*d) A Political Theology for Africa: Katongole’s Critique of Mugambi’s Reconstructive Ecclesiology*

To elaborate further on the foregoing, I will offer a very brief discussion of Katongole’s critique of Mugambi’s reconstructive ecclesiology in my attempt to evaluate the latter. According to Katongole (2011:32; 2002:219), Mugambi’s probing questions regarding the contradiction of an overwhelmingly Christian continent whose plight is characterised by debt crises, poverty and high levels of illiteracy, amongst others, promised a fresh start for theological and social reflection in Africa. The problem, according to Katongole, is that Mugambi moves “too quickly to the solutions of what the church’s role should be” thus capitulating to the temptation of “prescriptive haste”. Katongole suggests that such a pattern of prescriptive haste is characteristic of Christian social ethics in Africa. Accordingly, he identifies three paradigms of the African churches’ quest for social relevance and political performance namely the spiritual, the pastoral, and the political. These entail realising Christian responsibility by directly influencing government policy (political paradigm); indirectly by motivating or infusing Christian action in the world through love (spiritual paradigm); or in partnership with the nation-state through relief services (pastoral approach). Of these, he suggests that the political paradigm is prominent in ecumenical organisations such as the AACC while he sees Mugambi’s emphasis as an example of the pastoral approach. Collectively, his argument is that these three paradigms have been motivated by “unyielding pressure for relevancy” and further assume a view of the nation-state as the primary instrument to effect social change.

For example, with regard to Villa-Vicencio (1992:11-12), he argues that while the role of religion in nation building is affirmed and emphasised, its precise nature in social reconstruction is not clear (see Katongole 2011:45). He finds Villa-Vicencio’s suggested criteria for the relevance of the church in social reconstruction problematic. Villa-Vicencio (1992:116) articulates his suggested criteria as follows:

In a radically pluralistic society the church ... needs to learn with Bonhoeffer what it means to speak of its most fundamental values in a religionless or secular way. This is perhaps the only way in which it will be heard. For this to be achieved the church is obliged to address human rights. Without this basic commitment it is likely to find itself marginalised from the political quest for reconstruction. It may have no other tangible social contribution to make to the creation of a new age.

According to Katongole (2011:46), if the role of the church is framed in this way, “the church becomes increasingly just another NGO.” Such an approach pushes the church into a posture

of activism. In his view, the challenge of construing the relevance of the church in the way Villa-Vicencio does is that it obscures the most determinative contribution Christianity can offer namely, “that of imagining the social frames of reference in new and fresh ways grounded in her unique story and calling” (Katongole 2011:47). Stories, myths and the imagination, Katongole (2011:61) argues, are the stuff of Christianity.

On Mugambi, Katongole (2002:224) is of the view that he assigns the church a “pastoral” role, while investing

nation-state politics an unquestioned competency and validity to determine the shape, direction and goal of the social material processes (now under the rubric of reconstruction) - and to do so using whatever new ideology is at hand.

Katongole (2011:84) avers that the church is a “uniquely suited community for the task of the social reimagination of Africa.” The decisive role of Christianity is thus to be located in a new “Christian social hermeneutics” that may aid Christians to imagine an “alternative social history”.<sup>95</sup> Katongole (2011:47, 58) thus proposes a view of the church as an alternate social expression of the gospel, “another form of politics”. He highlights the distinctive role of Christianity in this regard as that of “imagining the social frames of reference in new and fresh ways grounded in her unique story and calling”. What is needed he argues, is a new imagination. The emphasis on underlying stories that shape social imagination in Africa highlights the significance of Christianity from the perspective of mythological adjustment. This emphasis on narrative reveals Katongole’s appropriation of the views of theologians Stanley Hauerwas<sup>96</sup> and John Milbank.

Although Katongole’s critique of reconstruction theology as articulated by Mugambi is compelling, his own ecclesiological vision vis-à-vis church-state relation is fraught with ambiguity. For instance, as helpful as his critique of the way the politics of nation-state in Africa works, it appears to me that his treatment of the notion of nation-state does not seem to fully capture its dubious nature within the African context (Katongole 2011:60). In his view, if the church is understood as a socio-political vision, then “its relation to the nation-state cannot be simply one of affirmation or resistance” (2011:121). While he does not suggest that the church replaces the nation-state as Ngong (2010:67) insinuates, one wonders how such an ecclesial politics plays out practically. Further, the complexity of the African political landscape raises significant questions on how Katongole’s ecclesial vision may interact with national governments in many African countries. Arguably, Katongole’s account of the relationship between church and world is rather ambiguous. Consider the following statement for instance:

The church’s mission is rather to proclaim the good news of God’s new future, to sow and nurture the seeds of the new creation, and to point to its signs. In doing so, the church somehow loses itself – that is, points less and less at itself, so that the full reality of God’s new creation, which exists beyond the church, might blossom (2011:145).

Further, while Mugambi emphasises ecumenism in his articulation of reconstruction, Katongole’s ecumenical vision is hard to note if any. The above considerations

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<sup>95</sup> To demonstrate this, Katongole provides three case studies of grass roots actions that are strictly speaking away from the centre of the political action of the nation-state which nevertheless contribute towards bringing into being an alternative political reality.

<sup>96</sup> Katongole follows Stanley Hauerwas’ view of the church a distinctive *polis*; an alternative community that carries an alternative story and practice. As Hauerwas (1977: 142-143) himself puts it, the “church... must act as a paradigmatic community in the hope of providing some indication of what the world can be, but is not... The church does not have, but rather is a social ethic.” (cf. chapter 3.3.5c above). For a detailed discussion on Hauerwas’ views in this regard, see Rasmusson (1995:210-230).

notwithstanding, I find Katongole's stress on the new vision for Africa creative. The significance he attaches to locating the reconstruction discourse close to the heart of the church is indeed commendable. It brings a specifically helpful challenge to African reconstruction theologians regarding what it means to be church in Africa today. In this regard, his proposal is instructive for contemporary attempts at rooting discourse on Christian social ethics in ecclesiology. It further highlights, albeit unintentionally, that the tension between ecclesiology and ethics is not immediately clear in Katongole. Arguably, the full breadth of such a tension is apparently not addressed owing in part to the absence of an ecumenical concern in his work. The report of the Rønne Consultation of the WCC study on ecclesiology and ethics (*Costly Unity*) is instructive in this regard through its emphasis on the notion of *koinonia* as having both ecclesiological and ethical implications (see 3.3.2a above). This further enriched in the WCC (1998:24) document *The Nature and Purpose of the Church* in which it declared that the notion of *koinonia* has become central fundamental for revitalising a common understanding of the nature of the church and its visible unity ... as a key to the nature and purpose of the church".

To conclude my analysis of ecclesiology in Mugambi, two points may be noted. First, I argued that the distinctive nature of the role of church in Mugambi's theology of reconstruction is somewhat unclear. Put differently, Mugambi's ecclesiology as reflected in his theology of reconstruction indirectly reflects the belief that the world sets the agenda. Secondly, I think that Mugambi (2003a:23-26) opens up a very creative methodological path for African theology. By insisting on a theological method that is not only sensitive to the direct experiences of the community of faith but also introspective, Mugambi offers a promising way of doing African theology in a manner that avoids the pitfalls of essentialism. Nevertheless, as I have argued in the preceding sections, Mugambi himself shifts the discussion away from the practices of the church to the nation-state. Undeniably, his second major book on reconstruction attempts to address this challenge in several ways.

### 7.3.3 The AACC's handling of Ecclesiology and Ethics: A Historical Analysis (1992-2013)

From the foregoing, it may be argued that Mugambi specifically contributed to theological discourse on reconstruction within the AACC. He made further contributions through his role as the Programme Co-ordinator & Senior Consultant for Development and Research at the AACC from 1994-1997. The preceding sections discussed reconstruction theology with specific interest on how ecclesiology has been understood, especially in Mugambi's articulation of reconstruction theology. This is germane for putting the reconstruction discourse within the AACC in its proper historical perspective.

The journey of the AACC from the Harare Assembly (1992) to the Addis Ababa Assembly (1997) reflects a profile of increasing attention to issues of human rights, democracy and reconciliation. In a way, this illustrates growing emphasis on a theology of reconstruction. A review of key AACC publications during this period is indicative of such a focus. A brief outline of these is necessary. The book *African Church in the 21st Century: Challenges and Promises*, edited by Douglas Waruta (1995), documents a number of essays on various aspects of a theology of reconstruction presented by AACC officials at a staff institute of the Association of Theological Institutions in Africa (ATIEA) held at Mbagara near Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania in 1993.

In 1997, the AACC published three books aimed at stimulating further theological reflection on reconstruction and these were edited by Jesse Mugambi namely *The Church and the Future of Africa* (1997a), *Democracy and Development in Africa* (1997b), and *The Church and Reconstruction of Africa* (1997c). The first book was a collection of revised

essays presented at the AACC symposium on problems and promises of Africa held at Kanamai, Kenya in November 1991. The second was an outcome of a consultation of church leaders on democracy and development in Africa held in August 1994 in Nairobi, Kenya. And the third book was a collection of essays – and a few additional papers – presented at a theological consultation convened by the AACC in April 1997 in Nairobi on the role of Churches in the reconstruction of Africa. The last chapter in this book documents recommendations that the fifteen theologians who participated in the Nairobi consultation made to the AACC. The recommendations included inter alia, to facilitate networking between groups involved in social reconstruction; encourage NCCs to promote discussion on reconstruction; facilitate consultations on various aspects of reconstruction; and to explore ways and means of working more closely with relevant departments of continental bodies such as the OAU (now AU), and regional political bodies such as IGAD, ECOWAS, COMESA and SADC (see Mugambi 1997c:249-250).

The above discussion illustrates the sustained commitment of the AACC leadership to pursue the theme of reconstruction thus building on the foundations initially led at its General committee in 1990 and further deepened at the consultation at Kanamai in 1991. In the remaining sections of this chapter, I will analyse how the AACCs has addressed the tension between ecclesiology and ethics period 1992-2013. Following the logic of the previous two chapters, my analysis will be arranged in terms of three broad thematic sections namely “selfhood of the church”, “church and society” and “the quest for unity”.

#### **7.4 Ecclesiology and Ethics at Addis Ababa (1997)**

The 7<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the AACC met in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia from 1<sup>st</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> October 1997. While Harare (1992) met amidst the optimism related to prospects of democratisation, the period leading to the Addis Ababa Assembly (1997) witnessed some of the horrendous acts of humanity such as the Rwandan Genocide that took place in 1994. The Addis Ababa Assembly theme namely “Troubled, But Not Destroyed”, was therefore fitting as it echoed hope amidst the many challenges facing the African continent and its peoples. Key issues discussed at the Assembly mainly related to political and socio-economic issues. These issues were discussed in four thematic section namely on “problems and promises: what hope for Africa”, “the church yesterday, today and tomorrow”, “peace and righteousness: A quest for liberation and reconstruction”, and on “peace: a biblical quest for liberation and reconstruction”. The discussions were enriched by respective presentations in the section groups on the above thematic areas. Although the theme of the Addis Ababa Assembly did not directly reflect the theme of reconstruction, several sub-theme presentations at the Assembly were purposely focussed on reconstruction and this is partly reflected in the respective titles given to the section groups.

The Assembly was punctuated with various perspectives on the plight of Africa. It was significant that a woman, Mercy Amba Oduyoye, delivered the keynote address to the Assembly. This was a crucial affirmation of the AACC strides in working for the equality of men and women in both church and society and a clear reflection of the organisations commitment to “Ecumenical Decade – Churches in Solidarity with Women” (1988-1998”).

In her address to the Assembly, Oduyoye highlighted the plight of Africa as a continent troubled by wide spread poverty, the negative effects of the colonial legacy, the devastating impact of globalisation and the abuse of ethnicity by African politicians for dubious interests. She claimed that the church too is troubled. It is troubled by several factors in the African context that are inimical to its “existence” and mission. These include the multiplication of divisions both as a consequence of the legacy of the missionary movement and contemporary ethnic divisions. This was a challenging but significant observation given, for example, the

implication of churches in ethnic conflicts such as the Rwandan genocide (see Kanyandago 2003:176)<sup>97</sup> or more recently the post-election violence in Kenya in December 2007 (see Omara & Kamaara 2013:216).

Oduyoye kept raising the rhetorical question *den mmusu nay yabo?* (what has happened to us). In describing the plight of Africa, Oduyoye distinguished between two words from her Akan language namely *esian* and *mmusu* to refer to evil that we bring upon ourselves and evil inflicted upon us respectively (see AACC 1997:48-49). Accordingly, she characterised the tragedy of widespread use of landmines in countries such as Angola as *mmusu* while she spoke of the negative impact of globalisation (read: neo-liberal globalisation) on the poor African countries as *esain*. In general, one may argue that most presentations at Addis Ababa stressed the plight of Africa. This emphasis notwithstanding, some speakers at the Assembly underscored the necessity of the continued search for the selfhood of the church in Africa amidst the many challenges facing African people.

#### **7.4.1 Selfhood of the Church at Addis Ababa**

Oduyoye noted some positive developments in the quest for the selfhood of the church in Africa. These included inter alia varied liturgies used in African churches, the ordination of women and the use of African languages in liturgy. Nevertheless, she observed that the quest for the selfhood of the church in Africa remains unfinished business given the continued struggles of several churches in Africa with inherited structures and norms (see AACC 1997:52). In the collective resolutions, the Assembly noted that the dialogue between Gospel and culture was necessary for the selfhood of the church (see AACC 1997:231). It is a matter that concerns who we are as Africans and Christians.

Given the competition for dwindling resources from Northern ecumenical structures and agencies, General Secretary Chipenda invoked the notion of moratorium proposed at the Lusaka Assembly (1974) as necessary for the selfhood of the church. In his words, “moratorium has now become a reality which we have to learn and live with” (see AACC 1997:34). Chipenda thus insisted that churches must rely on funds coming from their own members or from businesses which they own.

#### **7.4.2 Church and Society**

Discussions on church and society at the Addis Ababa Assembly highlighted the plight of Africa. These included issues of peace and reconciliation, democratisation and the debt crisis. Assembly deliberations on these matters reflected the resolve of African churches to articulate new visions of Africa that would replace the dominant negative images of the continent. As Chipenda noted in his address to the Assembly, positive images of Africa are rare, though we know they are there (AACC 1997:26). Tutu used the term afro-pessimism to describe the negative image of Africa and described Africa as a giant awaking. The Assembly discussed the many troubles of Africa but demonstrated faith and hope in its reconstruction. In what follows, I will discuss some of the pertinent issues addressed by the Assembly.

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<sup>97</sup> For a detailed discussion of the churches’ acquiescence in the face of the Rwandan genocide, see Gatwa (2005:126-148). In a statement issued at the end of a workshop on Lasting Peace in Africa held in Kigali, Rwanda in 2004 that was convened by the Protestant Council of Rwanda and the Alliance of Evangelical Churches in Rwanda, the AACC and the WCC, the ecumenical family recognised and apologised for their failure to act in the face of the genocide (see Kigali Covenant).

a) *Whither Africa? Church and Society in the Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu*

In his welcoming address to the Assembly, the then President of the AACC, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, captured several socio-political issues that characterised the African context in the period between the Harare Assembly (1992) to the Addis Ababa Assembly (1997). He highlighted the plight of Africa and argued that while some of the problems facing the continent may be attributed to external causes, some of these were caused by Africans themselves. He outlined some of the challenges facing the continent including poverty, the burden of HIV/AIDS, the refugee problem, ethnic strife, military dictatorships, and the debt burden (AACC 1997:18). Tutu's address focussed much on the social responsibility of the church. A critical analysis of his address begs the question of what vision of church he espoused. The mention of churches in Tutu's address was often used with specific reference to AACC member churches. Where the church was highlighted, it was typically in terms of the role of churches in the democratisation processes in various African countries. An analysis of the various addresses at the Assembly, including Tutu's, shows that there was little attention paid to the identity and nature of the church.

In Tutu's case, this is rather odd given the religious nature of the language he employed such as forgiveness, and reconciliation. This is probably typical of Tutu. His ecclesiology may be best understood in light of a number of formative influences on his life and spirituality. Tinyiko Maluleke suggests that Tutu's childhood experiences shaped his vision and notions of church and society. According to Maluleke (2015:584), Tutu's vision of the church may be best captured as "a life-enhancing community - a church opposed to the forces of death in society, a church of and for the underdog." In view of this and other insights on Tutu's ecclesiology as articulated by Michael Battle (2009:70), I would add that Tutu's emphasis on the social responsibility of the church also emerges out of his dual heritage of Anglican ecclesiology and African culture that leads to a nuanced kind of Black liberation theology.<sup>98</sup> Such inheritance leads Tutu to develop a model of reconciliation predicated on the African vision of community as Ubuntu (see AACC 1997:19).

At Addis Ababa, Tutu ended his address in a manner that depicted liberation as an act of God and humanity as follows:

Let us throw out the dictators and bring freedom and justice. Our God is not deaf, our God sees, our God knows and our God comes down to deliver us. Dictators beware; Africa will be free (see AACC 1997:21).

From the above discussion of Tutu's address, it may be argued that Tutu's theology embodies the tension between ecclesiology and ethics. Tutu's approach to ecclesiology and ethics was clearly influential within the AACC during this period as intimated in the previous chapter.

b) *The Ecumenical Movement and NGO's*

General Secretary José Chipenda also added his voice on the plight of Africa when he outlined issues that he discerned to be important for the Assembly's consideration. These included inter alia ethnic conflicts, the threat of land mines especially in Angola, and the ideology of the free market. In his view, one of the responsibilities of the church in the African situation is to learn to read the signs of the times and suggest viable options (see AACC 1997:26). Given the proliferation of NGO's during this period, Chipenda highlighted the challenges this posed on fundraising ventures in the ecumenical movement. The concerns

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<sup>98</sup> According to Tutu (1982:198) himself, "The church of God has to be the salt and light of the world. We are the hope of the hopeless, through the power of God. We must transfigure a situation of hate and suspicion, of brokenness and separation, of fear and bitterness. We have no option. We are servants of the God who reigns and cares. He wants us to be the alternative society."

raised by Chipenda need to be further understood in light of my discussion on the shift in the focus of AACC programmes from a development orientation to advocacy as shown in the previous chapter (see § 6.8.1 above). Of significant concern for Chipenda was the confusion of identity between church and non-church related NGO's (AACC 1997:34). This highlights the tension between ecclesiology and ethics. It points to the need for further reflection on the nature of the church vis-à-vis NGO's as a significant player within civil society (cf. § 7.2.4b above). From a practical perspective, the NGO-isation<sup>99</sup> of development meant that the AACC had to compete for resources alongside other players even within the framework of the ecumenical movement.

The competitive environment, in which NGO's and ecumenical organisations found themselves during this period, is amply described by the former director of Christian Aid Michael Taylor (1995:141). Taylor especially highlights the dilemma of the ecumenical movement in this regard mainly in terms of the tension between the ecumenism and efficiency. He writes:

Ecumenism, we are told, requires us to respect the special relationship which binds together the ecumenical family through thick and thin, and to choose to stay with ecumenical partners even where they are judged to be less than efficient when it comes to aid and development and the struggle against poverty and for life. Efficiency, it is said, declares that our first loyalty is to the poorest of the poor and that we must work with whoever we judge will most effectively address our overriding concern, whether they are ecumenical partners or not.

Quite perceptively, Taylor notes that the dilemma between these two concerns is not easily resolvable. Thus, he suggests that efforts be channelled towards achieving what he calls "ecumenical efficiency or efficient ecumenism". The creation of new ecumenical instruments such as the ACT-Alliance was in part an attempt to respond to such concerns (see § 6.8.3 below). For the AACC, the competitive context meant that the institution needed to become adept at raising funds. This was critical given the decline in funding particularly from overseas partners (see AACC 1997:143, 145). Additionally, the finance committee report to the Addis Ababa Assembly indicated that on average, only 15% of its membership had been paying their subscription fees annually. Positively however, the AACC generally had financial stability in the period between Harare (1992) and Addis Ababa (1997). Reasons for such a situation included inter alia the innovation of the AACC leadership under Chipenda in their implementation of the recommendation of the Harare Assembly to develop the property portfolio of the organisation.

### *c) The Churches and Democracy in Africa*

At the Harare Assembly (1992), General Secretary Jose Chipenda argued that democracy needed to be highlighted as one of the key concerns constituting the mandate of the AACC in the post Harare period. At Addis Ababa (1997), he lamented that with few exceptions, the fruits of the call for democracy in Africa had been sour. This discontent partly reflected concerns highlighted by several African scholars namely that liberal democracy has its limitations in Africa (see Ake 1993:243).<sup>100</sup> The problematic that Chipenda noted in this regard was that the recent winds of change had placed the market at the centre of the political

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<sup>99</sup> German scholar Sabine Lang (2013:64) describes the concept of NGO-isation as "the process by which social movements professionalise, institutionalise, and bureaucratize in vertically structured, policy-outcome-oriented organisations that focus on generating issue-specific and, to some degree, marketable expert knowledge or services."

<sup>100</sup> Elsewhere, Claudia Ake (2000:136) has questioned the feasibility of democracy (read: liberal democracy) in Africa and proceeded to suggest social democracy as best suited for Africa. For a useful critique of liberal democracy from the philosophical perspective, see Wiredu (1997).

arena (AACC 1997:31; cf. Ake 2000:27). This concern resonates with the debate on the relationship between economic liberalisation and political liberalisation. Nonetheless, that the church had played a crucial role in some of the success stories of transition to democracy was noted in Tutu's address to the Addis Ababa Assembly and widely affirmed by the Assembly delegates (AACC 1997:17).

The dawn of democratisation in Africa also intensified ethnic conflicts especially as politicians exploited ethnic ideologies for political expediency (see Kobia 1993:49-60).<sup>101</sup> Admittedly, the linkage between ethnicity and democracy is a problematic one. It begs the question namely how one defines the concept of ethnicity (see Ake 2000:93-95). This challenge is best understood in terms of the colonial legacy of divide and rule bequeathed to the new African nation states as discussed in chapter 5 (see §5.2.3). For where the rule of law and accountability of power characterise governance, democracy would actually help address ethnic conflict. To be sure, the real problem is not so much ethnicity but ethnicism. Kobia (1993) offers a helpful distinction between these two terms by assigning the earlier a positive meaning while the later carries the negative view. According to him, "ethnicity [read: ethnicism], as expressed in the insecurity of the minority and the unease of the majority, threatens to be a serious problem in the years ahead" (Kobia 1993:51; cf. Aboagye-Mensah 1994:98).

In the view of African theologian Bénézet Bujo, we probably have much to learn from the African notion of palaver. He thus argues that in traditional Africa,

Political authority draws its force from the support both of the people over whom it rules and from the ancestors. If a king or chief ceases to communicate the vital force, he despises the ancestors or fails to do justice to their concern, thus damaging the entire community in its triple dimension of the living, the dead, and those not yet born (Bujo 2003:124).

From this perspective, Bujo opines that in the genuine African tradition, the genocide in Rwanda would be impossible since "the palaver and the rites of reconciliation in the name of the ancestors would ensure that the worst would be avoided and peace re-established". Although the Addis Ababa Assembly did not issue any concrete recommendation on ethnicity, the challenges that it poses on both church and society was highlighted severally (AACC 1997:18, 36, 52, 61, 69, 110). Arguably, concerns with ethnicity were subsumed under the recommendations on conflict resolution (see 1997:227).

For some theologians at the Addis Ababa Assembly such as Mercy Oduyoye, the use of religion and culture as an alibi for oppression and the marginalisation of others needed to be countered by focussing on the reign of God. Theologically, the reign of God would entail the need to promote the intrinsic value and equality of all people (see AACC 1997:58). For Oduyoye therefore, democratisation and the principles of participation needed to be promoted not only in state governments but also in the churches. From the perspective of African women's theology therefore, Oduyoye argued that the legitimisation of oppressive power must be challenged through democracy. These perspectives were reiterated in a sermon preached by Frank Chikane during the Assembly's opening worship. In the Assembly

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<sup>101</sup> Arguably, some politicians in a number of African countries continue to use any form of identity to gain political power. Such identities include ethnicity and more recently religion. Regarding the latter, Zambia serves as an apt example given widespread religious and political patronage (see Gifford 1998:194, 201-206; cf. § 7.2.4e above). Similar arguments have been advanced with respect to Nigeria (Adigwe & Grau 2007:98-101) and Zimbabwe (Chitando & Togarasei 2010:159). However, owing to conflictual tendencies associated with emphasising ethnicity especially in countries with many ethnic identities, politicians tend to be more explicit in using religious identity than ethnicity. Arguably, the Christian religion is further seen as having potential to contribute towards unifying the nation while ethnicity is seen as challenging to the national unity project.

resolutions, it was recommended that power, whether in church or state was to serve the interest of all God's people (see AACC 1997:223). Although this has been addressed by some scholars in the African context, especially African women theologians (Phiri 2012:266),<sup>102</sup> theological reflection on this aspect has however not been sustained within the AACC itself (cf. § 7.2.4e above).

*d) Peace Building: The Church's Ministry of Peace and Reconciliation*

The role of the churches in peace building was variously underscored in the addresses to the Assembly by Dr Salim Ahmed Salim and Mr. K.Y. Amoako in their capacity as General Secretary of the Organisation for African Unity (OAU now AU) and UN Under Secretary respectively. Salim spoke of churches as partners in the OAU endeavours to address the plight of Africa (see AACC 1997:83). Amoaka argued that there was a need to strengthen the advocacy role and lead of the church in civil society in Africa (1997:88). In both addresses, the significance of the role played by the church in addressing problems confronting the continent was identified in terms of the church's moral authority and commitment to social justice (see AACC 1997:82, 89). In this regard, both Amoaka and Salim underscored the role of the church in peace-building. The representation of the OAU and UN was a clear demonstration of the AACCs determination to strengthen relationships with institution that address the plight of African people in a variety of ways.

It is also significant that the Addis Ababa Assembly report includes a section on the "voice of young" people on the plight of Africa particularly with regard to the rights of children and the vulnerability of children in the context of armed conflict (AACC 1997:90-100). Concerns with the latter led to the publication of a *Youth Peace Training Manual* in 1999 aimed at helping youths to "transform themselves from objects and subjects of war into agents of peace". The overall intent was to build a culture of peace based on Christian theological perspectives on peace while encouraging interfaith dialogue. The manual provides what it considers its approach as "deeply rooted in our African culture and guided by the Gospel" (AACC, 1999:xi-xii).

The Addis Ababa Assembly also recommended that the Church must engage with other actors involved in peace-building (AACC 1997:193). The Assembly identified the Church's ministry of peace and reconciliation as a contribution towards peace, stability and development in Africa (1997:213). Therefore, the Assembly recommended the establishment of a "Council of Elders for Peace in Africa" under the auspices of the AACC as one way of enhancing its ecumenical work in peace and reconciliation (see AACC 1997:227). Such work was the remit of the AACC International Affairs/Refugee desk. The recommendation effectively found expression in the Eminent Persons Ecumenical Programme for Africa (EPEPPA) (see §7.5.2c below). Additionally the Assembly recommended dialogue on conflict resolution drawing on the African notion of palaver and other [seemingly] successful stories of reconciliation such as the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). To affirm its commitment to peace and reconciliation, the AACC 7<sup>th</sup> General Assembly awarded a peace prize to the Council of Churches in Liberia and the Muslim representatives who jointly worked for peace and reconciliation in that country. This gesture further demonstrated how healthy inter-faith relations can be an instrument for peace in war-

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<sup>102</sup> For instance, the Circle of Concerned Women Theologians held a pan-African conference in Nairobi in August 1996. Proceedings from that conference were published as *Transforming Power: Women in the Household of God* (1997) edited by Mercy Oduyoye. Issues of power also found expression at another important gathering of the African women theologians in Johannesburg in October 2003. One of the outcomes was a publication entitled *Being the Church in Africa* edited by Isabel Phiri and Sarojini Nadar (2005).

torn situations.

e) *The Debt Crisis: The AACC supports the call for Jubilee debt Cancellation*

Deliberations at the Addis Ababa Assembly also touched on issues of globalisation and the debt crisis. In her keynote address to the Assembly, Oduyoye highlighted the negative impact of globalisation arguing that “power in Africa has shifted from the nation-state to the transnational corporations” (see AACC 1997:50). Collectively, the Assembly recommended the need to continue educating member churches on the negative effects of SAPs. In its Maseru declaration (1990), the AACC had earlier argued that SAPs led to “the obscene widening of the gap between the rich and the poor and the increasing impoverishment and pauperisation of the great majority of the African population” (AACC 1990:20). The AACC thus described Africa’s foreign debt burden as “a new form of slavery, as vicious as the slave trade.” In this way, the AACC linked the debt crisis to both the historical legacy of colonialism and the imperfection of the global financial system. The Maseru declaration urged the AACC to “call, in conjunction with the World Council of Churches and the churches of the North and South, a Year of Jubilee with its provisions for the cancellation of debts, and restructuring of the international economic, financial and monetary order” (cf. § 6.7.2a.i above). One may argue that although the AACC did not elaborate on its view of jubilee in these earlier deliberations, the Addis Ababa Assembly provided an opportunity to deliberate on the debt crisis anew. The Assembly position in this regard was largely influenced by the views of Desmond Tutu, then president of the AACC.

In his presidential address to the Assembly, Tutu issued a call for debt cancellation. He observed:

I called long ago for the cancellation of the crippling debt we have had to bear for so long. The IMF and World Bank are using their crippling Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPS). These are immoral, for they care nothing about the suffering of people. Jesus objected to such conduct. He said people were more important than even religious rules. He broke these to serve people. The Sabbath was made for us and not we for the Sabbath. Anything that imposes unnecessary suffering on those for whom Christ died, is wrong and immoral. SAPs do this and they must be condemned as wrong and immoral (AACC 1997:20).

Tutu proceeded to describe the campaign for debt cancellation as the new moral crusade of the time. He then proposed three conditions for debt cancellation namely, democratisation, respect for human rights, demilitarisation and redirecting money thus saved for the benefit of the so-called ordinary people. In the history of the AACC, Tutu’s call represents the most comprehensive statement on debt cancellation from within the ambits of the AACC. Tutu’s commitment towards debt cancellation saw him become the first President of a collaborative international campaign named Jubilee 2000 (Grenier 2003:90).<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Officially launched in April 1996, the Jubilee 2000 was a transnational civil society movement that brought together NGOs, churches, trade unions, and individuals, amongst others, who rallied the call for debt cancellation (see Busby 2007:248). The movement benefited from initial awareness work by Susan George who wrote a book titled *Debt Bondage*. More influential for the jubilee movement were the writings of Martin Dent then professor at Keele University in the United Kingdom who came up with the idea of jubilee year with regard to international debt. After its launch in 1996, the Jubilee 2000 movement spread to about 69 countries between 1997 and 1998 (see Grenier 2003:86). In 1999, a campaign oriented to the global South was launched in Johannesburg and was dubbed Jubilee South. The movement also received widespread support including that of influential economists such as Jeffrey Sachs and Joseph Stiglitz (2002:243). It is significant to note that the campaign won a commitment to a \$110 billion write off of un-payable debts achieved partly via an extension of the HIPC initiative and additional bilateral commitments from creditors such as the UK (see Greenhill 2002:8). Arguably, the success of the Jubilee campaign cannot be judged on whether or not the debt crisis was ameliorated. Rather, the campaign contributed to dealing with these issues

Although Tutu's call for debt cancellation was generally affirmed and reiterated in many sections of the Assembly, it was not elaborated on. For instance, in the "mandate for the churches in action together (1997-2002)", which documents the key resolutions of the Assembly, comments on debt cancellation were very brief. It was merely noted that the AACC member churches and NCC's commit should themselves to "advocate for debt cancellation in accordance with the biblical jubilee principle" (AACC 1997:220). At deeper analysis, the Assembly recommendations in this regard did not elaborate on the "complexity and the specificity of the required action" (see Miller 1998:5).

It must be recalled that within the context of the Breton Woods institutions, other debt relief mechanisms had been developed. One such mechanism was the HIPC initiative that had been advocated for by the IMF/World bank. The HIPC plan was nevertheless fraught with challenges. As Sachs et al (1999:4) argue, HIPC countries serviced "their debts at the cost of widespread malnutrition, premature death, excessive morbidity, and reduced prospects for economic growth." From the perspective of the rich countries and multilateral institutions, the peculiar argument was that they not "afford" to "merely" forgive the HIPC debt (1999:10). In view of this, the Jubilee campaign as advocated by ecumenical organisations such as the AACC and the WCC and more broadly through the Jubilee 2000 coalition was indeed a radical proposal for debt forgiveness.<sup>104</sup> From the point of view of the present study on ecclesiology and ethics, the involvement of the churches in debt crisis raises both theological and ethical questions.

For the churches, human needs took moral priority over legal obligations to repay debt. Differently stated, the churches questioned whether it was ethical for African countries to deprive its poor people of basic needs in order to repay debts owed to Western financial institutions. This was evident in the churches' critique of SAPs and conditionalities attached to the HIPC initiative as intimated above. At its Harare Assembly (1998) for instance, the WCC Harare Assembly (1998) affirmed that the "basic human needs and rights of individuals and communities and the protection of the environment should take precedence over debt repayment". In a strongly worded statement, the Assembly affirmed that "unless present debt management plans are transformed into debt release opportunities, the devastating cycle of debt accumulation will repeat itself, condemning millions more people to suffering" (see Kessler 1999:174-188). At a seminar on "Debt in Central Africa" organised by the AACC in collaboration with the WCC in Yaoundé, Cameroon, from 10-12<sup>th</sup> January 2000, participants saw the debt crisis not only as an economic issue but as a fundamentally ethical and moral problem.

Such ethical reasoning was grounded in theological consideration derived from the biblical narratives of jubilee<sup>105</sup> and debt forgiveness. The notion of jubilee was employed as a theological lens for engaging in economic justice. In this sense, the term was used as a metaphor for liberation thus encapsulating a "vision of economic justice" (Van Drimmelen 1998:135). For churches and ecumenical structures, this implied an emphasis on human rights. Accordingly, human rights were prioritised in preference to economic ones. Put differently, churches criticised International Financial Institutions for privileging economic

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in new light that stressed social justice. In this regard it was a significant political success that creditor governments accepted deeper debt reduction at the G-8 Cologne Summit in 1999 (see Busby 2007:250).

<sup>104</sup> For useful documentation of important documents produced by the various church related organisation as well as the Jubilee 2000 coalitions, see WCC (1999b).

<sup>105</sup> There has been a theological debate on the Jubilee Law itself which is found expressly in Leviticus 25. For useful commentaries on jubilee, see Duchrow (2002:35), and Preston (1994:131-132). Although quite dated, one of the comprehensive studies on Jubilee is Robert North's *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee* published in 1954.

concerns over human life and welfare. Theologian Michael Northcott (1999:179) captures this insight succinctly when he opines that the touchstone for evaluating the morality of economic policies is their effects upon people's welfare. Debt forgiveness therefore, Northcott (1999: 92) argues, "is not only the moral but the spiritual response which the desperate plight of Africa's peoples requires."

Theologically, linking human rights with debt forgiveness begs several questions. Is concern with human rights as it relates to debt an ethical issue or an ecclesiological one? Normally ethics is more prominent but what about the dignity of a community of forgiven sinners. The emphasis on sin is ethical but forgiveness is surely ecclesiological. Is dignity an anthropological given or an ecclesiological one?

At a deeper level of analysis one has to ask whether the call for debt cancellation (read: forgiveness) only attended to consequences rather than root causes of the debt crisis. Is it enough to simply forgive the debt? Put differently, would debt forgiveness necessarily entail the resolution of Africa's debt burden? I will return to these questions in my analysis of ecclesiology and ethics in subsequent Assemblies of the AACC below.

### **7.4.3 Addis Ababa's Ecumenical Vision**

Deliberations at Addis Ababa were very much focussed on the plight of Africa that ecclesiological reflections tended to be very weak where this was apparent. For example, in the report of the section 2 of the Assembly, participants used the notion of community in several places to highlight the nature of the church. The church, it was said, must be "a healing and inclusive community, free of all attitudes of domination and control" (AACC 1997:169). It was further noted that role of the church in society needed to be proactive and not just reactive.

Progress in the area of collaboration with other ecumenical structures was reported by General Secretary Chipenda. Earlier in 1994, the AACC co-sponsored the second Pan-African Christian Leadership Assembly (PACL) with the Association of Evangelicals of Africa (AEA). This was a significant development given polarisation between evangelicals and ecumenicals that characterised the relationship between the two in the 1970s. Such tendencies characterised the first PACL which was solely organised by evangelicals in 1976. The event was punctuated with scathing attacks on the AACC in a manner typical of the evangelical stance on ecumenicals in the 1970's (see Mugambi 2003:94-98; Bosch 1988). Another positive development highlighted in Chipenda's report pertained to the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the AACC. A significant gesture of cooperation was expressed through an invitation to the AACC to attend the first African (Roman Catholic) Synod held in Rome in 1994. According to Kwesi Dickson, who was appointed at Addis Ababa (1997) to take over from Tutu as President of the AACC, there was need to expand the AACC's ecumenical vision (see AACC 1997:237). In his view, the AACC needed to ponder the feasibility of a forum that would bring together the Roman Catholic Church and the AACC together.

Given the triple religious heritage of the African continent particularly in Western sub-Saharan Africa and recently East Africa, the Addis Ababa Assembly paid considerable attention to issues of dialogue and mutual understanding amongst the multiplicity of religious communities. In this regard, churches were encouraged to foster closer working relationship with PROCUMURA (Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa). In my view, although the issue of interfaith relations is an ecumenical concern, its goal points toward a wider ecumenism rather than that of the unity of the church (cf. CUV 2.6). Here, I follow the logic of Michael Kinnamon (2003:106) who argues that while dialogue and cooperation with

people of other faiths belong on the ecumenical agenda for various reasons, “Christian ecumenism and interfaith relations have different goals reflecting different theological foundations.”

What then was the understanding of unity expressed at Addis Ababa? As argued above, Assembly deliberations did not issue in clear reflections on the nature of unity around which the churches in the AACC were rallied. A brief intimation in this direction was expressed by Chipenda when he stressed the connection between unity and mission. Chipenda linked such reflection to the plight of Africa given the dominance of that concern in much of the deliberation at the Assembly. In his view, the crises facing Africa must not divide the churches. Rather, “they [crises] demand unity in action, based on Christian conviction” (AACC 1997:40). Similar to previous Assemblies, it seems to me that the nature of the unity sought was largely expressed in terms of unity in action. As Chipenda puts it in his post Assembly reflections, the Addis Ababa Assembly served many purposes including developing an up-to-date vision aimed at “mobilising churches for common action” (see AACC 1997:241). More so, the new focus on ecumenical formation symbolised by the holding of a theological institute of young theologians alongside the Addis Ababa Assembly was indeed significant.

## **7.5 Ecclesiology and Ethics at Yaoundé (2003)**

The AACC 8<sup>th</sup> General Assembly met in Yaoundé, Cameroon from 22-27<sup>th</sup> November 2003 under the theme “Come, Let us Rebuild” derived from the biblical passage in Nehemiah 2:17-18. The theme was indicative of the AACC’s focus on a theology of reconstruction that had hitherto informed much reflection within its ambit since the Harare Assembly (1992).<sup>106</sup> If the Addis Ababa Assembly (1997) provided the situational analysis of issues facing the African continent, the Yaoundé Assembly (2003) symbolised the commitment and resolve of African churches to contribute to the reconstruction of the continent. In its message to the churches, the Yaoundé Assembly (2003) invited all African churches, both members and non-members of the AACC to rebuild the African continent by not only seeking its survival but also that its people may experience abundant life (AACC 2006:3). One may observe that this Assembly was as much a reconstruction of the AACC itself given the restructuring measures taken by the Assembly largely as a result of the financial and organisational difficulties that the institution was facing. That the AACC asked its General Secretary Rev. Canon Clement Janda to step down in 2002 was an indication of the gravity of its challenges. To help the AACC stabilise and prepare for its 8<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (in Yaoundé), the WCC seconded one of its staff – Melaku Kifle – to act as General Secretary AACC from July 2002 to July 2003. The South African Methodist clergy Bishop Mvume Dandala assumed the role of General Secretary following his election at the Yaoundé Assembly (2003).

Realising that producing ecumenical statements does not necessarily issue in action, the Assembly delegates committed to acting on the issues by employing the term covenant in most of the final Assembly documents. This was best encapsulated in a brief document entitled “The Yaoundé Covenant” (see AACC 2006:221-222).

### **7.5.1 Selfhood of the Church at Yaoundé**

The Assembly recognised that although much theological talk had hitherto been articulated on contextualising theology in Africa, there were many aspects that needed contextualisation in concrete terms. The liturgy was one such aspect. As Kwesi Dickson puts it in his address to

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<sup>106</sup> Illustrative of this focus on reconstruction theology, Dedji’s book *Reconstruction and Renewal in African Christian Theology* was launched at the Yaoundé Assembly.

the Assembly, despite “much research done regarding the indigenisation of the Christian faith, somehow there is a lack of confidence to transform the worship style of most of churches to be authentically Christian and African” (AACC 2006:78). Already in 1995 and 1996, the AACC had held consultations of African Christian musicians in Nairobi to consider putting together songs that are relevant to the socio-cultural realities in Africa (see Temple 2001:98). Although the project does not seem to have come to fruition, a similar attempt in 1987 successfully led to the production of the hymnal *Africa Sings*.

In the history of the AACC, selfhood has often encapsulated the vision of the church in Africa being itself. In his address to the Yaoundé Assembly, General Secretary Dandala recalled the Lusaka Assembly (1974) call for moratorium to express the continuing need for self reliance in the African church. In this regard, he emphasised the need for effective management of resources and sincere collaboration with ecumenical partners (AACC 2006:82). In similar vein, Kathure Mwenda of Oikocredit stressed the values of accountability, corporate governance, investment, resource management, the avoidance of waste, and budgeting as necessary prerequisites for the selfhood of the church in Africa. This was well summed up when she noted that for a continent stifled by years of “inept, corrupt, tribal, colonial and apartheid misrule”, church leaders are expected to be men and women who are honest, trusted and of noble character (see AACC 2006:185).

### 7.5.2 Church and Society

The issues discussed at Yaoundé reflected an array of the daunting challenges facing Africa in the 21<sup>st</sup> century such as HIV/AIDS, poverty, the negative effects of globalisation, marginalisation of women and youths, and political instability. In what follows, my analysis will be limited to the Assembly deliberation on the African Union’s New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) initiative, corruption, peace and reconciliation, HIV/AIDS, and the restructuring of the AACC. The scope of reflections on these themes is illustrative of the AACC’s sustained focus on a theology of reconstruction.

#### a) NEPAD

Hellen Grace Akwii Wangusa provided the Assembly with a useful background to the African Union (AU) NEPAD initiative<sup>107</sup> and urged the AACC to critically engage NEPAD. Wangusa rightly noted that the “root causes of Africa’s marginalisation are embedded in the global economy in which NEPAD seeks to integrate Africa (AACC 2006:176). To this effect, she highlighted both the potential tensions and opportunities within the framework of the NEPAD initiative. The Assembly acknowledged NEPAD as an appropriate framework for Africa’s development and adopted an Ecumenical Charter entitled “Behold I Create a New Africa: Ecumenical Engagement with The New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD)”. The ecumenical charter spelt out some specific ways in which churches would engagement with NEPAD at local, national and continental levels (see AACC 2006:228-238). Significant insights in this regard derived from an earlier consultation on NEPAD that the AACC organised in collaboration with the SACC and the WCC in Johannesburg, South Africa in March 2003.

The Johannesburg consultation made several recommendations including the need to formulate an Ecumenical Charter on NEPAD. At Yaoundé therefore, the AACC’s

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<sup>107</sup> The origins of NEPAD are often associated with the initiatives of three African former heads of state, namely South Africa’s Thabo Mbeki, Senegal’s Abdoulaye Wade, and Nigeria’s Olusegun Obasanjo. NEPAD was formally set up in 2002 as an integral part of the AU and its secretariat was located in Pretoria South Africa. For a useful historical background to NEPAD see Adésiné (2004:132-134).

engagement with NEPAD was envisaged to contribute towards the implementation of NEPAD in ways that promote “faith, order, dignity, peace, gender equality and justice” (AACC 2006:235). In the Ecumenical Charter, the AACC affirmed the vision behind the NEPAD initiative as one that embodies Africa’s yearning towards total emancipation (cf. NEPAD 2001:1).<sup>108</sup> The stress in the NEPAD initiative on democracy and good governance as preconditions for development was attractive to the AACC. The AACC subsequently created a desk to accompany the NEPAD initiative and was located at its Lomé Office, in Togo.

In 2006, the AACC programme on NEPAD published three booklets on the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM)<sup>109</sup> in order to encourage and facilitate churches/National Councils of Churches to undertake ecumenical country assessments as part of their participation in the APRM. These included an introductory booklet on the APRM and Ecumenical Assessment Manuals on Socio-Economic Development and on Democracy and Political Governance (see Deh 2006a, 2006b, 2006c). The AACC simplified the APRM questionnaire by putting the questions in a biblical context thus adapting the questionnaire to a Christian context. The AACC NEPAD programme saw its task in this regard as one of capacitating churches so that they could influence policy formulation, critique and highlight the challenges and emerging trends in the review process (Deh 2006b:18). It was also envisaged that the manual would assist churches to carry out assessments of their own churches and ecumenical organisations in order to be better placed to critique the APRM assessments (Deh 2006c:19). For the AACC, the churches support for the APRM was envisioned as an attempt:

at the recovery of the African heritage in which just and participatory governance was the centre of community life... to facilitate the rebirth of the African values that undergirded the ethical dimensions of leadership and governance... coupled with Christian principles and values that genuinely promote justice and ethical conduct in public life and provide a solid basis and ecumenical imperative for building a culture of life with dignity and integrity in Africa (Deh 2006b:18).

This and other ways through which the AACC engaged the NEPAD initiative are best understood against the background of the AACC’s commitment towards a theology of reconstruction.<sup>110</sup> These initiatives were grounded in several theological convictions deriving from the life and ministry of Jesus, as well as a vision of governance in God’s household that is built on values of *Shalom* for all creation (see Deh 2006c:18).

The AACC was nevertheless cognisant of the limitations of the NEPAD initiative particularly the neoliberal framework in which NEPAD was formulated. Some theologians have offered sharp criticism of the churches’ buy in into the NEPAD initiative (see De Gruchy 2002:64-68; Gunda 2009:92-94). Maloko (2006:87) categorises critiques on NEPAD into two groups. The first is mainly from the African constituency and focuses on NEPAD’s

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<sup>108</sup> Such optimistic views regarding NEPAD also found expression in the preamble of the WCC conference on Theological Education and Ecumenical formation held in Johannesburg in 2002 when it stated: “It is the Christian church’s mission in fulfilling Christ’s promise of meaningful and abundant life for all of Africa’s people that compels us to engage critically with NEPAD in a spirit of mutual responsibility and commitment to Africa’s reconstruction and development” (Plan of Action 2002:2).

<sup>109</sup> The APRM was a voluntary self monitoring instrument and therefore an essential component of the NEPAD initiative endorsed by the AU in 2002 to promote compliance with the commitments contained in the AU “Declaration on Democracy and Political Governance” (2002).

<sup>110</sup> The AACC’s initiatives on NEPAD and the APRM fits quite well in Villa-Vicencio’s version of reconstruction theology in which the churches accompany the state as it tackles issues such as reconciliation, nation building, economic empowerment, participatory democracy and good governance.

conceptual and ideological assumptions namely its neoliberal orientation. Some add to this the view that NEPAD was a class project. Thus, according to Nigerian sociologist Jimi Adésiná (2004:142), NEPAD's extensive subordination to the Bretton Woods Institutions' perspectives (neoliberal) "raises its class project above its Africanist aspiration." The second category of critiques focuses on culturalist arguments often advanced by Western political scientists. Patrick Chabal is representative of this category. In a popular article entitled "The Quest for Good Government and Development in Africa: Is NEPAD the Answer?", Chabal (2002:450) argues that contemporary politics in Africa may be best understood as an exercise of neo-patrimonial power according to which the political system is embedded in the African socio-cultural matrix. Since "neo-patrimonialism rests on notions of political legitimacy which favour the redistribution of resources from patrons to their clients", Chabal (2002:454) argues that such politics lead to massive economic inefficiency. Despite political transitions to multiparty politics, African politicians have adapted to the new political framework without necessarily allowing it to "undermine the neo-patrimonial political system within which they operate" (Chabal 2002:459). Chabal concludes therefore that the NEPAD initiative contains signs of neo-patrimonial politics that undermine initiatives towards greater democracy in Africa.

Apart from the two categories of critiques mentioned above, some argue that NEPAD adopted a top-down approach which lacked the necessary broad based consultation during its formulation (see Adésiná 2004). Although NEPAD eventually slowed down, it would be an overstatement to argue that the initiative dismally failed. One may argue that, to a great extent, the initiative succeeded in putting on the agenda of African countries the issues of human rights, good governance and democracy. Nevertheless, given what some see as the complacency of the AU in dealing with the crisis in Zimbabwe, some have levelled criticisms at NEPAD on that account. The argument here is that the declared goals in NEPAD have not always produced credible results (see Taylor 2005; 2002:68-75). In my view, however, one may still infer positive contributions of the NEPAD initiative particularly with regard to the APRM.<sup>111</sup>

As Okokpari (2004:253) argues, the APRM "presents fresh opportunities for strengthening democracy to ensure that the basis of governance transcends the narrow confines of personal rule, patron-client relations or ethno-religious politics." In this regard, Manby (2013:225) writes, "In South Africa, for example, xenophobia was identified as a key issue, while the challenge of managing diversity was stressed for Kenya; both countries faced violent proof of these issues soon after the reports were published." Such usefulness of the APRM notwithstanding, there were challenges associated with the lack of political will to effect necessary changes as drawn by respective governments into a national programme of action subsequent to the country review reports. Manby (2013:225) illustrates this point with reference to Kenya. Positively therefore, I think that the AACC NEPAD programme did the ecumenical movement a great service by simplifying the APRM<sup>112</sup> questioners in order to build capacity for churches to engage in dialogue and influence policy formulation in their respective countries. The AACC initiative also holds much potential for enhancing good governance practices within churches.

The NEPAD secretariat in Pretoria was later transformed to become the NEPAD Planning

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<sup>111</sup> From 2003 when the APRM commenced its operations to October 2013, 17 countries had completed their first full review.

<sup>112</sup> Here it is useful to mention that Kenyan ecumenist Bethuel Kiplagat, who has worked closely with the AACC, served on the panel of the APRM. I thank him for drawing my attention to the APRM and its significance for AACC reflections.

and Co-ordinating Agency (NPCA) following an AU decision in 2007 which was implemented in 2010. The NPCA came to regard itself as ‘the leading African development organisation, able to mobilise private sector, heads of state and African people as a force for positive change, building continental prosperity and regional integration’ (African Union 2007:144).

#### *b) Corruption*

The Assembly paid attention to the threat of corruption on the sustainable development of African countries (see AACC 2006:55). The vice was noted as a moral crisis. The Assembly proposed a number of measures that churches could take to address this challenge including declaring churches and church-related institutions corruption free zones. Since the Assembly located the root cause of corruption in the misuse and abuse of power and public resources by those in leadership, delegates committed to denouncing such practices (see AACC 2006:221). Although the AACC has not hitherto provided concrete reflections on the issue of corruption, the leadership played a prophetic role in denouncing corruption at many fora including medial statements. The irony associated with corruption in Africa is that the vice became rampant almost hand in hand with the numerical growth of Christianity on the continent. On the basis of the Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index and indicators such as those used by the Pew Global Attitudes Project, a study by Heather Marquette (2010:4) for instance indicates that “many of the most corrupt countries in the world... also rank high in terms of religiosity.” In some African countries for instance, some of the African leaders who posed as Christians have gone down in history as individual who presided over some of the most corrupt of governments. The case of Zambia’s Frederik Chiluba is a case in point. Church leaders in some African countries became dumb folded on the basis of “gifts” given to them by corrupt politicians.

While it may be misleading to label corruption as a typically African problem, it is true that corruption has been one of enemies of African sustainable development. At the heart of corruption is a negative form of self-interest namely greed. In my view therefore, a specific contribution of the churches lies in its advocacy and praxis anchored on theological and ethical reflection (see Stückelberger 2010:163-192). Here, one must concede that moral action on the basis of religious influence (read: church teaching) is indeed a complex issue (see Marquette 2010:19). Construing the relationship in the way that Marquette does presents a dichotomy between religion and ethics. Such a view is largely untenable in the African context given that the relationship between religion and ethics is often seen to be symbiotic (Bujo 2003:19-20; Magesa 1997:44). Nevertheless the value of Marquette’s argument lies in the fact that there are divergences when it comes to determining which acts are corrupt and which are not. The argument takes on new significance if one for instance considers the prosperity gospel as it has spread in Africa. Here I am mindful of divergent interpretations.<sup>113</sup> This notwithstanding, one may agree with Stückelberger (2010:130) that the prosperity gospel is a “modern form of simony”.

Granted that Pentecostal theologies have generally been considered “politically irrelevant” when it comes to addressing socio-political issues, their contribution to challenging corruption is equally limited (see Togarasei 2011:349). This is not to suggest that mainline churches have been corrupt free. Examples of corrupt practices in churches may suffice. According to Stückelberger (2010:66-67), these include inter alia bribery in elections or appointments of church leaders (bishops, elders, school principals, and other positions in Christian

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<sup>113</sup> For instance, Lovemore Togarasei (2011:350) claims that the prosperity gospel contributes to poverty alleviation: encouraging entrepreneurship, employment creation, encouraging members to be generous, giving a positive mindset and encouraging a holistic approach to life.

institutions), misappropriation of project funds and land that belongs to the churches, and corruption in personal management (e.g. in the form of non-payment or misappropriation of social security/pension funds for church employees).

Drawing from my analysis of the WCC ecclesiology and ethics debate in chapter 3, I think that the insight that the church is a moral community is particularly instructive with regard to the role of the church in addressing corruption. This view stresses that the church does not only have but is a social ethic (cf. §3.3.2a above).

### c) *Peace and Reconciliation*

The Yaoundé Assembly also considered strengthening the AACC's ministry of peace and reconciliation. If the Addis Ababa Assembly (AACC 1997:227) recommended that the AACC exploit its observer status at the OAU (now AU), Yaoundé went further to insist on the AACC seeking active participation at the various structures of the AU. These decisions were regarded strategic since the AACC believed that at the heart of development was peace and justice. Accordingly, the decision to accompany and engage NEPAD, as will be shown below, was partly informed by the conviction that it advocated values that would enhance peace and development in Africa (AACC 2006:38).

Past experiences of AACC involvement in conflict resolution necessitated the need for a team of eminent persons to support and enrich the AACC conflict resolution and peace building efforts in Africa. As a follow up to the call of the Addis Ababa Assembly (1997), the Yaoundé Assembly (2003) affirmed the Eminent Persons Ecumenical Programme for Peace in Africa (EPEPPA), a joint initiative of the AACC, WCC and the Church World Service that was launched in November 2005, in Accra Ghana. EPEPPA was envisaged as a peace-building initiative rooted in the African traditions of consulting respected and trusted elders<sup>114</sup> to help resolve challenging community problems.

The Yaoundé Assembly also discussed the concerns of women, youths and the disabled in relation to justice for the marginalised. In continuity with past Assembly deliberations on women, the Yaoundé Assembly envisioned a new community of men and women working together to the glory of God. The AACC had made strides in this regard but more needed to be done. In this regard, the AACC women's desk launched a new publication *Rise Up and Act: A Resource Material on Violence against Women* (see Musyoni et al 2002). With this resource material, the women's desk envisaged that the church would "listen to victims of violence with a commitment to creating space for their healing, restoration of their dignity, liberation of the perpetrators and reconciliation of the communities." Regarding youths, the Assembly received the report of the Youth Pre-Assembly in which crucial issues were placed on the agenda of the Assembly including the need to address issues affecting youth such as HIV/AIDS, corruption and the impact of the global economy (see AACC 2006:211-213). Prior to this, AACC youth department published a book on the challenges of economic globalisation on the youth (see Adzor 2002).

With the active participation of the Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (EDAN), the Assembly also welcomed a theological statement from EDAN entitled "A Church of all and for all". Later in 2004, a memorandum of understanding between the WCC and the AACC was signed leading to the housing of the EDAN office at the AACC secretariat in 2005. As will be shown in my discussion of the move towards the revitalisation of theology in the work of the AACC below, concerns with disability have since been integrated in the work

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<sup>114</sup> For a useful discussion on this approach to conflict resolution, see Brock-Utne (2001:11-13). See also Kariuki (n.d:11-15) for a discussion on the basis of conflict resolution by elders and the challenges posed on such a view in contemporary Africa.

of the AACC (see §7.6.2d below).

*d) Churches' Response to HIV/AIDS*

If Addis Ababa's treatment of the challenge of HIV/AIDS was rather cursory, the deliberation at Yaoundé was substantial owing in part to the attention that the issue had received in several theological forums prior to the Assembly. Further, by the time of the Assembly (1997), the magnitude of HIV/AIDS as a major health and societal problem had become apparent. AACC President Kwesi Dickson described HIV/AIDS as "the most lethal scourge to development of Africa" (AACC 2006:74). Hitherto, most churches in Africa were silent on the issue of HIV/AIDS either out of denial or condemnation (see Amanze 2007:35-43; Doupe 2005:16). In his paper to Assembly, Dr. Peter Okalet, then director of the Medical Assistance Programme (MAP) International Africa Office, noted that HIV/AIDS exposed the churches' fault lines in attitudes of and language of clergy in theology, ethics and actions. That is, churches and other faith based organisations generally ignored harmful customs and traditions; created factions over condom use; called PLWAs sinners; and avoided talk of HIV/AIDS in holy places" (see AACC 2006:140). Such concerns lay behind the words in the communiqué of the Joint Theological Conference held at Mbagathi, Kenya in August 2000, which urged churches in Africa to tackle vigorously the root causes of HIV/AIDS, including amongst other things, "honesty and openness on issues of sexuality" (see Mbagathi 2001:96).

Already in January 2001, the AACC organised a "Church Leaders' Consultation on the Approach to the HIV/AIDS Crisis" in Mukono, Uganda. Participants at the consultation recommended inter-alia that churches develop guidelines for best practices in prevention, sexuality education, family life education, HIV prevention, AIDS care and orphan support. This meeting was soon followed by a similar consultation on the approach to the HIV/AIDS Crisis for church leaders in West Africa held from 23-25 April in Dakar, Senegal. Later in November that year, a Global Consultation on the Ecumenical Response to the challenge of HIV&AIDS in Africa was held in Nairobi, Kenya bringing together several representatives of African churches, the AACC, the WCC and church partners from the North. The consultation drafted the HIV/AIDS Plan of Action. Quite significantly, the first commitment of the participants was to condemn discrimination and stigmatization of people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) as a sin and as contrary to the will of God. As part of its implementation of the Plan of Action, the WCC set up the Ecumenical HIV&AIDS Initiative in Africa (EHAIA) within the framework of its Ecumenical Focus on Africa (see Kessler 1998:226). These developments indeed served as significant backdrop to the attention focussed on the issue of HIV/AIDS at the Yaoundé Assembly (2003).

The issues of stigma, healing, suffering, gender, poverty and sexual morality constituted key points of deliberation at Yaoundé (see AACC 2006:52-54). A special session was held to highlight the gravity of the pandemic and the Assembly subsequently adopted a document entitled "Covenant Document on HIV/AIDS" (CDHA). The AACC also made provisions for voluntary on-site testing for HIV at the Assembly. While Addis Ababa (1997) shied away from addressing human sexuality, the issue was touched on at Yaoundé (2003) albeit only cursory. The CDHA affirmed human sexuality as a gift from God. The report of the women pre-Assembly to the Yaoundé Assembly also highlighted the training of young people on human sexuality as a significant measure amongst others aimed at addressing the challenges of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. This was significant because the silence and difficulties faced by African churches to speak openly about issues of sex and sexuality made it painfully challenging to "engage, in any honest and realistic way, with issues of sex education and HIV

prevention” (see WCC 2001:2).<sup>115</sup> The CDHA made a number of links between HIV/AIDS and poverty, justice, and gender inequality.

From 7-11<sup>th</sup> June 2004, the AACC organised a conference for African church leaders and church-related institutions at which the CDHA was distributed. The title of the report from that consultation namely “Come let us rebuild: The Church is HIV+ Power Destroys” is instructive regarding the budding theological reflections on HIV/AIDS within the AACC at the time. The consultation noted for instance that the exclusion of People Living With HIV/AIDS is a sin (see AACC 2004:23,43; cf. WCC 2001:6). Participants further committed to HIV/AIDS treatment are available at church-supported mission hospitals, clinics, dispensaries and health posts.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic prompted further reflections that touch on both ecclesiology and ethics. What does it mean to be church when some members of the body of Christ are stigmatised in the face of HIV/AIDS? At the local level, ethical issues related to for instance the use of condoms as a preventive measure initially seemed to be divisive amongst churches (see Amanze 2000:207; Bongmba 2007:24-26). As the untold suffering caused by HIV/AIDS became apparent, churches were keener to work together in addressing the pandemic. In the view of Musa Dube (2002b:547), the church is called to an even wider ecumenism which embraces interfaith cooperation in the struggle against HIV/AIDS.

The theological reflection that soon emerged on HIV/AIDS ranged from challenging deuteronomistic interpretations to reflecting on theodicy in the face of suffering caused by HIV/AIDS (see Conradie 2005c:422-427). Other reflections tended to focus on soteriological questions in the face of the debilitating consequences of the HI-virus (see De Gruchy 2000). Deeper reflections went on to highlight the nature of God in the context of suffering brought by HIV/AIDS. Kobia (2003:156) offers a useful perspective on a theological response to HIV/AIDS by developing the perspective of a theology of life in which the church is conceptualised as the sanctuary of life. He argues that in “HIV/AIDS, the tragedy is that the very means by which human life comes to being has become the source of death and raises the threat of non-being.” For Kobia, the response of the church may therefore be best encapsulated in terms of three vital areas, namely theology, ethics, and pastoral care (cf. UNAIDS 2005:11). A significant ecumenical development in this regard is the work on curricula for theological education that sought to mainstream HIV/AIDS in theological education in Africa (see Dube 2003, 2004).<sup>116</sup>

The AACC Covenant Document on HIV/AIDS (CDHA) that was adopted at the Yaoundé Assembly (2003) is ecclesologically instructive. It states that “we are one body of Christ and if one member suffers, we all suffer together with it; that the Lord our God identifies with the suffering and marginalized and heals the sick”. On this basis, the Yaounde Assembly affirmed the view of the church as “a community of compassion and healing, a safe place for all PLWAs to live openly and productively with their status.”<sup>117</sup> This emphasised a notion of the church as a healing community anchored on hope and love. The stress on the church as the body of Christ in the context of HIV/AIDS highlights the notion of solidarity. Several African theologians at the time thus spoke of the church as having HIV/AIDS (see Ackermann 2004:31; Dube 2002b:539-540; Van Klíken 2008:327). The advance in reflections on

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<sup>115</sup> For a useful discussion on the secrecy around sexuality in African societies, see Amanze (2010b:84-89). On an African theological reflection on human sexuality, see Bongmba (2007:50-54, 99).

<sup>116</sup> The WCC conference on theological education and ecumenical formation called “A Journey of Hope in Africa” held in Johannesburg in September 2002 was a watershed for these developments.

<sup>117</sup> For a thorough treatment of the distinctive characteristics that the churches may bring in response to HIV and AIDS see Chitando (2007a). See also Orobator (2005:245-248).

HIV/AIDS within the AACC notwithstanding, it may be argued that it was only later that the institution developed effective programmes on HIV/AIDS build within its structures and programmatic work. This became the remit of its department of “Peace, Healing & Reconciliation”. One may thus argue that comparatively, the WCC initiative on EHAIA has made far better strides in this regard (see Chitando 2007b:68).<sup>118</sup>

#### *e) Restructuring of the AACC*

In response to the recommendations of the Addis Ababa Assembly (1997:224) to revisit the AACC mission, vision and objectives due to changing contemporary social, political, economic and cultural circumstances in the African context, delegates at the Yaoundé Assembly (2003) affirmed new vision and mission statements of the AACC. The new vision statement read as follows, “churches in Africa together for Life, Truth, Justice and Peace” (John 10:10). This was to accompany the ethos of restructuring that was recommended by the Assembly. It was apparent at Yaoundé that there was need to restructure and review the AACC for strategic renewal given the changing landscape of the continent and wider calls for the reconfiguration of the ecumenical movement mooted within the ambits of the WCC (see Raiser 2002b:501-505; cf. § 2.4.2 above). Accordingly, the Yaoundé Assembly decisively endorsed a two year period for the restructuring of the AACC. A concept paper presented by Dr. Agnes Abuom provided a detailed assessment of the AACC and suggested necessary restructuring measures. The paper further highlighted the need for the AACC to find its niche as a continental ecumenical structure. In this regard, it was suggested that the AACC “should be issue based focussing on advocacy, NEPAD and economic justice, capacity building, HIV/AIDS, and peace and conflict resolution” (AACC 2006:114). In my view however, the theological underpinning was not explored. Helpfully, the suggested changes implied that the AACC would no longer operate tasks based on desks but rather organised around theme-focussed teams.

#### **7.5.3 Yaoundé’s Ecumenical Vision**

As an overall picture, it may be argued that Yaoundé (2003) had an exclusive focus on ethics. This was partly augmented by concerns to redefine the mission and vision of the AACC in light of several societal changes and a growing competitiveness in the public space. The restructuring measures noted above illustrate the urgency that was attached to reviving the AACC. In this regard, the new General Secretary emphasised the need to clarify the distinctive role of the AACC in its attempt to respond to challenges on the continent. As attempt to discern what that role would be, Dandala highlighted analysis and interpretation of events and trends on the continent; advocacy for response to such issues; and enabling activities that will strengthen the African church and the ecumenical movement in Africa to act together for common, transformative action (see AACC 2006:87). In such a situation Dandala did not imagine separating good theological reflection from strategic networking and financial resource building. Here, one notes a vision of unity predicated on common action. The Yaoundé Assembly logo is instructive in this regard as it depicts the AACC resolve to rally its member churches to act together in the reconstruction of Africa. Collectively, the assembly delegates committed to rediscover the “African values of solidarity and community life” in the Yaoundé covenant (see AACC 2006:222).

It was the outgoing General Secretary of the WCC, Konrad Raiser, who stressed the ecumenical imperative of unity as the *raison d’être* of the ecumenical movement. In his view, “the unity of the church remains the primary purpose, an objective of the ecumenical

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<sup>118</sup> For a recent examination of how the various strands of African theology have responded to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, see Chitando (2009).

movement” (AACC 2006:94). Such unity, however, has to find expression in real life situations, strengthening the fellowship of people and churches. Another voice that contributed to shaping the AACC ecumenical agenda at Yaoundé was Samuel Kobia, who addressed the Assembly in his capacity as the newly elected General Secretary of the WCC. Kobia underscored the imperative of unity when he noted that “if need be, we must rethink institutional forms of ecumenism especially if it inhibits and ceases to find expression in the aspirations for unity among ordinary Christians who seek to bring change in society” (see AACC 2006:109). These various perspectives on unity clearly underscore the integral relationship between ecclesiology and ethics. Put differently, if unity is the goal of the ecumenical movement, such a goal is meaningless if it is divorced from the quest for justice and the struggle against conditions that attack the dignity of human beings. While one may rightly note a focus on the latter in the Yaoundé Assembly deliberations, it is also true that the issues which were discussed at the Assembly had serious ecclesiological implications. Certainly, the issue of HIV/AIDS had consequences that were deeply theological and ecclesiological, namely regarding both the visible expression of the unity of the church as well as on the mission of the church in an era of HIV/AIDS.

## **7.6 Ecclesiology and Ethics at Maputo (2008)**

When the AACC gathered for its 9<sup>th</sup> General Assembly at Maputo, Mozambique from 7-12<sup>th</sup> December 2008, the organisation had “regained its place as the pre-eminent ecumenical organisation on the continent” (AACC 2012:10). The successful implementation of the Yaoundé “surgery” resulted into an AACC with renewed focus. Several factors account for this. Programmatically, the AACC abandoned the approach arranging its work in terms of desks and instead adopted an integrating and crosscutting approach to the work of its directorates. Additionally, the institution implemented a social audit, thus enhancing its financial management systems (see AACC 2012:31). The AACC also successfully implemented the restructuring measures taken at Yaoundé with a special focus on clarifying its role as an ecumenical and pan-African institution.

The Maputo Assembly met against the background of a crumbling global economy and political polarisation in a number of African countries. Therefore, that the theme of the Assembly was “Africa Step Forth in Faith” was indeed significant to rally the African churches to continue the rebuilding of the continent with faith in Christ. This theme of hope was broken down into several sub-themes including entrenching human rights, spirituality and environmental conservation, global pan-African solidarity, HIV/AIDS, reconciliation and peace, urban mission and moral regeneration, amongst others. These were discussed in several workshops at the Assembly.

### **7.6.1 Selfhood of the Church at Maputo**

The search for the selfhood of the church in Africa remained an issue of concern although not as central as it featured in previous Assemblies. In earlier Assemblies, the selfhood of the church often found expression in the search for authenticity (read: Africanisation). Recalling the AACC past visions of authenticity, the then President of the AACC, Rev. Dr. Nyansakoni-Nku, pointed out to delegates of the Maputo Assembly (2008) that the quest for authenticity which began with the ‘end’ of the missionary era had also been linked to a larger agenda of the quest for political and ecclesial unity (AACC 2012:17). In this regard, Nku noted that the AACC journey with churches has been a movement of decolonisation (2012:18). The new challenge was therefore to rethink the selfhood of the church in light of people’s struggles against poverty and injustice.

While significant developments had been recorded in the area of theological reflection

stirred by African theologians, other dimensions critical to the quest for selfhood remained a challenge for the AACC institutionally. To this end, although the AACC could not speak of total self-sustainability at the time of the Maputo Assembly, its new leadership under Dandala made significant strides building on the Chipenda and Tutu legacy of developing a solid property portfolio for the institution. Without doubt, the AACC was becoming exemplary to its member churches and councils in terms of good financial planning and strategic direction.

## 7.6.2 Church and Society

Deliberations on church and society at Maputo (2008) marked a significant advance in terms of the scope of issues addressed as well as on the variety of participating organisation apart from AACC member churches and councils. A variety of issues were addressed primarily in workshops build around Assembly sub-themes. In what follows, I will only highlight those issues that indicate significant advance over the deliberations at Yaoundé. This is necessary because one sometimes finds repetitions of recommendations and this may be attributed to the fact that there are always a significant number of people attending an AACC Assembly for the first time thus not always aware of previous recommendations. I will therefore highlight the Maputo Assembly deliberations on climate change, economic justice, peace and reconciliation, and on the theological basis for the work of the AACC.

### *a) Environment and Spirituality*

The Maputo Assembly (2008) recognised concern for the “environment and spirituality” as a key priority for the churches in Africa. In this regard, it marked a unique advance over its predecessor Assemblies. A brief historical account of AACC concern with environmental issues is germane in this regard. For instance, the report of the Addis Ababa Assembly (1997) documents a recommendation on environmental issues but this was not tied to previous Assembly deliberations such as the Lomé Assembly in 1987 (see AACC 1997:166;227). In the Yaoundé Covenant from the 8<sup>th</sup> General Assembly at Yaoundé (2003), the need to create awareness and commit to the protection of sustainable environment were captured but not elaborated upon (see AACC 2006:223). In several ways therefore, Maputo (2008) marked an advance in AACC discourses on environmental issues. Reasons for this include inter alia consequences of the restructuring process (strategic visioning) as well as the involvement in the AACC of some theologians who were actively engaged in discourse on climate change such as the Kenyan Jesse Mugambi.

The contribution of Jesse Mugambi, who was one of the resource persons at the Maputo (2008) workshop on environment and spirituality, is quite discernible from a critical analysis of the Assembly recommendations on the issue (see AACC 2012:161-164).<sup>119</sup> The Assembly recommendations in this regard placed emphasis on strengthening the capacities of AACC member churches in community based adaptation and mitigation interventions with the goal of contributing towards the diversification of livelihood options. In terms of influencing policies and programmes of national governments, the AACC committed to advocating for the integration of climate change into national sustainable development plans (see AACC 2011a:12). The AACC thus included in its post Maputo programmatic arrangements “climate and care of creation” programmes. “Climate and care of creation” programmes included practical training and education on environmental stewardship by reflection on ecological issues of relevance to the AACC constituency.

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<sup>119</sup> Mugambi’s perspective on climate change may be gleaned from several of his publications on climate change as well as through his various contributions as member of the WCC Working Group on Climate Change (since 1994) and as consultant on environment with the Norwegian Church Aid (2004-2008).

Already, in the statement from its conference on “Churches for Water in Africa” held in Entebbe, Uganda in May 2007, the AACC pointed out the aggravating impact of climate change manifested in “unpredictable rainfall, prolonged droughts, devastating floods, desertification and drying up of water sources.” In its document “African Church leaders’ Statement on Climate Change and Water” – which was an outcome of an Ecumenical consultation on Climate Change organised by the AACC in June 2008 – the AACC elaborated on the implications of climate change on poor societies and further described the “climate crisis” as “primarily spiritual and ethical<sup>120</sup> with serious political, economic and justice implications”. Accordingly, the statement encouraged churches in Africa amongst others to collaborate with their partners in the North to establish eco-congregations as one way of checking consumerism through behaviour change thus reduce carbon emissions.

An analysis of the AACC discourse on the environment and climate change as gleaned from its official statements and Assembly resolutions makes apparent the tension between ecclesiology and ethics. Very often, such statements point out what the problems are with regard to for instance climate change. Yet, this is not typically accompanied by sustained theological reflection. The subtitle of the report of the “Pan-African Interfaith Consultation on Climate Justice and Sustainable Peace in Africa” held under the auspices of the AACC in Nairobi in 2011, namely “Climate Justice and Sustainable Peace in Africa: From Faith and Values” is instructive. From “faith and values” indicates the intuitive recognition of the distinctive contribution of the faith communities to the environmental crisis. In that regard, the message of the Nairobi consultation (2011) noted that faith communities can contribute towards reversing the environmental crisis by drawing from their “spiritual resources to foster crucial ecological virtues such as wisdom, justice, courage and temperance and to confront vices such as greed”. This statement was presented at the COP 17 that met in Durban, South Africa in December 2011. In light of such involvement of faith communities in ecological discourse, I agree with Sigurd Bergmann (2009:102) that religious contributions

emphasize especially the ethical dimension and the geopolitical and ecological injustice, which becomes even more inescapable in the ongoing climate change, and its asymmetrical distribution of risks and sufferings between the rich and the poor.

Within a Christian context, the question is how to understand the distinctive contribution of the church. More specifically, the concern has to do with what the distinctive role of the church is within the larger household of God.

For some African theologians, emphasis has been placed on the prophetic impulse of the churches for ecological justice thus stressing ethics. Such approaches emphasise justice at the global level and stewardship at the local (Mugambi 1987; Mugambi & Vähäkangas 2001:4).<sup>121</sup> With regard to the earlier for instance, AACC General Secretary Rev. Dr. André Karamaga noted in his address to a session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights held in Gambia in May 2009, that climate change was not only an isolated environmental issue but “a broader sustainable development and poverty reduction issue with equity and justice demands” (see AACC 2009). AACC discourse in this regard may be described as engagement in what Ernst Conradie (2011b:158) calls “Prophetic environmental critiques” (cf. SACC 2009:47). A critical question has to do with whether ecumenical statements in this regard are effective in influencing policy making on climate change.

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<sup>120</sup> A similar argument was advanced in its statement on Responsible Leadership to Reverse Global Warming and Ensure Equitable Development addressed to the UN Climate Change Conference (COP 13 and CMP 3) held in Bali, Indonesia from 13 to 19 December 2007 (see AACC 2007c).

<sup>121</sup> For example, Mugambi suggests that the principles of precaution, mitigation and adaptation for the management of the environment (see AACC 2012:161; cf. Mugambi 2010:7-11).

According to Conradie (2006:183), although the impact of such statements may be “limited outside the communities within which they are produced, they do play a significant role within such communities in shaping the moral vision of its participants.”

The focus on stewardship in African Christian approaches to ecological issues construes the role of the church in terms of contributing towards developing norms or an ecological ethos.<sup>122</sup> Such an approach is generally characteristic of AACC discourse on environmental issues. A statement by philosopher Holmes Rolston (2010:121) captures the role played by the churches very aptly he notes as follows; Religious communities offer “a value-laden, unified understanding of creation, humankind, and our obligations as stewards of the Earth.” However, it must be noted that the usefulness of the metaphor of stewardship has been criticised by some theologians as being too hierarchical and too androcentric (see Conradie 2007a). Additionally, it is argued that the notion of stewardship assumes a very strong anthropocentrism (see Conradie 2006:128-132).

In my view, the African ecumenical debate on ecological theology has not sufficiently explored the distinctive contribution of the church to the ecological crisis. Arguably, without grounding their contributions on theological reflection, statements made by churches or ecumenical structures on the environmental crisis may end up simply repeating what others are doing better. In his *The Church and Climate Change*, Ernst Conradie (2008b) offers a helpful entry into ecological discourse that stresses the unique contribution of the church. According to Conradie (2011b:156-157), the environmental crisis provides the especially the Protestant churches with an opportunity for reformation, renewal, and conversion. This observation is best understood in light of Conradie’s (2006:8; 2017:72) insistence that ecological theologies “offer a Christian critique of the cultural habits underlying ecological destruction and an ecological critique of Christianity.” His proposal is instructive given its emphasis on the significance of theological reflection on the “unique eschatological nature of the church” (Conradie 2011b:157; cf. White 1967:1203-1207). Here one must acknowledge the variety of Christian responses to ecology.<sup>123</sup>

The approach being suggested here should not be understood as a construal of the mission of God as typically ecclesiocentric. If from a theological perspective, salvation is understood as the work of God, one could argue that God’s Spirit may as well work through secular efforts that contribute towards liberation, reconciliation and reconstruction. The prophetic impulse of the churches’ concern notwithstanding, to only emphasise the ethical, namely what we must do about the environment, is not enough. Nevertheless, the churches contribution to the debate attains immense global significance given the churches’ consciousness of it’s

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<sup>122</sup> For instance, in the “Declaration of the Fellowship of Christian Council in Southern Africa (FOCCISA) on Ecological Debt and Climate Change”, it is affirmed that “the church has a moral and theological responsibility to embrace its role of stewardship to lead in caring for creation” (see SACC 2009:80).

<sup>123</sup> In an approach that resonates with many other African contributions to ecology that draw on the ecological wisdom of African tradition religion and culture (e.g Magesa 1997; Gitau 2000), Zambian theologian John Kapya Kaoma (2014:198) attempts an appropriation of the notion of ubuntu for the articulation of the ethics of ecological interconnectedness (cf. LenkaBula 2008:387-393). On that basis he portrays Jesus as the “ecological ancestor of life” (2014:180). As a theological contribution, Kaoma’s study nevertheless raises begs further theological clarity. For instance, although he discusses notions of spirit particularly that of *Nyami-Nyami* (river spirits) and *mizimu*, it is unclear how he relates his proposal to the Christian teaching of God as Trinity and in that regard the place of the Spirit in his vision of an ecological ethic. Seen from another perspective, Kaoma’s stress on Christology raises questions about the relationship between Christ and the Spirit. Pneumatologically, another problematic has to do with how to construe the relationship between spirits and the Spirit in the African context. For a useful overview of distinct Christian discourses on ecology see (Conradie 2017:73-76). On dominant approaches within the African context, see Conradie (2016a), and Mugambi & Vähäkangas (2001).

belonging to the world wide church (read: catholicity). Although catholicity is often employed as an ecumenical theological concept, it has ethical implications in the context of ecological discourse. This view attains significance especially in light of the understanding of the *oikoumenē* as “whole inhabited world”. For thinkers, such as philosopher Holmes Rolston, a case can be made in this regard concerning the role of religion in ecological issues. He writes:

Both science and religion can think and operate at world scales, with transgenetic senses of community, more so than other cultural institutions, such as government and law. Even global capitalism, as we have seen, favors the interests of the rich in the developed nations (2010:141).

From the foregoing, a crucial question has to do with the place of the church in the *oikoumenē*.<sup>124</sup>

#### *b) Peace and Reconciliation*

The Maputo Assembly also discussed the churches’ ministry of peace and reconciliation. Discussions included reflections on the role of women as agents of peace, the political crisis in Zimbabwe, and on the relationship between peace and the issues of human rights and interfaith relations. The Assembly issued a strong statement condemning the action of President Robert Mugabe especially with regard to the March 2008 elections in Zimbabwe. A bold decision was taken in which Mugabe’s regime was declared illegitimate and the Assembly urged the AU not to recognise the regime as such (see AACC 2012:169). The illegitimacy of Mugabe’s regime as it relates to the 2008 elections was succinctly captured in the following words by Tutu in an interview on the BBC’s “The Andrew Marr Show” on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2008. Challenging the AU not to recognise Mugabe’s election, Tutu noted as follows:

If you were to have a unanimous voice, saying quite clearly to Mr Mugabe ... you are illegitimate and we will not recognise your administration in any shape or form – I think that would be a very, very powerful signal and would really strengthen the hand of the international community.

The AACC stance on Zimbabwe was in part informed by its involvement in monitoring the 2008 elections in addition to earlier concerns that reach back June 2003 when the AACC issued a letter in which among other issues, the AACC appealed to its member churches to lobby the Zimbabwean government to support mediated dialogue between the government and the opposition. In the report of the AACC team that monitored the 2008 elections in Zimbabwe, it was concluded that those “elections were far from being free and fair” (AACC 2008a:32). As act of continued accompaniment of the churches and people of Zimbabwe, the Assembly dedicated 25<sup>th</sup> January 2009 as a day of prayer for Zimbabwe.<sup>125</sup> Further, to

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<sup>124</sup> Some recent contributions on Christian ecological discourse have thus stressed the relationship between ecclesiology and ecology. Several scholars specifically accentuate the relationship between ecclesiology and ecology from a missiological perspective (see Conradie 2016b:102-115, Jenkins 2008; Kaoma 2011:297-298). Quite often, such a focus prompts soteriological reflections. For instance, as ethicist Willis Jenkins (2008:180) observes, when “soteriology puts creation at the center of God’s mission, then mission practice can make the well-being of all creation a specific goal of mission.” At a deeper level of analysis, it becomes necessary to clarify the place of the church in the larger scheme of God’s work between creation and salvation (see Conradie 2016b:113). As Conradie (2016b:111) rightly notes, “the church is a sign of the coming reign of God – nothing more than, but also nothing less than, a sign”.

<sup>125</sup> The prophetic role of churches in Zimbabwe has found expression in various initiatives. A seminal document in this regard was published in 2006 by the Zimbabwe the Council of Churches, the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference and the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe. The said document, entitled “The Zimbabwe We Want”, was an attempt at initiating national dialogue on the vision for a future Zimbabwe (see The Zimbabwe We Want 2006). For a helpful analysis of the role of the churches in responding to the crisis in Zimbabwe see Chitando & Togarasei (2010:160).

demonstrate the role of churches in peace building, the AACC in response to an initiative of the churches in Mozambique, inaugurated a peace monument in Maputo on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2008. The monument is constructed using guns collected from the Christian Council of Mozambique's project "Transforming Guns into Hoes" (TAE) a programme that consisted in collecting decommissioned weapons from the Mozambican 16 year civil war in exchange for agricultural production tools. The project was inspired by Bishop Denis Sengulane – one of the Mozambicans bishops awarded the AACC peace prize at the Harare Assembly (1992) – and supported by Christian Aid (see Tester 2006:170).

The Maputo Assembly also placed emphasis on the role of women as agents of peace by first reflecting on the predicaments that women are confronted with in the context of war (AACC 2012:165-166). The Assembly affirmed the role of women as catalysts in peace and reconciliation efforts and noted their contribution towards healing and reconciliation at community level (AACC 2012:178). Another highlight of the Assembly in this regard was the launch of a Gender audit conducted in Zambia, Malawi and South Africa (AACC 2012:125). The findings from the gender audit in these countries indicated several positive initiatives taken by churches on gender issues but also made the call for further strategic in this regard.

Related to the Assembly deliberation on women as "agents of peace" were discussions on the close connections between peace and human rights. In this regard, former South African President Thabo Mbeki noted in his address to the Assembly that "we must together treat the question of peace on our continent as a fundamental human right, precisely to emphasise and underline the sanctity of human life" (see AACC 2012:10). Collectively, the Assembly affirmed human rights as given by God on the basis of the theological doctrine of the *imago Dei*. Human rights were also discussed in relation to children. The Assembly affirmed the role of children as veritable partners in God's mission in the renewal of Africa (AACC 2012:174). Further, the AACC launched a publication on Children's rights and ministries at the Maputo Assembly (see AACC 2008b).

Prior to Maputo, the AACC had undertaken several strategic decisions. I will point out only three such initiatives here. First, the AACC set up a liaison office in Addis Ababa in 2007 and subsequently appointed Melaku Kifle as its Ecumenical Envoy to the AU. As a strategic diplomatic move, it was envisaged that this development would enhance participation of the churches in peace-building and democratisation in the continent. Secondly, the EPEPPA which was established in 2006 but received earlier endorsement at Yaoundé (2003) sent a delegation led by former Mozambican President Joaquim Chissano to Burundi in January 2008. This ecumenical solidarity mission proved the significance of the EPEPPA initiative in peace building. Thirdly, in collaboration with the "Fellowship of Christian Councils in the Great lakes and Horn Africa" (FECCLAHA) and in consultation with church leaders from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda, and Uganda, the AACC established the Great Lakes Region Ecumenical Forum (GLREF) in May 2006 in Bunjumbura, Burundi. The GLREF was formed to address issues of peace and security in the Great Lakes Region (see GLREF 2006:9). Meanwhile in the post-Maputo period, the AACC established the office of an Ecumenical Special Envoy to Sudan in 2010 and Dr. Sam Kobia was appointed in that regard. One of Kobia's immediate preoccupations was the process of the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) which was signed in Naivasha, Kenya in January 2005 between the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and the Government of Sudan (see Kobia 2013:2-3).

### c) *Economic Justice*

The Maputo Assembly also reflected on the issue of economic justice. In retrospect, it may be argued that in the period leading up to the Maputo Assembly (2008), the AACC engagement

on economic issues often stressed the concerns of economic justice and fair trade. With regard to the politics of aid and development for instance, the AACC in collaboration with the SECAM, issued the statement “African Church Leaders’ Statement on AID Effectiveness” ahead of the Accra High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness<sup>126</sup> that was held Accra in September 2008. In the statement, it was noted that

aid effectiveness should be measured in its contribution to sustained reduction of poverty and inequalities; and its support of human rights, democracy, environmental sustainability and gender equality”. It must be a transformational development that is based on the theological affirmation that all persons are created *in the image and likeness of God* (Genesis 1:27) with the potential to live just, humane and dignified lives in sustainable communities (AACC/SECAM 2008:2).

Another area of involvement in economic issues relates to the AACCs critique of the processes and possible impact of the European Union’s (EU) Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs). EPAs were negotiations aimed at trade and development agreements negotiated between the EU and African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Partners engaged in regional economic integration which started in September 2002 (Carbone 2013:747). Their roots may be traced back to the signing of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement signed in 2000 but brought into force in 2003 (see Gomes 2013:718-723). The AACC made concerted efforts to enlighten its constituency on EPAs and the possible impact that these agreements would have on the poor (see AACC 2007a, 2007c). A fundamental critique of EPAs raised by the AACC is that they “are skewed in favour of rich countries and threaten to leave more poor worse off than ever before”. It was feared that EPAs would potentially lead to the collapse of local industries due to liberalisation and that it would also encourage the privatisation of essential basic services (AACC 2007a:4-5). The AACC thus called for an overhaul and review of the EU’s neoliberal external trade policy, particularly with respect to ACP countries (2007a:15).

The theological basis for AACCs reflections in this regard were informed by a prophetic vision of the church. Hermeneutically, the AACC amply utilised the Accra Confession interpretation of empire to describe economic domination. The Accra Confession speaks of empire as:

the convergence of economic, political, cultural, geographic, and military imperial interests, systems, and networks for the purpose of amassing political power and economic wealth. Empire typically forces and facilitates the flow of wealth and power from vulnerable persons, communities, and countries to the more powerful.” (WARC 2004; cf. Hardt & Negri 2000:23)

The Accra Confession typically links empire and economic injustices. For example, such a perspective formed the basis on which Arthur Shoo, then Programme Director of the AACCs department of Empowerment and Capacity Building grounded his address to the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly held in Wiesbaden, Germany in June 2007 (see Shoo 2007:30-34). He noted that “one of the multiple consequences of the present Empire’s financial

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<sup>126</sup> This was in response to the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005) that was developed mainly by donor governments with a view to improve the technical and management aspects of aid efficiency. A follow up consultation was convened in Nairobi on “Moving from Aid Effectiveness to Development Effectiveness” in 2011. The Nairobi meeting issued the statement “The Nairobi Declaration” in which emphasis was placed on aid for development. Such aid was viewed as “aid that promotes the integrity of creation, social justice, sharing, participation of all stakeholders, responsible stewardship, upholding of the rule of law, democracy, good governance, respect for human dignity, gender equality and accountability at all levels” (see The Nairobi Declaration 2011:1). The work of the AACC on the above issues is best understood in light of the organisations participation in the Open Forum for Civil Society organisations (2008-2009) within the framework of the Global Facilitation Group (Open Forum 2012:35).

rationale is the transfer of rights of human beings to things and financial fictions” (2007:32). In similar vein, the AACC *Report of the Study on African Ecumenical Engagement with the Consultation Process Towards a Joint EU-Africa Strategy* notes the following:

Economic globalization has not benefited Africa as the multilateral trade regime under the World Trade Organization (WTO) favours countries of the North and often leads to the underdevelopment of countries of the South (AACC 2007b:10).

In view of the foregoing discussion on engagement with economic justice issues prior to the Maputo Assembly (2008), I will now more specifically highlight the mandate of the Maputo Assembly with regard to economic justice. Generally, one may argue that Maputo (2008) generally affirmed the Accra Confession and accordingly recommended its adoption amongst AACC member churches (AACC 2012:155). In the Maputo Assembly key resolutions on economic empowerment, the Accra Confession was seen as a useful tool for the churches’ work on economic justice (cf. §3.2.4 above). This notwithstanding, it seems to me that this has not found clear institutional expression within the AACC in terms of further theological reflection as for instance within the Council for World Mission in which the Accra Confession has informed its model of “mission in the context of empire”. Nevertheless, it was significant that in its final message (the Maputo covenant), the Assembly delegates observed that “with the prevailing forces of globalization, Africa experiences a new form of oppression with crippling economic burden through unjust international relations, trade and hopeless foreign debts” (AACC 2012:175). Accordingly, they affirmed the call of the AACC Yaoundé Assembly (2003) for the reconstruction of Africa as still valid.

#### *d) Revitalisation of the Theological Basis of the Work of the AACC*

Another development from the Maputo Assembly relates to the process of the revitalisation of the theological basis of the work of the AACC. General Secretary Dandala placed this issue in proper perspective for delegates to the Maputo Assembly (2008) when he pointed out that the journey of the AACC from Yaounde to Maputo was marked by efforts to strengthen a coordinated theological approach to work of the AACC (see AACC 2012:31). With the restructuring endeavours (endorsed at Yaoundé) and wider calls for the reconfiguration of the ecumenical movement as intimated above (see §7.5.2e) in mind, Dandala saw theological reflection as being central to the process of revitalisation within the ecumenical movement in Africa. To this end, a workshop on “The Ecumenical Movement in Africa at a Crossroad” was held earlier in June 2004 in Nairobi (see AACC 2005a). The papers presented at the workshop covered many aspects of including the meaning of ecumenism, ethical and theological imperatives for ecumenism in Africa, and an alternative vision of authentic ecumenism in Africa. A critical analysis of the various papers leads one to conclude that the AACC may well provide a forum for theological reflection that will inform member churches in carrying out their God given mission to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ in word and deed (see AACC 2005a:8-12). In light of such developments, General Secretary Dandala impressed upon delegates at the Maputo Assembly (2008) to ponder on the centrality of theological reflection in the work of the AACC.

Accordingly, the Assembly endorsed the call to revitalize the AACC department of Theology. Subsequently, the department of “Theology, Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations” (hereafter Department of Theology) became one of the major focus of AACC activities in the post Maputo period. The Department of Theology was soon organised around the vision to provide space for contextual “in-depth theological, ecumenical and interfaith dialogue by stimulating a fresh understanding based on contextual reality, and by speaking out in a united voice to address the challenges of the African continent” (AACC 2011a:19). To actualise such a vision, the AACC Department of Theology soon placed emphasis on a number of key

strategic areas.

The first involved an attempt to revitalise sub-regional associations of theological institutions. In 2010 alone, the AACC facilitated several consultations of regional theological associations in Africa including ASTHEOL (in March), ATIEA (in October), WAATI (in October), and ATISCA (in November).<sup>127</sup> Following these sub-regional consultations, the AACC appointed an advisory committee for theological education which held its first major meeting in November 2010. The advisory committee recommended that the AACC launches two significant theological projects as part of the efforts to revitalise theological education in Africa. These are namely the establishment of “the African Fund for Theological Education” (AFTE) and the “All Africa Academy for Theology and Religious Studies” (AAATRS) (see AACC 2015:88). The AFTE is envisaged to, amongst other things, deepen, inspire and nurture contextualisation of African theological education, curricula and theologies. In terms of funding priorities, the fund will focus on inter alia leadership formation, literature development, and library development in addition to supporting initiatives for innovative pedagogical models in ecumenical theological education (see AACC 2013:50-51). Meanwhile, the AAATRS was launched in December 2012 during the AACC International Symposium on “The Church in Africa” held in Nairobi” (see AACC 2013:49). The first congress of the AAATRS took place in Nairobi from 19-22 February 2015 under the theme “Towards an African Theology of Life with Dignity”. The establishment of the AAATRS constitutes the second initiative. The WCC Theological Education programme (WCC/ETE) collaborated with the AACC in this regard (see Dossou 2013:146; Werner 2010:289-291).

Thirdly, the Department of Theology prioritised ecumenical formation of young theologians primarily through short term engagement, exposure and ecumenical experience at the AACC often in the form of an intensive theological institute. The AACC has since held a number of such institutes with the very first held alongside the Maputo Assembly in 2008. Dr Tharcisse Gatwa, then consultant for the WCC ETE Africa regional, played a crucial role to ensure the success of the Maputo institute. Subsequent theological institutes were held in 2009 (Nairobi), 2011 (Nairobi), 2013 (Kampala), 2014 (Nairobi), and 2015 (Nairobi). Given the focus of the institutes on ecumenical formation and preparation of the next generation of African church leaders and theologians, the theological institutes also provide unique opportunities for the young theologians – drawn from member churches in different parts of the continent – to meet senior ecumenical and pan-African leaders thus enhancing intergenerational learning. For instance, at the Maputo institute (2008), the young theologians interacted with senior ecumenists such as Dr. John Gatu and Rev. Jose Chipenda. At the Kampala (2013) institute, the participants had the opportunity to engage with Prof. John Mbiti, Dr. Sam Kobia, and Prof. Konrad Raiser. Given the limited knowledge about the work of the AACC in general and of the ecumenical movement in particular amongst several participants of AACC institutes that I have so far attended, the significance of the institute to deepen ecumenical theological knowledge amongst young theologians is self-evident. These institutes therefore provide synergies for common theological reflection amongst young theologians.

The fourth significant component included encouraging theological publications for consumption in Africa and beyond (see e.g. Kalengyo 2013). The department also gave crucial attention to theological reflection on interfaith relations and the concerns of disability. The AACC has encouraged member churches and theological associations to incorporate these concerns in theological education. On interfaith dialogue, the AACC has since

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<sup>127</sup> For a helpful overview of regional theological associations in Africa, see Amanze (2010a). For developments on theological education in Francophone Africa, see Gatwa (2003).

heightened its collaboration with PROCMURA, as well as in networking with other religious bodies on issues of common interest. An example of the latter is a Pan-African Religious Leader's conference on climate change that was jointly organised by the AACC, PROCMURA and the South African Faith Communities' Environment Institute (SAFCEI) in June 2011 in Nairobi. The AACC also took part in the first Interfaith Summit jointly organized with the AU in Abuja, Nigeria from 15-17 June 2010 (see AACC 2010:3-4). The AACC has since appointed three church leaders in the permanent steering committee. On disability, the AACC theology department has carried out the mandate of the Maputo Assembly as noted in the key resolutions on the church and people living with disability mainly through collaboration with EDAN and member churches. In this regard, emphasis has been placed on encouraging theological reflections and disability discourse in churches and theological institutions in Africa (see Kabue & Kamba 2013:733).

### **7.6.3 Maputo's Ecumenical Vision**

An analysis of the work of the AACC in the period between the Yaoundé (2003) to the Maputo (2008) was characterised by an increasing focus on the role of the church in addressing the various issues facing the African continent particularly in relation to economic, health, and peace and reconciliation issues. The AACC vision that was endorsed at the Yaoundé Assembly (2003) namely "Churches in Africa together for Life, Truth, Justice and Peace" is instructive in this regard. The role of the AACC came to be understood more in terms of a facilitator and enabler of member churches to respond together to issues facing the continent. The mandate of the Maputo Assembly resulted into an AACC plan of action (2009-2013) that was organised around five thematic areas, namely Empowerment and Capacity Building; Theology, Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations; Peace, Healing and Reconciliation; the Lomé Office; and the AU Liaison office in Addis Ababa.

While stressing the ecumenical vocation, since the Addis Ababa Assembly the AACC has tended to focus more and more on accompanying churches and engage in discernment for positive transformation (see AACC 2014:4). This was partly prompted by the restructuring measures that required its leadership to profile the AACC in a manner that is both qualitative and also reflecting a particular niche regarding its approach to social issues (see African Christian Pulse 1998:3). The "Empowerment and Capacity Building" directorate therefore became critical in the post Maputo period leading to various capacity-building workshops and training for leaders of AACC member churches. More significantly, the revitalisation of the Theology Department initiated as it was at the Maputo Assembly (2008) helped ground the AACC programmatic work in theological reflection. Nevertheless, the question of an appropriate ecumenical vision working towards the visible unity of the churches in Africa is not immediately clear. In Dandala's address to the Maputo Assembly, an attempt was made to emphasise the significance of ecumenical unity.

For Dandala, however, this called for locating the ecumenical calling of the African church both locally and internationally. Locally, "ecumenism must be inserted into the daily exercise of the faith of our people", Dandala argued. "It must speak their language and sing their songs" (AACC 2012:25). He thus envisioned the role of the AACC as facilitator and enabler of the churches to carry out their mission. Internationally, Dandala emphasised a pan-African vision for the ecumenical movement. To this end, significant efforts had been made to foster and nurture relationships with African Diaspora communities in Europe and the United States of America.

### **7.7 Ecclesiology and Ethics: The Journey from Maputo (2008) to Kampala (2013)**

This section will be distinct from the preceding sections in which I analysed the AACCs

handling of ecclesiology and ethics in terms of three broad themes namely selfhood of church, church and society, and ecumenical vision. This is necessary for a number of reasons. The first is that since this research covers the history of the AACC from 1963-2013, I will deliberately attempt to limit my analysis to the year 2013. Secondly, given the nature of AACC Assemblies as forums at which the General Secretariat reports on progress made and subsequently seek a new mandate from the churches, my focus will be on former in order to do justice to the first reason above. This is necessary since an historical analysis can only be undertaken in retrospect. On this basis, I will specifically focus on selected events and activities in the programmatic arrangement of the AACC in the period leading up to the AACCs 10<sup>th</sup> General Assembly held in Kampala from 3-9 June 2013 (hereafter Kampala 2013). This notwithstanding, the sections below namely §7.7.1, §7.7.2, and §7.7.3 may as well be read as dealing with the “selfhood of the church”, “church and society”, and “ecumenical vision”, respectively.

### **7.7.1 Africa Step Forth in Faith: The Churches in Africa and the Struggle for Dignity in the Post Maputo Period**

In the post Maputo period, the AACC had firmly positioned itself to work towards the vision of “churches in Africa together for life, truth, justice and peace. In response to the mandate of the Maputo Assembly (2008), the new AACC programmatic thrusts included “peace, healing and reconciliation”, “empowerment and capacity building”, “theology, ecumenical and interfaith” in addition to “finance/administration and resource development”. One of the earliest initiatives undertaken by the AACC after Maputo was the launching of the “Campaign for African Dignity” in July 2009. This was an attempt at mobilising resources for the AACC within Africa as a strategy for the local ownership of the AACC. Furthermore, this campaign was seen as part of the continued search for the selfhood of the church in Africa. Theologically, this promised to be nuanced version of the quest for selfhood under the new leadership of General Secretary André Karamaga based on a theology of hope and dignity that “takes into account contemporary trends and developments in the reconstruction, liberation and self-sustainability of Africa” (see AACC 2011a:2). Karamaga was not at all new to the AACC or to the ecumenical movement in general. He had previously served the AACC in a number of positions including that of information officer and as the head of the “selfhood of the church unit” (1990-1994). He later joined the WCC where he served as Executive Secretary for Africa (2002-2008) before accepting the African churches’ call for him to serve as General Secretary of the AACC in 2008.

Related to the “Campaign for African Dignity” was the AACC initiative to offer short courses to leaders its member churches from its secretariat in Nairobi. As a capacity building initiative, this also helped enhance the ownership of the AACC by member churches. The courses touched on several aspects of the ministry of the church including self-sustainability of churches. Spearheaded by its deputy General Secretary for Finance and Administration Dr. Bright Mawudor, the AACC had made significant strides in building a solid property portfolio. Thus, in the report of the AACC Finance and Personnel Committee to the Kampala 2013 Assembly, positive operating results were reported (see AACC 2015:90-93). The foregoing illustrates the AACCs continued search for the selfhood of the church.

### **7.7.2 Towards Kampala 2013: God of Life, Lead Africa to Peace, Justice and Dignity**

In this section, I will briefly discuss two symposia that were held prior to the Jubilee Assembly in Kampala (2013). As I will argue, these symposia were critical preparatory occasions for the Kampala Assembly (2013).

a) *God of Life, Peace, Justice and Dignity: A Very Brief Overview of the Theological Symposium held in November 2011*

As part of the preparatory process towards its 10<sup>th</sup> General Assembly and Jubilee celebration, the AACC held two symposia at which theologians reflected on crucial issues facing the ecumenical movement and society in Africa. The symposia also provided an opportunity for further reflection on the theme of the Kampala 2013 Assembly namely “God of Life, lead Africa to Peace, Justice and Dignity”. This theme was decided upon in collaboration with the WCC which also settled on a related theme for its General Assembly in Busan, Korea in November 2013 namely “God of Life, lead us to Peace and Justice”. Concerns regarding the selfhood of the church in Africa may be discerned in the AACC inclusion of dignity in its Assembly theme.

The first symposium was held on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2011 at the Desmond Tutu Conference Centre in Nairobi under the theme “God of Life, Peace, Justice and Dignity”. The various papers presented at the symposium highlighted several aspects of the Christian understanding of God as it relates to life, peace, justice and dignity. In what follows, I will briefly highlight some of the key issues that emerged in this regard. Papers read at the symposium were later published in a book bearing the title of the symposium and was launched at Kampala 2013 (see Kalengyo 2013). In his contribution at the symposium Karamaga (2013:33) pondered on a question raised by Oduyoye’s (2000:75) well over a decade ago namely whether the God of our redemption is the same as the God of creation. Given the planned Assembly theme namely, “God of Life, Lead Africa to Justice, Peace and Dignity”, Karamaga rhetorically probed the question of which God of life is called upon. Responding to the earlier question in the affirmative, Karamaga (2013:42) went on to underline Christology as the new fact in the African experience of God. In Jesus Christ, Karamaga argues, Africans encounter an expression of the God in whom their ancestors believed from time immemorial. While he commends first generation African theologians for their commendable demonstration of the African belief in God, Karamaga (2013:35) laments that as a reaction to the denigration of the African view of God, inculturation theologies failed to integrate their reflections on an African understanding of God with the teachings of the church and its various liturgical expressions. However, I disagree with Kamaraga (2013:43) when he claims that the heart of African identity is God. Such a view is indeed problematic, given the arguments on whether it is belief in the supreme being or anthropocentricity that is the heart of African Religion (see §5.3.3a above).

Reflecting on God as author of all life, the contribution by Simon Dossou – then Director of the AACC Department of Theology – drew on the thinking of Vincent Mulago to argue that the African concept of life emphasises being in relation with others including the living dead (2013:28). In his reflections on peace, Tharcisse Gatwa drew on Mveng’s distinction of anthropological poverty from socio-economic poverty and argued that salvation must be envisioned holistically (2013:72). Recognising the debate on the tension between peace and justice particularly in liberation theologies, Gatwa suggested that the ecumenical movements must contribute towards the building of a culture of peace. In his view, a “culture of peace is an approach to life that seeks to transform the cultural roots of war and violence into a culture in which dialogue, respect, and fairness govern social relations” (2013:84). Of the papers presented at the symposium, it was Dietrich Werner’s in which reflections on God were closely predicated on the ecumenical vocation. Werner (2013) related his proposal for a new concept of God to six major contemporary challenges namely, the environmental crisis; the crisis of the ecumenical movement; the anthropological crisis; the global economic/financial crisis; the crisis of ethnocentrism and religious fundamentalism; and the crisis of theology and theological education. Werner pleaded for the refocusing on God in the ecumenical movement

as this had implications on each of the above six challenges. Inversely, Werner's (2013:93) reflections pointed towards the appreciation of theme areas and theological discourses where an enriched and deepened understanding of the concept of God is emerging and the need for ecumenical dialogue on the same as part of the preparatory process of the Kampala Assembly.

*b) The Church in Africa: A Very Brief Overview of the International Symposium held in December 2012.*

The second theological symposium was held in Nairobi from 5-7 December 2012 on the theme "The Church in Africa: Opportunities, Challenges and Responsibilities". The symposium brought together several African theologians, ecumenical partners and past AACC leadership, including Desmond Tutu and José Chipenda. As part of the discerning process to situate the theme of the Kampala 2013 Assembly within the context of church and society, the consultation discussed several themes, including challenges facing African churches such as the search for unity, interfaith relations, African dignity, climate change and care for creation, and human trafficking. The reports from teams tasked to capture the various addresses and discussions at the symposium, highlighted significant aspects for the future work of the AACC including the need to develop a strong Department of Theology to strengthen African theological education and interfaith dialogue (see AACC 2013:64). The issues addressed at this symposium found expression and further elaboration at the AACC 10<sup>th</sup> General Assembly held at the Munyonyo Commonwealth Complex in Kampala from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> June 2013. For instance, the Assembly emphasised the theme of dignity with respect to human trafficking, gender based violence, discrimination of women, youth and people with disability. With regard to disability, the Assembly called for a theology of inclusion and disability (see AACC 2015:97-99).

In a rather unprecedented fashion, the 10<sup>th</sup> General Assembly noted in its final message to the churches that it would be inconsistent for churches to claim to promote and enhance life while at the same time been discriminatory. Part of the message reads: "We need a Church that is not afraid of confronting critical issues that affect the lives of people no matter how controversial these issues are, these include issues of sexuality, and sexual orientation" (see AACC 2015:16). That sexual orientation was highlighted was indeed unprecedented, given widespread opposition towards homosexuality amongst African church leaders.<sup>128</sup> Some attribute such opposition to the view that it is foreign to Africa. This is disputed, however, by several scholars who instead argue that homosexuality existed in Africa long before colonialism (see Dlamini 2006:131-132; Gunda 2010:193-194, 205). This notwithstanding, Chitando & Mapuranga (2016:174) are on point when they argue that the strident anti-colonial spirit that runs through much of African Christianity arguably contributes to the negative attitude of most African church leaders to the issue of homosexuality.

The former President of the AACC Desmond Tutu is an exception in this regard. Tutu has

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<sup>128</sup> For instance, ahead of the WCC Harare Assembly in 1998, the then General Secretary of the AACC Clement Janda argued that the WCC meeting needed to reflect an African stamp by focusing on African concerns (Solheim 1998). He observed that homosexuality was not amongst those concerns. Instead, he highlighted the issues of poverty, the heavy debt burden, environment and diseases such as Malaria and HIV/AIDS as African concerns. This was notwithstanding Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe's virulent denunciation of homosexuality. On the contrary, Tutu argued that putting the issue of homosexuality on the ecumenical agenda was a matter of ordinary justice. Subsequently, the WCC Harare Assembly Programme Guidelines Committee recommended that the WCC move from sexual orientation to human sexuality in its rich diversity a move that proved useful for many stakeholders. For a chronology of WCC work on human sexuality, see WCC (2006b).

been a strong supporter of the rights of gay people, albeit not on behalf of the AACC. His remarks on sexuality at the AACC Nairobi Symposium (2012) were useful in reminding the AACC to address this issue. In a carefully worded statement, Tutu intimated on the oppression and marginalisation of people “who are not as heterosexual as most of us are” thus beckoning church leaders to stand with the oppressed (see AACC 2012:6). Returning to the Kampala message to the churches as it relates to sexuality, the real question is how the AACC will follow up this debate in its programmatic arrangements in the post Kampala 2013 period. One may argue that the official silence of the AACC on homosexuality reveals an underlying tension between ecclesiology and ethics. How best can one explain the low profile taken by the AACC on matters pertaining to human sexuality? Notwithstanding the nature of fellowship within the AACC, the official institutional position on homosexuality in particular is largely unclear.

### **7.7.3 Theological Self-understanding of the AACC: Perspectives from Kampala 2013**

Kampala 2013 was unique, given that the AACC was also celebrating 50 years of its existence. In addition to required attendants as per AACC constitution, the Assembly was joined by some of its former Presidents and General Secretaries as well as two participants who were present at the founding Assembly at Kampala in 1963, namely Mrs Doris M'timkulu and Ambassador Bethuel Kiplagat. The latter shared their memories of the inaugural Kampala Assembly (1963). In continuity with the search for authenticity, the Assembly was addressed by Prof John Mbiti who launched the second edition of his *Concepts of God in Africa*. For purposes of this section, I will focus my discussion on an emerging ecumenical vision within the AACC in the period between Maputo (2008) to Kampala 2013.

From the foregoing, it may be argued that the period leading up to the AACCs 10<sup>th</sup> General Assembly in Kampala (2013) witnessed significant efforts and initiatives directed at the theological underpinning of all AACCs programmes. There was a renewed focus on the ecumenical vocation of the AACC. This was necessary following concerns raised at the Harare (1992) and Addis Ababa (1997) Assemblies regarding the need to clarify the AACCs self-understanding vis-à-vis its involvement in wider civil society. Following the restructuring measures taken at Yaoundé (2003), the Maputo Assembly (2008) set in motion a pan-African vision of the ecumenical movement in Africa stressing the significance of working together for the transformation of the continent. Such a vision of unity was predicated on the view that the AACC is an ecumenical instrument facilitating synergy amongst its members by mobilising its constituency to speak with one voice on issues affecting the people of the continent. The Maputo mandate of theological revitalisation entailed a fresh quest for deepening theological reflection within the AACC and its constituency. In this regard, the symposium on “The Church in Africa: Opportunities, Challenges and Responsibilities” (2012), which I have discussed in the preceding section, particularly devoted attention to discerning not only the new vision and mission of the churches in Africa, but also on an appropriate ecumenical vision (see AACC 2013:43). Two perspectives may be highlighted in this regard. First, suggestions were made that the AACC should develop common theological understanding on issues of mutual concern. Second, recognising the denominational dynamics in Africa, some argued that the AACC needs to understand itself as a promoter of new forms of ecumenism, reaching beyond the current parameters (see AACC 2013:64). These perspectives were further nourished at Kampala 2013.

The resolutions of Kampala 2013 on unity linked church unity with the quest for peace, justice and dignity. The Assembly noted that “the objective of ecumenism is to equip churches with the knowledge of how they can achieve church unity in order to achieve, peace, justice and dignity in the church as the body of Christ” (AACC 2015:102). Here, one may

infer a tension between ecclesiology and ethics. More strictly, it may be argued that this statement presumes a functional understanding of unity. Such a tension was best captured by Konrad Raiser in his address to the AACC 10<sup>th</sup> General Assembly on the relationship between the “imperative of Christian unity and the promotion of peace, justice and dignity”. In his view, the continuing divisions between churches weaken their credibility and impact in the struggle for peace and justice. Such a view, as intimated above, implies unity as a functional requirement for the effective common witness of the church in the world. However, this is rather problematic a view theological speaking. As Raiser notes, “unity is not so much an objective to be achieved through dialogue and negotiation, but is offered us to be made manifest and only in this sense does it become a calling or responsibility for the Christian community” (see AACC 2015:66). In a way, this resonates with my discussion on the ecumenical indicative and the ecumenical imperative in chapter 1 of this study (see §1.2.2b). That is to say, ecumenical unity is both a gift and a calling.

## 7.8 Conclusion

This chapter has analysed how the AACC handled the tension between ecclesiology and ethics in the period between its Assemblies in Harare (1992) and Kampala (2013). The range of issues that the AACC addressed in the period covered in this chapter reflects the response of the churches to the impact of neo-liberal globalisation. The chapter therefore documented the various ways in which the AACC addressed issues confronting the people of Africa in a globalising world. These issues included democratisation, human rights, environmental issues, the debt crisis, HIV/AIDS, and international trade justice. The tension between ecclesiology and ethics was highlighted in my discussion on each of these issues.

The chapter further reviewed the deepening of political, economic and social analysis in the work of the AACC. In this regard, it was shown that the AACC forged networks and partnerships with various continental actors including the AU. Such a profile has led some to view the AACC as a continental pan-African civil society actor (Melief & Van Wijk 2008:25-26). At a deeper level of analysis, theological concerns emerged regarding the need to clarify the self-understanding of the church vis-à-vis its role in wider civil society.

Theologically, attention was paid to the pioneering role of the AACC in promoting the African theology of reconstruction. While the chapter noted that this theology indeed helped churches to ponder their role in the reconstruction of the continent, it was argued that the African theology of reconstruction did not eventually focus on the distinctive role of the church in social transformation. In my analysis of deliberations at the Addis Ababa Assembly (1997), for instance, I noted how it was that very little attention was paid to the identity and nature of the church. In light of this and other examples, it was argued that discourse within the AACC in this period tended to focus more on ethics than ecclesiology. However, a renewed focus on theology was noted in the post Maputo Assembly period. In that regard, I averred that the Maputo General Assembly (2008) marked a watershed in as far as an innovative attention to theological reflection within the AACC is concerned. This soon led to various initiatives aimed at the revitalisation of regional theological associations in Africa and the setting up of the AAARTS and the AACC “Fund for Theological Education”. The decision to strengthen the AACC theology department was accompanied with the holding of frequent theological institutes targeting young African theologians in an attempt to provide space for ecumenical formation in Africa. These initiatives indeed offer much hope for the future of ecumenical theological reflection and education in Africa. The post Maputo period also witnessed the deepening of interfaith relations in collaboration with PROCURA. Finally, the chapter highlighted the emerging ecumenical vision in the period leading up to Kampala 2013.

## **Chapter 8: Conclusion: From Authenticity to Reconstruction – Ecumenical Visions in the African Context**

### **8.1 Introduction**

This study set out to investigate how the AACC has addressed the ecumenical tension between ecclesiology and ethics in different periods of its history from 1963 to 2013. As a point of departure, the study analysed ecumenical discourse on ecclesiology and ethics in the context of the WCC study project on ecclesiology and ethics conducted during the period 1992 to 1996. The research more specifically entailed a study, assessment and analysis of literary data on the history of the AACC in order to identify the various ways in which the AACC addressed the ecumenical tension between ecclesiology and ethics. In what follows, I will briefly summarise the findings of this study and point out possible recommendations and areas for further research.

### **8.2 Summary of Findings**

#### **8.2.1 Very Brief Summary of Chapters**

This study had two parts. The first part comprised chapters 1-4. Chapter 1 presented the background to the study, the problem statement, research hypothesis, methodology and outlined the structure of the study. Chapter 2 focussed on the changing ecumenical landscapes paying attention to the emergence of Pentecostal type churches and widening calls for the reconfiguration of the ecumenical movement. Chapter 3 described the ecumenical tension between ecclesiology and ethics and traced the history of earlier attempts to address this tension particularly within the context of the WCC. The chapter specifically provided an overview and critical analysis of the WCC study project on ecclesiology and ethics. Therein, it was affirmed that ecclesiology and ethics belong together. Chapter 4 offered a brief historical background to the emergence of institutional ecumenism in Africa with specific reference to institutional history of the AACC. The chapter drew attention to the ironic character of the missionary movement in Africa, given its pioneering role in the introduction of both denominationalism and the ecumenical movement in Africa. With regard to the latter, brief examples of African ecumenical initiatives were highlighted in order to underscore African agency in African church history.

Chapters 5-7 formed the second part of this study. Therein, I offered an analysis and critical comparison of the ways in which the AACC has addressed the ecumenical tension between ecclesiology and ethics. These chapters demonstrated that the ecumenical tension between ecclesiology and ethics has indeed been at the heart of the ecumenical movement in Africa. It was argued that although the AACC has indubitably tended to focus more on the socio-responsibility of the church (read: ethics) than on ecclesiological questions on the nature of the church, concern for theological reflection on ecumenical unity has not been completely absent. The study therefore demonstrated that attention to theological issues (read: ecclesiology) was at many times prompted by deep concerns over social issues in the African milieu. In the following sections, I will highlight specific themes that emerged from this study.

#### **8.2.2 Ecclesiology and Ethics are integrally linked: The WCC Study on Ecclesiology and Ethics.**

In Chapter 3, I examined the WCC study project on ecclesiology and ethics. Programmatically, that study was an attempt to reconcile two major streams of the ecumenical movement, namely Faith and Order (FO) and Life and Work (LW). FO tended to focus on

the search for visible unity, while the emphasis of LW is best encapsulated in the dictum “doctrine divides but service unites”. The study showed that moral issues can be a church dividing factor just as doctrinal issues are. Put differently, there is a significant threat to church unity posed by responses to divisive moral questions. The WCC study specifically underscored the interconnectedness of ecclesiology and ethics. From my analysis of this project, I will highlight two aspects that I consider significant for ongoing reflection on ecumenical theology in Africa, namely the conviction that ethics and ecclesiology are inseparable, and the need for appropriate language to describe such an integral relationship.

a) *Ecclesiology and Ethics are Inseparable*

The first aspect that this study derives from the WCC project relates to the conviction that ecumenical ethical reflection and action are essential to the nature and life of the church. If so, the churches struggle for peace and justice in the world cannot be seen as an appendix to the life of the Church. The social responsibility of the church is an expression of the faith and intrinsically connected to the life of the Church. As the report of the Rønde consultation notes, the “being (*esse*) of the church is at stake in the justice, peace and integrity of creation process” (CU par 5).

In his reflections on the WCC study project, Dirkie Smit (2003:430) touches on a crucial point when he asks whether “churches can still call themselves churches if they do not engage themselves in ecumenical efforts” and “whether they are still churches if they do not follow their ethical calling in the world”? One way of responding to these questions is to argue that if a church does not engage with the issues that affect humanity and creation, it is not being truly church. At a deeper level of analysis, one may further opine that if churches do not engage in such issues together, they are not being truly church. In this regard, my response to the perceptive question raised at the second consultation of the WCC study project at Tantar, namely, whether we may not say that “if the churches are not engaging these ethical issues together, then none of them individually is being fully church?”, is in the affirmative.

The insight that ecclesiology and ethics are integrally connected is undeniably a relevant one in the African context. As this study has shown, the tension between ecclesiology and ethics has been at the heart of the ecumenical movement in Africa. Nevertheless, this is not to suggest the tension between ecclesiology and ethics is easily resolvable. Not even the WCC study claims a simple road to the integration of ecclesiology and ethics. The titles of the three reports that emerged out of the WCC study project, namely *Costly Unity*, *Costly Commitment*, and *Costly Obedience* are indicative of the difficulties in resolving the tension. Some of these difficulties were outlined in my analysis of post-study reactions to the WCC ecclesiology and ethics study project (see §3.3.5 above). Michael Kinnamon (2014:58) succinctly captures both the difficulties and significance of endeavours to integrate ecclesiology and ethics. He writes, “holding together the tension between unity and justice is not easy, but the attempt to do so is precisely when the ecumenical vision becomes most profound and the ecumenical movement most vital.” The above observations notwithstanding, the WCC study was an important effort that yielded useful expressions to underline the interconnectedness of ecclesiology and ethics.

b) *Appropriate Language to Express the “and” between Ecclesiology and Ethics*

In view of the foregoing, the significance of the WCC study project may be understood in terms of its contribution towards finding apposite language for expressing the proper connection between ecclesiology and ethics. In chapter 3, I highlighted divergent scholarly opinions on the significance of the WCC study project (see §3.3.5c above). Although some judge the project to have been fruitful as a discussion between the traditions of FO and LW (Mudge 1998:68), others argue that the study “ended rather precipitously, having perhaps

posed more questions than pressed to conclusions” (May 2001:49). In my view, a conclusive position in this regard would require an investigation of WCC discourse and programmatic arrangements after the Harare Assembly in 1998 at which the results of the ecclesiology and ethics study project were presented. While an attempt to assess the success of the WCC project as an endeavour to bridge the divide between discourses in FO and LW was clearly not within the scope of the present study, suffice it to note that there is a perception in some circles of the ecumenical movement that the classical agenda around FO has recently been supplanted by focus on ethical issues (see Braaten & Jenson 2003:5, 24-25). A number of scholars who take this view often point to the WCC (2013b) study on *Moral Discernment in the Churches* as an example. However, some challenge this view by pointing to the recent WCC (2013a) convergence document on *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* arguing that the document holds ecclesiology and ethics together (see Gibault 2013:396-398).

From my analysis of the WCC project in chapter 3, it may be concluded that the WCC discourse on ecclesiology and ethics contributed towards finding appropriate language to describe the interconnection between the search for ecclesial unity and the social responsibility of the church. The notions that emerged from the study process in this regard include “moral community” (§3.3.2a), “moral formation” (§3.3.3), *koinonia* (see §3.3.2a), and “household of life” (§3.3.4). My study suggests that these themes may well be appropriated in an articulation of a renewed vision of the ecumenical movement in Africa. To do so, it is proposed that these insights may be enriched through an ecumenical reformulation of African notions of *ubuntu*. Towards the end of this concluding chapter, I will sketch preliminary reflections in that regard. Before doing so, I will briefly summarise the findings of this study regarding our research question, namely “how has the AACC as the most significant ecumenical structure in Africa addressed the relationship between the theological quest for unity (read: ecclesiology) and the social responsibility (read: ethics) of the church in Africa between 1963 and 2013?”

### 8.2.3 From Visions of Authenticity to Reconstruction

Chapter 4 of this study provided an historical background to the formation of the AACC. Chapters 5-7 were a response to the research question. Overall, the research findings indicate that the tension between ecclesiology and ethics has indeed been at the heart of ecumenical theological discourse within the AACC. The study has shown that although this tension has been unwittingly addressed at different points in the history of the AACC, such efforts have not always been intentional. One of the reasons for this is that theological developments within the AACC have often been prompted by a variety of social concerns (read: ethics). This view may be inferred already in a statement from the AACC Inaugural Assembly held at Kampala in 1963, in which the mission of the Church in relation to the world is framed as the point of departure for all other ministries of the church (AACC 1963:39). In the following, I will explore how this is so and proceed to offer a summary of the findings of this study on how the AACC has addressed the tension between ecclesiology and ethics.

#### a) *African Theology and Social Context: The Contributions of the AACC*

That theological developments in the AACC have often been prompted by social issues has been variously underscored in this study (read: ethics). This was demonstrated by means of an analysis of the history of the AACC in three periods in recent African history, namely decolonisation (1963-1974), development (1975-1992), and neo-liberal globalisation (1992-2013). The study spelt out how these periods generally correlate with the emergence of African theologies of inculturation, liberation, and reconstruction.

In the first period (1963-1975), concerns regarding cultural imperialism and the call for

decolonisation characterised theological reflection and endeavours within the AACC (see §5.3.4 above). Accordingly, decolonisation was described as the nexus for the development of African theology in its formative stages (see chapter 5). Understandably, African inculturation theologies arose during this early period as a response to Western cultural imperialism and the theological paternalism of Western/missionary theology. In Chapter 5, I underlined the contribution of the AACC in the development of African theology in this regard. In the period that followed (1975-1992), concerns regarding nation building in Africa North of the Limpopo and the problem of apartheid in South Africa impelled a focus on the liberative dimension of theology (see §5.3.4 above). The experience of racial oppression was the womb out of which South African black theology was born while African liberation theologies emerged in the rest of Africa as a response to the suffering and exploitation experienced in the socio-political context. The emergence of the various African theologies of liberation, including African women's theology, soon led to a debate between inculturation and liberation approaches to African theology. This debate was described as basically hermeneutical and therefore a reflection of theological diversification on the continent (see §6.3 above). During this second period, the AACC uniquely provided a forum within which both approaches found expression (see §6.3.4 above).

Given the disillusionment with African nationalist leaders owing in part to the so-called “failure of development”, the emergence of oppressive regimes and widespread corruption, the third period (1992-2013) signalled the need for a nuanced approach to social issues. Thus, by the early 1990's, the AACC began a process of discerning the role of the churches in an era marked by the end of the Cold War and widespread calls for democratisation. The African theology of reconstruction emerged as a theological response to the conditions in which African people found themselves (§7.3 above). This theology places emphasis on the responsibility of the church in the task of social transformation by advocating the role of theology in developing a human rights culture, policy formulation and nation building. In all three periods, the AACC has provided a forum for dialogue and facilitated creative theological thought encapsulated in the above mentioned theologies.

From the foregoing, it may be concluded that African theology has developed in relation to changes in the African social context (see § 5.8 above). There is a sense in which several aspects of the African social context have had an impact on theological thinking in African theology in general and the AACC in particular. In this regard, Chitando (2009:43) notes that at the heart of the various strands of African theology has been the dictum that “existential needs of Africans must constitute the core business of the church”. This has been decisive within the African context given that the church as an institution encounters – at close range – different elements of the social context in which it is embedded (see Orobator 2005:31). Such elements include, amongst others, the challenges of poverty, HIV/AIDS, gender injustice, corruption, and unemployment, in addition to other issues covered in this study such as apartheid, human rights, and ethnicity. There is a sense therefore in which African theologies arise out of the problems of daily existence and are therefore attempts at finding solutions to such exigencies. However, whether African theologies – and the ecumenical movement which spawned several such theologies – are successful attempts cannot be addressed here. Nevertheless, on the basis of my discussion of the role of the churches in democratisation (see §7.2.4c above) and the church struggle against apartheid in South African (see De Gruchy 2004:207-222), we may infer the significance of the ecumenical church for social change in Africa. Additionally, the recent interest in the study of Christianity in Africa by anthropologists and sociologists further buttresses this observation (see Ellis & Ter Haar 2004; Freeman 2012; Meyer 2004:450-453).

Returning to my discussion of African theology, it is plausible to argue that African

theology is to a great extent a socially constructed reality in as far as it is shaped by societal concerns. Pragmatically, this raises the question about the nature of African theology vis-à-vis the local church. Stated differently, this puts to test the claim of African theologies as relevant theologies. The significance of the AACC may in this regard be understood as both a source of African theology, as well as a platform in which academic African theology is challenged not only to reflect the local context but also to arise from the same. As a fellowship of churches, the AACC is potentially a unique forum from which African church leaders and theologians have an opportunity to learn and hear of concerns from other parts of the continent. In view of the foregoing, I will now sketch a very brief summary of the ways in which the AACC has addressed the ecumenical tension between ecclesiology and ethics as demonstrated in this study.

*b) Church and Society in AACC Discourse: An Unresolved Tension?*

From the above, it may be argued that AACC discourse reveals a constant embeddedness of the relationship between Gospel and culture on the one hand, and between church and society on the other in ecumenical reflections in Africa. Differently stated, AACC discourse has developed in relation to the social context. If so, the critical question that emerges relates to what it means to be church in the face of fundamental social challenges. Through a detailed analysis of primary documents on the AACC, this study has demonstrated that AACC discourse and programmatic arrangements have often tended to focus on the social responsibility of the church.

*i) The Primacy of the Church's Social Responsibility in the AACC*

The need to address pertinent challenges in the African context has not afforded the AACC the luxury of protracted theological discussions on unity. For African churches, it was more urgent to ask what churches would do together in the midst social problems and internal conflicts of all sorts than to ask the question of the doctrinal issues related to the unity of the church. In terms of priorities therefore, the churches' actions for peace and justice took precedence over ecclesiological questions pertaining to for instance ministry or church order. In a way therefore, one could argue that a focus on matters of faith and order have not so much constituted the core of the churches search for unity within the ambits of the AACC. Interestingly, this does not suggest that theological reflection has been absent. Ecclesiological reflection has also been present albeit the starting point has often been predicated on issues in the social/cultural context.

For instance, at the first Assembly of the AACC at Kampala (1963), the concern with the selfhood of the church in Africa was elaborated alongside wider debates on decolonisation and as such linked with the visions of Pan-Africanism and African nationalism (see §5.5.1b above). The nexus of ecclesiology and ethics came to the fore in Kampala's engagement with nationalism. The Assembly highlighted the threefold task of the church as prophetic, reconciling and witnessing. At the second Assembly at Abidjan (1969), the role of the church as prophet and reconciler was underscored. My analysis of the AACC's third Assembly held in Lusaka (1974) showed that issues in the social context prompted theological reflection. The concern with matters relating to apartheid, tribalism, colonialism, and ecclesiastical imperialism at the Lusaka Assembly provided a unique context in which the nexus of ecclesiology and ethics came to the fore. In his address to that Assembly, the then AACC General Secretary Burgess Carr emphasised that there is an integral relationship between the call to unity amongst Christians and the struggle for justice and reconciliation in the world. The Lusaka Assembly's famous call for the moratorium on foreign personnel and resources was another context in which the tension between ecclesiology and ethics came to the fore.

Apart from placing emphasis on the wider ecumenical agenda the issue of mature relations between churches (and mission boards) in the West and those in Africa, the Lusaka Assembly call for moratorium drew attention to the quest for the selfhood of the church in Africa. Although one may argue that ethical concerns over ecclesial imperialism prompted this debate, the call was at the same time a deeply theological one. Theologically, the implications of the moratorium as a call for the selfhood of the church were significant one not only in Africa but also elsewhere. One issue that this study has raised in this regard pertains to the issue of the catholicity of the church. Although this initially emerged as a critique of the call for moratorium, this study has argued that the moratorium was implicitly a critique of a distorted missionary version of catholicity. That is, a notion that limits catholicity with the churches in the West. This study has demonstrated that the notion of catholicity cannot be separated from contextuality. Catholicity has profound significance only in relation to contextuality. This study therefore contends that the moratorium debate was matter of both ecclesiology and ethics. At a deeper level of analysis, however, I think that as the ecclesiological debate on the moratorium got going, it was sidetracked by a political focus, namely on resistance against empire to which the church was asked to contribute. Nevertheless, an analysis of that debate within the context of the AACC leads one to affirm with Effiong Utuk that during this period, the AACC articulated visions of authenticity. These found expression in the language of the “selfhood of the church” and had played a role in the birth and subsequent development of African theology.

In the period after its Nairobi Assembly (1981), the AACC gave attention to a variety of issues, including human rights, the refugee problem, environmental issues, development, ethnicity, peace and reconciliation, and concerns of women and youths, in addition to the recurring theme of the selfhood of the church in Africa. At the Lomé Assembly (1987), there was emphasis on ecumenical collaboration amongst churches in the field of development work. A statement from that Assembly thus noted: “Development work should provide us with an opportunity to practise ecumenism and religious tolerance” (AACC 1988:58). The Assembly also stressed the role of the church in liberation with specific reference to the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. The next Assembly at Harare (1992) was a watershed regarding the AACC turn to a new theological approach to issues facing the Church. The African theology of reconstruction proposed by Mugambi at an AACC executive meeting in 1990 and subsequently developed by a variety of church leaders and theologians emphasised the concerns of the church with issues of democratisation, participation in civil society, human rights, and other issues related to social transformation. At the heart of Mugambi’s (1995:163) proposal is the blatant contradiction between the numerical growth of Christianity on the continent and the social economic challenges of the continent. In my analysis of the period during which this theology evolved, I argued that a crucial question that emerges in this regard has to do with the distinctive role of the church in society vis-à-vis other actors in the socio-transformation of the continent (see §7.2.4b above). More specifically, questions arise regarding the self understanding of the church.

At the Addis Ababa Assembly (1997), for instance, at which the agenda of the theology of reconstruction was further promoted, most addresses and resolutions tended to focus on the plight of Africa and in that regard on ethics. In chapter 7, I argued that theological reflection on the nature of church did not accompany such reflections at Addis Ababa (see §7.4.3 above). There was little attention given to ecclesiological issues pertaining to the nature of the church. The following Assembly at Yaoundé (2003), which had an even more pronounced focus on reconstruction, placed emphasis on the role of the church in addressing issues of human rights, HIV/AIDS, the negative impact of globalisation (read: neoliberal globalisation), and on the need for churches to accompany development efforts such as the

AU NEPAD Initiative (§7.5.2 above). From the findings of this study, the Yaoundé Assembly also placed much emphasis on ethics. This was understandable, given the urgency that was attached to the theme of reconstruction. In my review of the African theology of reconstruction, I argued that while this new theological approach in African theology helped churches ponder their role in the reconstruction of the continent, it offers less clarity on the distinctive role of the church in social transformation. Therefore, this study affirmed – to a large extent – Emmanuel Kotongole’s (2012:31-50; 2002:221-226) critique of African reconstruction theology and Christian social ethics in Africa (see §7.3.2c above). The problematic identified in this regard is that while the African theology of reconstruction as advocated by Mugambi creatively argues for the redefinition of the social role of the local church, the attention shifts away from the church and her practices to the nation state when it comes to concrete proposals. This tendency is general discernible in much of African theology whereby there is no clear distinction between the agenda of the church and that of the state or civil society. Some would argue that this is probably due to the emphasis in African traditional religion and culture in which there is no separation between the sacred and the profane (see Conradie 2007b:18). This notwithstanding, this study has accentuated the significance of clarifying the distinctive nature of the church and in relation to its contribution in society.

To return to my discussion of the focus on ethics at Yaoundé, it may be argued that the dearth of detailed ecclesiological reflection at that Assembly owes in part to the crisis that the AACC was going through. The Yaoundé Assembly (2003) affirmed a restructuring process which was soon carefully implemented by the new AACC leadership under Bishop Mvume Dandala as General Secretary.

Given the successful implementation of the restructuring measures undertaken in the period after the Yaoundé Assembly, the AACC regained its place as a significant player in the ecumenical movement by the time of its 9<sup>th</sup> General Assembly at Maputo (2008). In light of the various challenges of neoliberal globalisation (see §7.2.2), the AACC soon gave significant consideration to issues of economic justice and the environmental crisis, in addition to issues of justice for women and children, and its consistent concern with peace and reconciliation in Africa. It was significant that the Maputo Assembly resolved to undertake the revitalisation of the theological basis of the AACC. Although one may argue that the AACC came to be seen more and more an international civil society organisation given the need to strategise and reposition the institution, the Maputo decision offered much hope for strengthening the theological work of the AACC. The soon led to a variety of initiatives including the holding of theological institutes for young African theologians, the revitalisation of theological associations on the continent, and the establishment of “the African Fund for Theological Education” (AFTE) and the “All Africa Academy for Theology and Religious Studies” (AAATRS). Thus, by the time of the 10<sup>th</sup> General Assembly at Kampala (2013), there was hope that this focus would help situate the AACC work in theology and in that regard lead to robust ecclesiological reflection that does justice to both ecclesiology and ethics. Nevertheless, the concrete outcomes of these initiatives require thorough investigation in years to come.

*ii) Ecumenical Visions: The Understanding of Church Unity within the AACC*

Given the apparent primacy of the social agenda of the church within the AACC as described above, one is led to ponder the question of the nature of ecumenical unity as understood within this continental ecumenical structure. According to the basis of the AACC (2008c:1) – which has remained unchanged since its affirmation at the inaugural Assembly at Kampala (1963) – the AACC

is a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and only saviour according to the Scriptures and therefore, seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit (cf. AACC 1963:63; see also my discussion in § 4.5.5 above).

Although the search for unity is already implied in the basis, it is in the aims of the AACC that unity is underlined as one of the chief goals of the AACC. This study has demonstrated that although unity as a theological imperative has been underscored at different points in the history of the AACC, the nature of this unity has not often been based on such notions of unity as has been explored in the context of global ecumenism encapsulated in the FO tradition within the WCC. While it was not the intention of this study to compare these two institutional expressions of the ecumenical movement, their historical associations merit consideration along those lines. This study has shown that within the AACC, church unity has often been construed in functional terms. This may already be discerned from deliberations at the AACCs inaugural Assembly at Kampala in 1963.

The Kampala Assembly (1963) somewhat stressed visible unity and this was understood Christologically in terms of incarnate-union (see §5.5.3 above). The realisation of visible unity was seen as something that would be achieved in stages. As such, the formation of the AACC was seen as the first stage in this regard. At the early stages of the history of the AACC, the roots of disunity amongst the churches were located in missionary sources so much so that the social roots of disunity amongst churches were largely overlooked. Although visible unity was underscored, this study has shown that already at Kampala, concern with issues in the African social context was primary. As such, the ecumenical vision that was expressed at Kampala described the “mission of the Church in relation to the world” as the point of departure for all other ministries of the church (AACC 1963:39). At the second General Assembly at Abidjan Assembly (1969), mission was linked with unity. The Assembly observed that “God is moving us at this time of our African history to seek unity – not for its own sake but for mission” (AACC 1970:120). The search for church unity was thus understood as a response to God’s will to heal divisions amongst churches so that churches may effectively carry out mission.

The report of the Lusaka General Assembly (1974) contains a small section on church union (AACC 1975:39-40). At the Nairobi Assembly (1981), a link between unity and reconciliation was underscored leading to an Assembly recommendation on the “indigenous African model of reconciliation”. It was argued that such a model was holistic and embraced the Christian model and even went beyond it. The Assembly further proposed a view of reconciliation as “renewal and recreation of relationships – between individual and God, with neighbours and social reality.”

The collective visions of unity from the next Assembly at Lomé (1987) tended to focus on relations with foreign ecumenical partners rather than a theological reflection on the kind of unity sought. Where unity was highlighted, it was purely for practical purposes as, for instance, when the Assembly recommended an ecumenical approach to human development. Such an approach entailed collaboration with other Christians and people of other faiths (see AACC 1988:56). Although the Lomé Assembly did not issue specific ecumenical visions collectively, individual church leaders at the Assembly expressed interesting visions of unity for the churches in Africa. For instance, Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu suggested the African value of community as a basis for unity (see §6.6.3a above). Given his stress on human interdependence, one may argue that Tutu was advancing an *ubuntu* ecclesiology. Generally however, the Lomé Assembly (1987) advanced functional notions of unity.

When the AACC met for its 6<sup>th</sup> Assembly at Harare (1992), the new leadership of Tutu and

Chipenda had done the churches proud by helping the AACC regain its credibility on the continent and beyond. Although the imperative of unity was underscored in the General Secretary's report to the Assembly, Harare did not issue any clear visions of unity. As noted above, the next Assembly at Addis Ababa (1997) was probably the weakest in terms of the dearth of theological reflection on ecclesial unity. At the Yaoundé Assembly (2003), the AACC hit a low again and reflections on unity were scanty. Nonetheless, a functional view of unity emerged and was encapsulated in new proposed vision for the AACC, namely "Churches in Africa together for Life, Truth, Justice and Peace". Given the restructuring measures taken at Yaoundé, this new vision implicitly stressed the need to reformulate the role of the AACC. Thus, at the next Assembly at Maputo (2008), the role of the AACC was described in terms of facilitator and enabler of member churches to respond together to issues facing the continent. In the period leading up to the 10<sup>th</sup> General Assembly at Kampala (2013), the AACC stressed theological revitalisation and this holds much promise for fresh perspectives on unity. In chapter 7, for instance, this study noted that a view emerged at a symposium organised by the AACC in 2012 at which it was recommended that the AACC needs to understand itself as a promoter of new forms of ecumenism, reaching beyond the current parameters (see §7.7.3 above). This recommendation, however, was not expounded.

At the Kampala Assembly (2013), it was observed that denominationalism is one of the major factors preventing churches in Africa from uniting (see §7.7.3 above). The Assembly urged various denominations to seek unity on the basis of the recognition that we are all God's children. This resonates with most African ecclesiologies that emphasise the metaphor of family. At Kampala (2013), a functional view of unity is clearly discernible. This is clear from the Assembly resolution on "denominationalism and unity in Africa" in which it is stated that "the objective of ecumenism is to equip churches with the knowledge of how they can achieve church unity in order to achieve, peace, justice and dignity in the church as the body of Christ" (AACC 2015:102). This statement notwithstanding, the Assembly did not delineate the specific nature of such unity.

From the foregoing, it may be argued that the AACC has expressed a functional notion of unity, focussing on what Christians and churches can do together. This may also be understood in terms of unity of purpose and unity of vision. The notions of church that have emerged at various points of the AACC history stress various aspects of the social responsibility of the church. Unity has been underscored as a matter of credibility for the churches' witness in society. While this study has argued that the AACC has favoured a social agenda of the church, it has also stressed that ecclesiological reflection was not entirely absent.

At various points in the history of the AACC, the integral relationship between what the church is and what it does has been noted, albeit unwittingly in the majority of cases. Therefore, the study concludes that the tension between ecclesiology and ethics has indeed been at the heart of the ecumenical movement in Africa as represented by the AACC. Additionally, this study confirms the hypothesis set out in chapter 1, namely that the periods of decolonisation (1963-1974), development (1975-1992), and neo-liberal globalisation (1993- 2013) in recent African history correlate with the AACC's handling of ecclesiology and ethics. Drawing from insights of the WCC study on ecclesiology and ethics, it has been further argued that although ecclesiology and ethics are interconnected and should therefore not be separated, the tension is not easily resolved. Yet, it is significant to find appropriate language to express the interconnectedness between what the church is (read: ecclesiology) and what it does (read: ethics). To this end, this study proposes the African notion of *ubuntu* as horizon for ecclesiology and ethics.

This proposal arises in part from my critique of the theology of reconstruction in which I argued that more attention must be paid to view of the church as an ethic. That is to say, attention must be paid to the tension between the theological and sociological reality of the church. Additionally, I think that it may not be farfetched to claim that notions of church in discourse on African ecclesiologies and within the AACC have an affinity with communion ecclesiologies. Following Doyle (2004:13), I understand communion ecclesiology as referring to the view of the church as essentially a communion or fellowship amongst human beings and God. In what follows, I will therefore offer preliminary and in that regard inconclusive reflections on the proposal of *ubuntu* as a metaphor for an African ecumenical ecclesiological vision. I find such endeavour significant in light of the observation by Mveng already in the late 1980's that it is not a matter of that institutionalisation of the division of churches that passes for ecumenism in Africa. In his view, it is "that African force for unity, reconciliation and solidarity which is deeply rooted in the purest tradition of their ancestors" (Mveng 1988:18). Although I do not agree with his notion of "purest tradition", I find his stress on unity, reconciliation and solidarity useful for ecumenical theological reflection in Africa.

### 8.3 *Ubuntu* as Horizon for Ecclesiology and Ethics: Towards a Vision of Unity

In the African context, the search for the visible unity of the Church in faith and action can be enriched through an appropriation of the African notion of *ubuntu* as a metaphor for the integral relation between ecclesiology and ethics. This notion has recently been employed in African theological reflections on peace and reconciliation (Battle 2009; Tutu 1999), ecological theology (Bujo 2009; Kaoma 2014), and on economic justice (LenkaBula 2008). Amongst scholars of African religion, *ubuntu* is generally regarded as an aspect of African spirituality (see Magesa 2013). Within ecumenical circles, the significance of the notion of *ubuntu* has been intimated in reflections on economic and ecological justice (see WCC 2007a:12). The notion of *ubuntu* and the related Asian concept of *Sangsaeng* were a focus of reflection at a WCC-CWM sponsored consultation on "Transforming Theology and Life-Giving Civilization" held in August 2007 in ChangSeong, Korea. In the final statement from this consultation, the participants observed that ecumenism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will involve inter alia "exploring a theological basis for wider ecumenism in which the whole family of the *oikoumene*, particularly people of other faiths, and creation are related and connected on the basis of a spirit of *Ubuntu* and *Sangsaeng*" (see Bringing Together 2008:131).

Etymologically, the term *ubuntu* is derived from the Bantu languages of sub-Saharan Africa. It finds expression in a variety of terms across Southern Africa such as *umunthu* (Chewa, Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia), *botho* (Sesotho), *obuntu* (Ganda, Uganda), *obunu* (Jita, Tanzania), *umundu* (Kikuyu, Kenya), and *unhu* (Shona, Zimbabwe), amongst others. It consists of the prefix *ubu* and the root *ntu*. *Ubu* stresses the quality of *ntu* (being). Rwandese scholar Alexis Kagamé (1956) proposes four categories of a Bantu philosophy of being, under which all being, in whatever form, may be subsumed (cf. Jahn 1961:101). These are namely, *muntu* (human being), *kintu* (thing), *hantu* (place), and *kuntu* (modal time). The root of these Bantu words is *ntu*<sup>129</sup>, which simply means being. According to Jahn (1961:101), *ntu* is that point from which creation flows. Given the contestations around the notion of *ubuntu* in recent literature, I will first offer reflections on how I construe this notion and then proceed to elaborate on its usefulness as a horizon for ecclesiology and ethics.

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<sup>129</sup> The recognition of *ntu* as common amongst several languages is what is presently regarded as Sub-Saharan Africa led the German linguist Bleek to recognise a large Bantu speaking family (see van Binsbergen 2001:54).

### 8.3.1 *Ubuntu* Discourse: A Very Brief Overview

Recently, there has been a growing corpus of literature on *ubuntu* that cuts across scholarly disciplines.<sup>130</sup> A significant body of such literature has emerged from the South African context, prompted in part by debate on a political ethic of inclusion following the end of apartheid (Praeg 2014; Shutte 2001). In that context, the notion was introduced as one of the founding principles of the new South Africa closely linked with ideas of an African Renaissance (see Matolini & Kwindiwi 2013:199). Gade (2011:306), however, demonstrates that term *ubuntu* appeared in writing already in 1846. In this brief preliminary exploration of the significance of *ubuntu* as horizon for ecclesiology and ethics, I affirm the (sub-Saharan) African roots<sup>131</sup> of the notion of *ubuntu*. Nevertheless, I find compelling the argument by Leonhard Praeg (2014:37) that *ubuntu* is a glocal phenomenon, which in its current articulation – at least in the Southern African context – is infused with Christian and human rights discourses. Such a view takes into account the political dimension of contemporary discourse on *ubuntu* (Stuit 2016:5-16). This said, *ubuntu* is neither passé (Matolini & Kwindiwi 2013:201)<sup>132</sup> nor an ideological construct. It is also not merely a product of globalisation as some may suggest (cf. Van Binsbergen 2001:61-62).<sup>133</sup>

As one born and bred in a largely *Bemba*<sup>134</sup> speaking community in the southern African nation of Zambia, I identify with the values that are associated with *ubuntu* as articulated in much of the discourse on *ubuntu*. In that regard, I consider *ubuntu* as a living tradition that is constantly reinvented owing to cultural dynamism. Additionally, one may argue that the many aspects of *ubuntu* resonate with concepts such as vital participation and vital force, respectively articulated by the scholars Vincent Mulago and Placide Tempels, whose work I have already highlighted in chapter 5 of this study (see §5.3.2a). It is plausible to argue, as some suggest, that *ubuntu* is a “lived and living philosophy rather than a set of abstract ideas” (Ramose 2014:121).

Conceptually, there are at least three ways in which the notion of *ubuntu* has been employed in recent discourse on the subject. These are, namely as a signifier of a quality of being human (Shutte 2001:2), a notion of relational ontology (Musopole 1994:13; Tutu 2004:26), and as an ethical theory (Metz 2011). As an example, the latter view found

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<sup>130</sup> Significant work in this regard has been undertaken, especially by African philosophers, theologians, and Africanist scholars. Significant contributions have also emerged from law, political science, and anthropology. For a critical evaluation of contemporary discourse on Ubuntu, see Praeg (2014). Praeg articulates a view of Ubuntu as a form of humanism and distinguishes between *ubuntu* as “pre-colonial communal praxis” and Ubuntu as “contemporary political and philosophical discourse” on that praxis.

<sup>131</sup> The notion resonates with other concepts developed in different contexts such as *Sangsaeng* in Asia and *Sumak Kawsay* in Ecuador. One may therefore argue that *ubuntu* values are not limited to Africa (see Shutte 2001:2).

<sup>132</sup> For these two scholars, *ubuntu* is an outdated mode of being. In that regard, they consider contemporary discourses on *ubuntu* as narratives of return that are not “well suited for complex, multicultural societies that do not prize communality and associations drawn along those lines” (Matolini & Kwindiwi 2013:203). The notion of “narrative of return” has been explained by Praeg (2000:106) as referring to narratives of “a return to the state of nature”. He takes narratives of return to mean what the African philosopher Mudimbe describes as the narrative of derision (see my discussion of Mudimbe in §5.2.2b above).

<sup>133</sup> Comparing *ubuntu* with Zambian humanism, Van Binsbergen (2001:61) argues that both are not in the first place a factual description. “They primarily express the speaker’s dreams about norms and practices that allegedly once prevailed in what are now to be considered places (notably, within the intimacy of allegedly closely-knit villages, urban wards, and kin groups), while the speaker herself or himself is situated at or near the national or global centre”. He portrays *ubuntu* as a creation of the African elite (i.e. academics and politicians).

<sup>134</sup> *Bemba* (*ichibemba*) is a Bantu language widely spoken in central and Northern Zambia.

expression in the deliberations of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, whose chairperson was Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu. According to Tutu (2004:27), “*ubuntu* has to do with what it means to be truly human ... that you are bound up with others in the bundle of life, for a person is only a person through other persons.” Amongst the Sotho-Tswana this is expressed in the following words, “*motho ke motho ka batho babang.*” As Mbiti (1969:108-109) puts it in the oft-quoted phrase: “I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am.” In Mbiti’s view, it is only in terms of other people that the individual becomes conscious of his being.

The goal of life is almost construed as a quest to become a (complete) person, a genuine *untu*. This view of humanness is indeed value-laden. In this regard, Menkiti (1984:172) remarks that personhood in the African context is “something which has to be achieved, and is not given simply because one is born of human seed” (cf. Shutte 2001:30). Kwasi Wiredu (1992:104) recounts the following words of Zambia’s first Republican President, Kenneth Kaunda, which he addressed to Margret Thatcher in praise of her constructive role at some point during negotiations to rid Zimbabwe of white minority rule: “Personhood is not an automatic quality of the human individual; it is something to be achieved, and the higher the achievement, the higher the credit.”

Congolese theologian Bénézet Bujo affirms this view by placing it in the context of African religion. Bujo (2003:114) remarks that African ethics “does not define the person as self-realisation or as ontological act; rather, it describes the person as a process of coming into existence in the reciprocal relatedness of individual and community, where the latter includes not only the deceased but also God”. This view of personhood assumes human existence but situates the acquisition of personhood within a wide web of relationships. It posits a relational ontology. Accordingly, the notion of *ubuntu* carries other connotations such as communality, communion, and interrelatedness. *Ubuntu* thus signifies the related values of hospitality, solidarity, and respect for human dignity and life (see Tutu 1999:34-35). A connection may also be drawn between the African emphasis on life and *ubuntu*. Thus, as Bujo (1992:22) argues, the “morality of an act is determined by its life giving potential”. Good acts are those which contribute to the community’s vital force. Magesa (2013) has recently argued that “*ubuntu* is also a quality of groups and communities, in whom certain reputations of kindness, hospitality, and sharing are perceived.”

### 8.3.2 Ecumenical Significance of *Ubuntu*

Without doubt, identity plays a factor in the African communal oriented cultures. Very often, the African sense of identity is as intimated above, closely connected with the sense of being part of community (cf. Mbiti 1969:108). Similarly one may posit a similar view with respect to churches and ecumenical unity. However, this begs the question whether the notion of *ubuntu* sufficiently captures the tension between unity and diversity, given that unity does not entail uniformity.<sup>135</sup> Can the notion of *ubuntu* as a metaphor for communion ecclesiology do justice to both ecclesial and theological diversity? In light of such concerns, some argue that the notion of *ubuntu* does not sufficiently to capture deep perspectives of the other as unique

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<sup>135</sup> Some suggest that the emphasis on community in *ubuntu* constrict individuality “in terms of which it demands an oppressive conformity and loyalty to the group” (Louw 1998; cf. Menkiti 1984:171). Others, such as Bujo (2003:118), contend that the individual is not absorbed into the community. As an example, Bujo (2003:25) notes that individuality in Africa is emphasised by the fact that each one has his [sic] own name, which is different from that of his parents. Recently, Louw (2006:168) points out that “Ubuntu’s respect for the particularity of the other links up closely to its respect for individuality”.

(cf. Conradie 2007b:11).<sup>136</sup> This challenge may have to do with the particularistic nature of the notion of *ubuntu*.<sup>137</sup> The danger becomes pronounced in the face of essentialist notions of identity, which stress the fortification of such identity. In this way, *ubuntu* becomes a notion of exclusion rather than inclusion and may lead to negative forms of identity such as xenophobia, nepotism, and even ethnicism.<sup>138</sup> This ambiguity has been noted severally (see Praeg 2014; Louw 1998).

The foregoing notwithstanding, the notion of *ubuntu* has potential for developing an ecumenical ethic that underpins both the ecumenical search for unity and the social responsibility of the church. This is derived from the integrative capacity of *ubuntu* as a relational concept and as a moral vision. I will discuss at least two perspectives in this regard.

a) *Ubuntu as Koinonia*

Firstly, from the African religious ethos that underpins *ubuntu*, community transcends the human community of the living to include the living dead<sup>139</sup> and the whole of creation (see Bujo 2009:281; Ramose 2002:94). The human is seen as part of a network of relationships. The gamut of relationships that come under the grasp of *ubuntu* holds potential for an ecumenical theological reinterpretation of relationality as encapsulated in this African view of communality. In this regard, *ubuntu* resonates with various aspects of the notion of *koinonia* as expressed in the New Testament and described in ecumenical theological discourse as outlined in chapter 3 of this study (see §3.2.8; especially §3.3.2a). Explaining Tutu's perspectives on *ubuntu* as a theological concept, Battle (1997:57) claims that *ubuntu* is seen as a metaphor for "human participation in the divine life". Battle (1997:9) further argues that Tutu sees *ubuntu* as "life in relation to God and neighbour"

The potential of the notion of *ubuntu* can be enriched by biblical accounts of *koinonia* and in turn contribute towards contextual ecumenical theological reflection on ecclesiology and ethics in the African context.<sup>140</sup> Akin to my description of *koinonia* in chapter 3, *ubuntu*

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<sup>136</sup> Conradie (2007b:10-11) draws a parallel between Bonhoeffer's notion of sociality (in *Sanctorum Communio*) and African notions of *ubuntu* when he argues that the latter "based his description of the church on a theory of sociality where a person is constituted by the presence of a concrete other person." However, Conradie also notes that the uniqueness of the other is not emphasised in African notions of *ubuntu*. His contention is that in Bonhoeffer, the church as a community of persons implies "a social formation based on both the distinctness of persons and a reciprocity of will (not a mystical fusion in which the boundary between other and self disappears)."

<sup>137</sup> An example drawn from the South African context may illustrate this challenge. In a cartoon by Zapiro (pseudonym for Jonathan Shapiro) that appeared in the South African newspaper *The Sunday Times* of 25<sup>th</sup> May 2008, a group of South African men holding various weapons, including machetes and axes, is pictured in what is clearly a xenophobic attack on a foreigner. One of the men, holding a machete in his hand, is depicted saying the following words: "I could tell he is a @#&\* foreigner! He does not know the meaning of *ubuntu*". This is an ironic way of critiquing the use of *ubuntu* in an "inclusive" way, while at the same time suggesting an exclusionary identity. In South Africa, foreigners have generally been referred to as *makwerekwere*. For a discussion on the role of nationality, ethnic and xenophobia in the construction of exclusionary identities see Hankela (2014:249-260).

<sup>138</sup> Here, my criticism of the view of the church as family in the previous chapter applies (see §6.5.3c above; cf. Msafiri 2002:93). I may further add that the notion of *ubuntu* is also tainted with patriarchal values widespread in many African traditional societies (see the discussion by Keevy 2014:69-74). This notwithstanding, by pointing to the emancipatory potential of *Ubuntu* to aid the reinvention of violent masculinity, some scholars argue that it is nevertheless compatible with feminism (Magadla & Chitanda 2014:185-190).

<sup>139</sup> I owe this designation to John Mbiti (1969:32).

<sup>140</sup> Whereas some theologians such as the late Russel Botman (1996:10) understood *ubuntu* in relation to unity as forming community "not around doctrinal agreement, but based on ethics", my contention is that it carries potential for actually holding together ecclesiology and ethics. Elsewhere, Botman (2000:270) argues that

shares the features hospitality, fellowship and participation (see §3.3.2a above).

Following Magesa (2013), it may be argued that we can rightfully speak of a community as having *ubuntu*. In this sense, I suggest a view of the church as an *ubuntu* community. This implies an ecclesiology of inclusion. However, if an *ubuntu* ecclesiology is to be rendered an appropriate metaphor that resonates with both African tradition and Christianity, several questions emerge. The first is Christological. Who is Jesus within the *ubuntu* community? The community called *ubuntu* (ecclesiology) derives its existence from Jesus, the ideal expression of *ubuntu* whose *ntu* is continually expressed in the church through the Holy Spirit. The *ubuntu* community is therefore a *koinonia* of the Spirit.<sup>141</sup> This necessarily links with a second question, namely how the proposal set out here relates to the Christian tradition of the doctrine of the Trinity. In this regard, an African articulation of the doctrine of the Trinity becomes inevitable. My contention here is that ecclesiology is necessarily derivative to the doctrine of God. As intimated in chapter 5, while one may not speak of a fully developed discourse on the Trinity in African theology,<sup>142</sup> the study by James Kombo (2007)<sup>143</sup> represents a creative attempt so far (see § 5.3.3 above). It is suggested here that the notion of *ubuntu* as horizon for ecclesiology and ethics here must be reconciled with an appropriate African view of the doctrine of the Trinity. The argument is that theologically, the doctrine of God is indispensable to an adequate theological account of the nature of the church. In this regard, I think that *ubuntu* already resonates with the broad outlines of the doctrine of God as Trinity, the divine community. The doctrine of the Trinity infers communion. Therefore, the church as an *ubuntu* community participates in God's, *ntu* which is constitutive of *ubuntu* as *koinonia*. Theologically, community is a gift of God made possible through the power (vital force) of God (cf. Botman 2000:270).

Following the theological perspective of the church as a fellowship of those called together by the Holy Spirit, the community called *ubuntu* may be understood as effected not only

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*ubuntu* equates with the concept of *oikos* and particularly draws on Konrad Raiser's (1991:87-88) reflections on the metaphor of the household.

<sup>141</sup> Some African theologians like Nyamiti (1998:132), describe communion in the church as *koinonia* on the basis of an ancestor Christology. On that basis, Nyamiti develops both an ancestral ecclesiology, as well as a doctrine of the Trinity predicated on the view that ancestral relations exist in the Trinity (1976:48-50). See also Bujo (1992:85) on the theology of ancestors as the starting point for an African ecclesiology.

<sup>142</sup> For a useful overview of discourse on the doctrine of the Trinity in African theology, see Vähäkangas (2000:69-78). Kuhnnyop (2015:55-68) also provides a creative overview albeit with evangelical undertones. The theological doctrine of the Trinity as a heritage of early Church Fathers poses several challenges within the African context. The intellectual infrastructure of Greek philosophy that is employed particularly regard to the language of persons is foreign within the African set up. For instance, Jesse Mugambi (2002:75) finds the term person as used in discourse on the Trinity inappropriate in the African context arguing that such language is "misleading, vague and confusing". However, the reinterpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity particularly as a social doctrine has been appropriated by some African theologians (see e.g. Oduyoye 1986:141-142).

<sup>143</sup> Following the Bantu notion of *ntu* as being, Kombo infers that God as the source of all life is the Great *Muntu* (person). Accordingly, he argues that the Holy Spirit is the Great *Muntu* and the Son too is the Great *Muntu*. From eternity, Kombo argues, the Great *Muntu* has oneness of *Ntu* and activity with the Son and the Holy Spirit. Subscribing to the relational understanding of personhood as encapsulated in *ubuntu*, Kombo (2007:245) proposes the view of the Great *Muntu* as Community in Unity. Kombo's view is not immediately appropriated in my proposal for at least three reasons. Firstly, it appears to me that Kombo's proposal is to a large extent a reinstatement of the western cultural articulation of the Trinity forced to fit into terminology derived from the African traditional set up. It is precisely this that Kombo (2007:246) does when he argues that the *ntu* concept presents the "Trinitarian arguments in terms that are very close to the lines of discussion" observed by the church fathers. Secondly, I think that my proposal of *ubuntu* as horizon for both ecclesiology and ethics require reconciliation with Kombo's approach otherwise there may not be sufficient justice done to divine otherness as compared to *abantu*, *ukuntu*, and *ifintu* and ultimately with what constitutes *ubuntu*.

through the response of community members to the ethic of *Ubuntu*, but more so as a gift of God through the power (vital force) of the Holy Spirit (see Sakupapa 2012:426). The Holy Spirit constitutes the *ubuntu* community. Nalwamba and Sakupapa (2016:76) argue that “*koinonia* is expressive of the relationship and unity within and among churches locally and globally”. In relation to *ubuntu*, the unity and interaction within the community called *ubuntu* entails participation and solidarity (cf. Chukwu 2011:35). This observation necessarily leads me to underscore the second perspective on the significance of *ubuntu* as a metaphor for describing the horizon of ecclesiology and ethics.

#### b) *Ubuntu as Diakonia*

Participation in the community called *ubuntu* entails solidarity not only within the community, but also towards others. This may be best understood in several vital convictions associated with *ubuntu*. In this regard, Conradie (2006b:26-27) suggests at least three aspects, namely (i) that identity is constituted by relatedness to others, (ii) respect for the human dignity of all, and (iii) solidarity in need (read: African hospitality). The first aspect has been explained above in terms of relational ontology. The second aspect has found radical expression in the writings and work of Desmond Tutu, who argues for the essence of human dignity in terms of our common humanity. Drawing on the Judaeo-Christian tradition of the creation of human beings, the Christian teaching of unconditional justification of the sinner and the notion of *ubuntu*, Tutu argues for the human rights and dignity of all, especially of those despised by the majority - the victims of history, beggars, prostitutes, lesions, etc. Tutu’s focus in this regard is further illuminated in light of his view of God: “God is clearly not a Christian. His concern is for all his children” (Tutu 2011:12).

Distinctively, Tutu also underscores the inalienable dignity of perpetrators of some unthinkable violations of human dignity in human history such as apartheid. He opines the view that both the oppressor and the oppressed are created in the image of God (cf. Battle 1997:40). In the words of Tutu (1999:35):

a person with *ubuntu* is open and available to others, affirming others, does not feel threatened that others are able or good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated and diminished, when others are tortured and oppressed.

For Tutu we are made for interdependence. Elsewhere, he adds to his views on *ubuntu* an ecological slant when he intimates that “we are beginning to discover that it is true that – that that tree does hurt, and if you hurt the tree, in an extra ordinary way you hurt yourself.”

From the foregoing, one may infer a view of *ubuntu* as a radical ethical vision. More specifically, such views of *ubuntu* echo various aspects of solidarity and hospitality. Such solidarity (read: African hospitality) is extended not only to friends and neighbours but also to enemies. It is in this regard that Oduyoye (2001:100) has described “the limitation of hospitality to ones’ own ethnic group” as a “perversion of hospitality in Africa”. Additionally, an ecumenical vision of *ubuntu* also necessarily raises questions around both inclusivity as well as limits to unity. It is undeniable that churches in Africa struggle with the matter of homosexuality. In this regard therefore, what would be the implications of the AACCs silence on matters of sexuality given this study’s proposal for an ecumenical vision grounded in visions of *ubuntu*?

Secondly, I suggest that *ubuntu* resonates with the idea of *diakonia* (read: solidarity, struggle for justice) as a missiological description of the social responsibility of the church. *Ubuntu* as solidarity attains ecumenical significance in this regard. The Church as the *ubuntu* community is expected to be a community of sharing, interdependence and solidarity. This,

however, requires a reinterpretation and theological enrichment (through scripture) of negative forms of solidarity such as those based on essentialist notions of identity, whether that is in the form of race, ethnicity, or even religion.<sup>144</sup> In that way, *ubuntu* becomes an ecumenical socio-ethical vision of inclusion. Proper solidarity as informed by the ethic of *ubuntu* also entails respect for the other.

A community that is informed by the ethic of *ubuntu* can rightly be spoken of in terms of a moral community in so far as *ubuntu* entails a moral ethic. Kobia (2006:100) came closer to an expression of this idea in his address to address to the AACC General Assembly at Yaoundé (2003) where he observed as follows: “The ecumenical movement in Africa is called to reinvent a network of moral communities inspired by communitarian spirit”. South African theologian Barney Pityana (1995:98) makes a similar point when he argues with respect to the South African context that “the possibility of the church as a mutually supportive and moral community is compelling”.

### c) *Limitations of Ubuntu as a Metaphor for an African Ecumenical/Ecclesiological Vision*

The church as an *ubuntu* community and in that regard a moral community, participates in the struggles for peace and justice in the world. The church as *ubuntu* community stands in solidarity with the world. It must be pointed out however that *ubuntu* as a metaphor for an African ecumenical/ecclesiological vision needs to do justice to distinctive nature of the church in the whole household of God. As Conradie (2007b:23) observes in his reflections on African ecclesiologies, such discourses “describe the nature of the church in terms of a free community of equals, but seem to place less emphasis on the distinctiveness of the church community within the larger human community.” In similar vein, one may argue that the metaphor of *ubuntu* somewhat obscures the distinction between church and world. This notwithstanding, I think there is also a danger in either sharply contrasting between the church and the world or joining the two. Indeed, a crucial aspect that requires further reflection in my proposal of *ubuntu* as a horizon for ecclesiology and ethics concerns how to do justice to the church as a distinct body within the *oikoumene* (cf. Raiser 1991:104-105). The second limitation derives from whether or not *ubuntu* ecclesiology implies divinisation of the church since the *ubuntu* community includes God.

The above limitations notwithstanding, the notion of *ubuntu* may well be appropriated to express the integral relationship between ecclesiology and ethics. As the fifth World Conference on Faith and Order observed:

The church as *koinonia* is called to share not only in the suffering of its own community but in the suffering of all; by advocacy and care for the poor, needy and marginalized; by joining in all efforts for justice and peace within human societies; by exercising and promoting responsible stewardship of creation and by keeping alive hope in the heart of humanity. *Diakonia* to the whole world and *koinonia* cannot be separated (Best & Gassmann 1994:233).

From the foregoing therefore, it may be argued that further reflection on an ecumenical vision of *ubuntu* may enrich the AACC to become an “open space” (read: *sokoni*)<sup>145</sup> where the cross-fertilizing of the various particularities of Churches in Africa may take place. In that regard, the AACC must strive in the task of enabling churches to dialogue, to learn from one

<sup>144</sup> The recent spate of xenophobia in South Africa, for instance, has been described by a number of scholars as a form of negative ubuntu (see Hankela 2014). In similar vein, the South African theologian David Field (2017) counter-intuitively, suggests a view of the Church as God’s Makwerere (a word used in South African to describe foreigners) to underscore an inclusive ecclesiology in the context of migration and xenophobia.

<sup>145</sup> *Sokoni* is a Swahili term that means “at the market-place” and was employed in the context of the WCC study process on the Theology of Life. For a useful interpretation of the notion as a metaphor to describe the ecumenical movement see Kobia (2003:167-169).

another, and to share their diversity. It must be stressed, however, that ultimately, the search for unity must be understood in its eschatological dimension. The foregoing notwithstanding, a few areas may be identified for future research.

#### **8.4 Questions for Further Research**

I will only highlight three areas of concern in this regard. The first relates to the fact of the changing ecclesial landscapes in Africa as discussed in chapter 2. The second aspect has to do with the nature of the ecumenical encounter, while the third aspect calls attention to the need to foster ecumenical consciousness.

##### **8.4.1 Pentecostalism and the Ecumenical Movement in Africa**

Although the AACC has played a role in pioneering theological reflection on Africanisation (inculturation), liberation, and reconstruction, it has not sufficiently engaged with the theologies of African Pentecostal and charismatic churches. What is the future of the ecumenical movement in Africa if Pentecostal type churches, which account for huge numbers of Christians across the continent, remain outside the scope of mainstream ecumenism as represented by the AACC? The AACC study on “New Dimensions in African Christianity”, spearheaded by Paul Gifford (1992) during the 1990’s, was undoubtedly an important study. However, its contribution to ecumenical discourse and relations with Pentecostal churches remains largely unclear. Is there a future for the AACC if it continues to articulate an ecumenism based mainly on traditional forms of Christianity which very often do not include Pentecostal type churches. Werner (2013:98-99) offers helpful pointers on possibilities for mainstream ecumenism to enter into mutual complementarity and inclusivity with Pentecostalism. From the perspective of this study it may be asked whether it could be the case that the lack of ecumenical fellowship and dialogue between African historical churches (most of which are represented in the AACC) and Pentecostal churches has to do with how soteriological notions related to healing and prosperity are construed? How may a sound ecumenical and biblical theology of prosperity look like for example? These remarks point towards the need to construct clear marks of a costly African ecumenism that does justice to both ecclesiology and ethics. How this may work within the AACC remains a subject for further research.

##### **8.4.2 AACC: A Fellowship of Churches?**

I referred to the basis of the AACC as “a fellowship of churches” in my analysis of the AACC’s understanding of church unity above (see §8.2.3b.ii). That the AACC is a fellowship of churches begs questions regarding the nature of ecumenical encounter within the AACC. For, as Gillian Evans (1996:66) observes, one of the paradoxes of ecumenical encounter is that “although what is happening is a meeting of churches, that can happen only in and through the meeting of human individuals.” This necessarily raises the question regarding accountability of representatives at ecumenical meetings. Do decisions and insights shared at the level of AACC Assemblies, conferences and consultations filter down to Christians in local churches? Indeed, as this study has shown, it has been severally noted in a number of Assembly’s whether the AACC is actually known by Christians in member churches. Inadequate channels of sharing decisions made at ecumenical gatherings greatly impinges on significant ecumenical memory and this often reflects in decisions made by church leaders who are unaware of past ecumenical resolutions. This is crucial area, seeing as, as Nikos Nissiotis (1981:290) has remarked, “there is no ecumenical movement without its reality in the local situation.”

### 8.4.3 Developing Ecumenical Consciousness

Related to the above is the question regarding how the AACC may assist churches in Africa in the development of an ecumenical consciousness. In this regard, one would hope that the AACC theological institutes will continue to receive support as they contribute towards ecumenical formation of young African theologians and future leaders of churches in Africa. Related to this, the AACC will do the churches a great service if the revitalisation of ecumenical theological associations can contribute towards the renewal of ecumenical theological education. This is critical, given the wide recognition of the potential role of theological institutions in ecumenical formation (see AACC 2015:103; 1997:173). As an outcome of ecumenical formation, ecumenical consciousness is critical if churches are to demonstrate determination of being ecumenically engaged.

### 8.5 Final Remarks

The study has shown that the AACC has played a crucial role in the quest for authenticity amongst African churches and also in their efforts to remain socially relevant. It was argued that the tension between ecclesiology and ethics has indeed been at the heart of the ecumenical movement in Africa as represented by the AACC. Accordingly, the study argued that the AACC's handling of the tension between ecclesiology and ethics correlates with three periods in recent African history, namely the periods of decolonisation (1963-1974), development (1975-1992), and neo-liberal globalisation (1993-2013). The various themes of AACC Assemblies capture the prophetic witness of the churches in the various periods of recent African church history. Accordingly, the AACC has facilitated and provided space for the innovative theological developments that take seriously the concerns and agendas of the continent. It has indeed served as a platform for dialogue and deepening of diverse creative African theological thought encapsulated in the theologies of inculturation, liberation, and reconstruction. If the early period of the AACC marked visions of authenticity, the 1990's signalled the need for visions of reconstruction. In this regard, the history of the AACC (1963-2013) may be characterised as a movement from authenticity to reconstruction.

Overall, the study affirms the view that unity is an imperative for the public witness of the churches. More specifically, it affirms the conviction that ecclesiology and ethics are integrally linked. The study further proposes an ecumenical vision inspired by the African notion of *ubuntu*. This notion, it has been argued, resonates with the notions of *koinonia* and *diakonia* and may thus best encapsulate an ecumenical vision that ties together ecclesiology and ethics. Such a vision entails ecumenical initiatives that stress the values of dignity, solidarity, and respect for all forms of life. Embracing an ecumenism of *ubuntu* potentially underscores the interrelatedness of all being on the basis of an understanding of the Great *Muntu* (the divine fellowship of God) as the source of all *ntu* including non-human *ntu*'s.

From a historical perspective, this study is a contribution to academic reflection on the history of the ecumenical movement in Africa. It serves as a compendious introduction to ecumenical documents arising from the African context. To this extent, it adds to other sources of ecumenical memory in Africa. The study further contributes to discourse in African theology on *authenticity* (read: ecclesiology) as expressed in theologies of inculturation and indigenisation and on *social relevance* (read: ethics) as expressed in theologies of liberation and reconstruction.

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## Appendix 1

### List of AACC Leadership from 1958 to 2013

Table 1: General Secretaries

	<b>General Secretary</b>	<b>Country of Origin</b>	<b>Duration</b>
1	Dr. Donald M'Timkulu	South Africa	Sept. 1959-1963
2	Mr. Samuel H. Amissah	Ghana	1963- mid 1971
3	Canon Burgess Carr	Liberia	1971-1978
4	Mr. Sarwat G. Shehata Associate GS for Finance Mr. Kodwo Ankrah (interim General Secretary)	Coptic Orthodox Church, Egypt Ghana	- 1979 (Jan)-1980 (Oct)
5	Maxime V. Rafransoa	Madagascar	Jan. 1981-1987
6	Mr. James Kangwana (Acting General Secretary for five months)	Kenya	1987
7	Rev. José Belo Chipenda	Angola	1987-1997
8	Rev. Canon Clement H. Janda	Sudan	1997-2002
9	Mr. Melaku Kifle (Interim General Secretary)	Ethiopia	July 2002-July 2003
10	Rev. Dr. Mvume Dandala	South Africa	2003-2008
11	Rev. Dr. André Karamaga	Rwanda	2009-to date

Table 2: Presidents/Chairman of the General Committee

	<b>President/Chairman of Gen. Com.</b>	<b>Country of origin</b>	<b>Duration</b>
1	Sir Francis Akanu Ibiam (Chairman of the Provincial Committee formed in Ibadan in 1958 to spearhead AACC's formation)	Nigeria	1958-1963
2	Rev. Dr. Jean Kotto (President)	Cameroun	
3	Bishop Abel Muzorewa (President)	Zimbabwe	
4	Rev. Dr. Richard Andriamanjato	Madagascar	1969-1974
5	Rev. Dr. John Gatu, (Chairman of the General Committee in 1981 he became AACC vice president)	Kenya	1974-1981
6	Archbishop Walter Khotso Makhulu (President)	Arch Bishop of Botswana Church of the Province of Central Africa	1981-? (He left office mid-term)

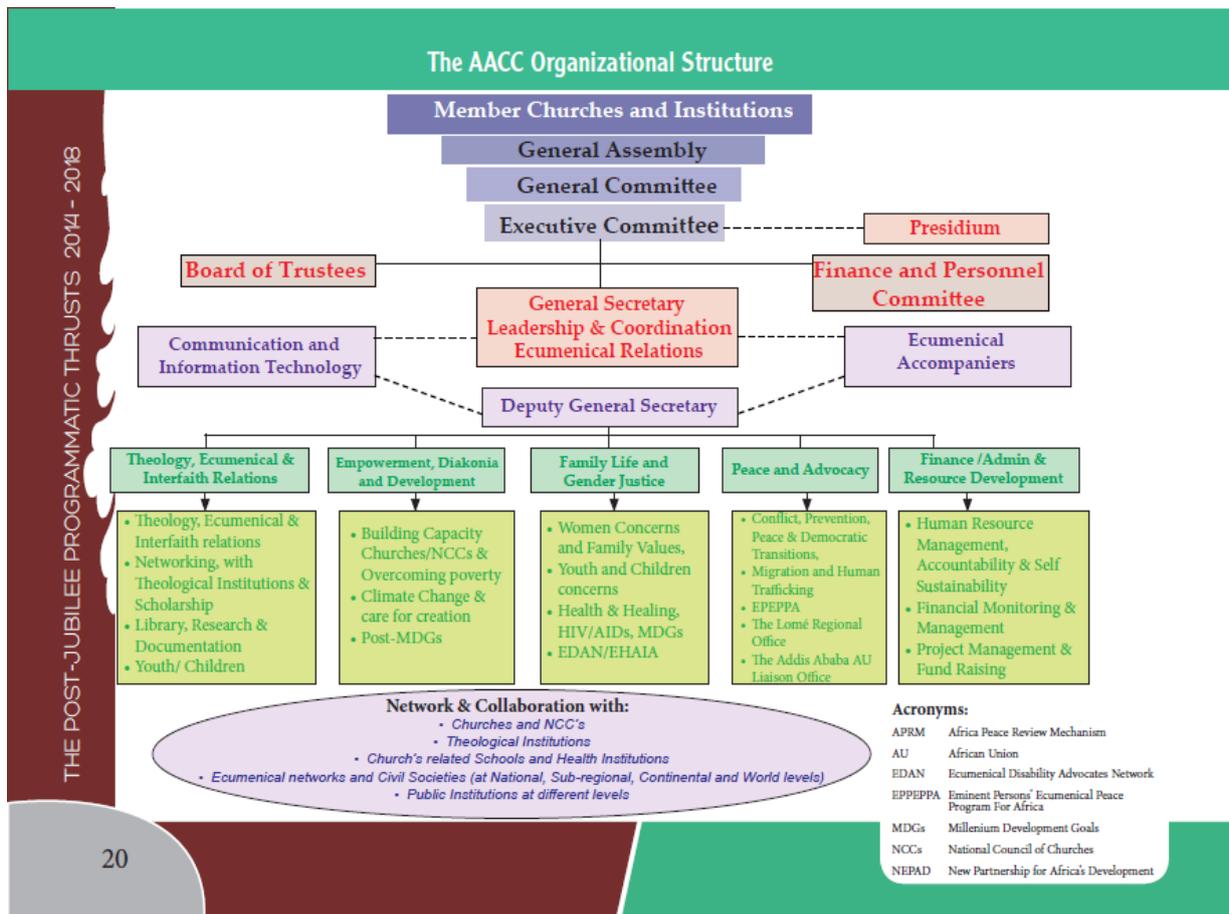
7	Rev. Harry Henry (President of Gen. Com.)	Benin	1981-1987
8	Archbishop Desmond Tutu (President)	South Africa, Anglican	1987-1997
9	Prof. Kwesi Dickson (President)	Ghana	1997-2002
10	The Rt. Rev. Dr. Nyansako-ni-Nku (President)	Cameroun	2002-2008
11	The Mst Rev. Valentine Mokiwa	Tanzania	2009-to date

### **List of AACC General Assembly Themes: 1963-2013**

- 1<sup>st</sup> General Assembly: Kampala 1963, “Freedom and Unity in Christ”.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly: Abidjan 1969, “With Christ at Work in Africa Today”.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly: Lusaka 1974, “Living No Longer For Ourselves... But For Christ”.
- 4<sup>th</sup> General Assembly: Nairobi 1981, “Follow Me... Feed My Lambs”.
- 5<sup>th</sup> General Assembly Lome 1987, “You Shall Be My Witnesses”.
- 6<sup>th</sup> General Assembly: Harare 1992, “Abundant Life In Jesus Christ”.
- 7<sup>th</sup> General Assembly: Addis Ababa 1997, “Troubled but not Destroyed”.
- 8<sup>th</sup> General Assembly: Yaoundé 2003, “Come Let us Rebuild”.
- 9<sup>th</sup> General Assembly: Maputo 2008, “Africa Step forth in Faith”.
- 10<sup>th</sup> General Assembly: Kampala 2013, “God of life, lead Africa to peace, justice and dignity”.

## Appendix 2

### AACC Organogram



**Figure 1: Adapted from the AACC (2014:20) “Post Jubilee Assembly Programmatic Thrusts (2014-2018)”.**