

**TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF LABOUR:
A THEO-HISTORICAL ENQUIRY OF THE
INTERFACE BETWEEN THE ENGLISH
SPEAKING CHURCHES AND LABOUR
(1985-1995)**

By

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December 2015

DECLARATION

As required by University regulations, I hereby state unambiguously that this work has not been presented at any other University or any other institution of higher learning other than the University of KwaZulu-Natal, (Pietermaritzburg Campus) and that unless specifically indicated to the contrary within the text it is my original work.

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10 December 2015

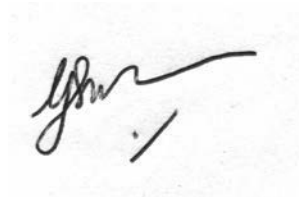
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CERTIFICATION

We the undersigned declare that we have abided by the College of Humanities, University of KwaZulu-Natal's policy on language editing. We also declare that earlier forms of the dissertation have been retained should they be required.



GARY STUART DAVID LEONARD

08 December 2015

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10 December 2015

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ABSTRACT AND KEY TERMS

This study critically examines the relationship between the English-speaking Churches (ESC) and labour organizations in South Africa between 1985-1995.

Following Richard Osmer's model of practical theological interpretation, this study analyses the historical context of oppression in South Africa as a hermeneutical key to assess the role of the ESC and their relation to labour. Drawing from the Bible, other sources in the Christian tradition and the work of four contemporary theologians, the study identifies building blocks for a contextual theology of labour in an attempt to close the gap between theory and praxis.

Particular attention is devoted to identify organisations committed to worker struggles during the period under review and their contributions to the relationships between Church and labour is assessed. The study explores why the ESC failed to translate their resolutions on labour into concrete actions or effective and coherent programmes alongside workers. Furthermore, the exploration offers insights and identifies ways to build healthy church and labour relations in contemporary society.

The concept of human work as participating in God's creative and continuing work of liberation to build a more just world is critically examined. This study claims that work gives meaning to life and is part of God's salvation plan.

This study concludes by connecting faith to the world of work and argues that churches can offer valuable and unique perspectives on work. Practical ways are suggested for the Church to contribute towards a genuine theology of labour and support the rights of workers.

Key Terms: *Apartheid; Conquest; Eschatology; Employment; English-speaking Churches; Hope; Human dignity; Liturgy; Labour; Liturgy; Missionaries; Trade Unions; Work; Workers; Theology; Theological training.*

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

In order to be consistent with the use of key terms throughout this study, each concept needs to be defined and analysed to ensure that they communicate with clarity the deep meaning that is intended by each term used.

Hermeneutical Circle: This refers to a theory of interpretation that defines intellectual integrity in which every interaction produces new information to act upon.

Reading the signs of the time: This refers to a faith reflection and response to the social, economic and political realities.

Theo-historical: This refers to an interpretation of historical events from a faith perspective.

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GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACSA	Anglican Church of South Africa
ANC	African National Congress
AZACTU	Africa-Azanian Confederation of Trade Unions
BAWU	Black Allied Workers Union
BCC	Bantu Congregational Church
BMC	Black Methodist Consultation
BPC	Black Peoples Convention
BTR SARMCOL	British Tyre and Rubber SARMCOL Company
CCMA	Cape Clothing Manufactures Association
CCSA	Christian Council of South Africa
CNETU	Council for Non-European Trade Unions
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CUPC	Church's Urban Planning Commission
CUSA	Congregational Union of South Africa
ESC	English Speaking Churches
FAWU	Food and Allied Workers Union
FEDSAW	Federation of South African Women
FOSATU	Federation of South African Trade Union
ICT	Institute for Contextual Theology

ICU	Industrial and Commercial Workers Union
IDAMASA	Interdenominational African Minister's Association of South Africa
IMP	Industrial Mission Project
KD	Kairos Document
LMS	London Mission Society
LRA	Labour Relations Act
MCSA	Methodist Church of Southern Africa
MDM	Mass Democratic Movement
NACTU	National Council of Trade Unions
NIR	National Initiative for Reconciliation
NPA	National Peace Accord
PAC	Pan African Congress
PBC	Peoples' Budget Campaign
PCR	Programme to Combat Racism
SACC	South African Council of Churches
SACTU	South African Congress of Trade Unions
SAMWU	South African Municipal Workers Union
SASO	South African Students' Organization
SFT	Standing for the Truth Campaign
SPG	Society for the Propagation of the Gospel

SPRO-CAS	Study Project of Christianity in Apartheid Society
SWAPO	South West Africa People's Organization
TLP	Theology of Labour Project
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UCCSA	United Congregational Church of Southern Africa
UDF	United Democratic Front
UNISA	University of South Africa
UPCA	Uniting Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa
WCC	World Council of Churches
YCW	Young Christian Workers

CHAPTER ONE

PRELIMINARY DISCUSSION

1.1. Brief motivation and background

An abundance of literature including research material on workers' struggles in South Africa is evident. There is, however, a comparative dearth of literary resources on the subject matter regarding the relationship between the churches and the South African Trade Union Movement, not limited to the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). This paucity of material is of particular interest especially since many leaders of trade unions and other worker organizations claim to have had some form of religious affiliation and association (Cochrane and West, 1991). My study will confirm that an alienation between faith and labour may be found due to, among other factors, a serious lack of a critical theological reflection on workers.

The Marikana massacre,¹ and the strikes of farm workers in the Western Cape wine lands on 5 December 2012 have once again brought the issues of workers and organized labour into public and media focus. Given this exposure, one may ask, what is the relationship between faith and labour? Even more specifically, what has been the relationship between Christian faith and the labour movements in South Africa? How has Christianity responded to the challenge of labour rights and injustice in South Africa over the years? These questions reveal the need to reflect critically and theologically on Christian faith and labour relations within the South African context.

This research purposes to examine the relationship between English-speaking churches (ESC) and labour organizations between 1985 and 1995, a decade that lays bare the churches leadership coming to terms with a changed political system, albeit the involvement of senior clerics which added a veneer of respectability. Charles Villa-Vicencio (1988), James Cochrane (1987), Daryl Balia (1989), the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and others all use the term ESC to refer to those denominations in South Africa whose origin can be traced back to

¹ <<http://column.global-labour-university.org/2013/02/unpacking-marikana-massacre.html/>>, [Accessed 02 December 2012].

its colonial relationship with Great Britain. These include Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational Churches. Although these churches are of British origin, they are not monolithic. Villa-Vicencio (1988:16) admits that “the phrase English-speaking churches are a misnomer, having acquired a rather specific connotation in South Africa.” John W. de Gruchy (2005:85) points out that the term ESC is “misleading because it may suggest, these churches are predominantly white and uniform.” The facts of the matter are that the majority of the members of these congregations are indigenous Africans whose first language is not English giving rise to the lie that the ESC’s posed a monolithic social structure within Church and its social relations.

Villa-Vicencio contends that the ESC’s were effectively paralyzed because they were “trapped in apartheid” through conforming to the social and political demands of the time. Both in structure and form, these churches were a microcosm of apartheid society. Cochrane, who analysed the role of the ESC from 1903-1930 and Balia from 1960-1987, came to the conclusion too that these churches were captive to the dominant apartheid structure of society. However, the period 1960–1994 is also “contested.” Church leaders, among others, the Reverend Peter Storey, formerly President of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa and the South African Council of Churches, makes a bold assertion that this period was the Churches’ most ecumenical era and “may rightly be called “the SACC Years”...when the witness of the SA church was taken most seriously around us” (cited in Conradie 2013:105).

Researchers, most notably Cochrane (1987:183), indicate that despite the ESC’s criticism of government policies, it had little to say in support of trade unions, the matters of labour, industrial action or workers in general. It is noteworthy too that the majority of church members who were workers at the bottom of the economic ladder were active in the broad Trade Union Movement. In the concluding chapter of his (1989) work, *Christian Resistance to Apartheid*, Balia drafts a possible agenda for churches. He argues very convincingly for the need of the Church to address the problem of human labour since “workers are the single most important source for a revolutionary transition of power in South Africa...[and] it becomes imperative for churches in the context of worker’s struggles to develop an adequate theology of black labour” (Baliam 1989:173). This study will seek to investigate critically how the ESC responded to Baliam’s challenge through a detailed theological-historical enquiry.

The key motivation for this work is the author's experience growing up in a home where both parents were unionized workers. While his mother drew inspiration from the Christian Bible and tradition, his father saw the Church as complicit with the oppressive apartheid government and, as such, counter-revolutionary. For him, the trade union movement carried the burden of history and constituted the primary vehicle for change in South Africa as it had the industrial muscle and capacity to challenge the apartheid state. Spending most of his childhood in a home with this palpable tension, the present author always yearned to understand more deeply why the ESC (of which he is a product and would later become a church leader) failed to close the gap between theological belief, on the one hand, and socio-historical practice on the other. Furthermore, as a Methodist leader exposed to the historical links between early Methodism and the trade union movement in Great Britain he thought that he could explore the connection to see if he can contribute in any way to the Church taking this ministry more seriously. The author brings this experiential knowledge to the research mindful of Charles Wright Mills' argument that, "the most admirable scholars within the scholarly community...do not split their work from their lives. They seem to take both too seriously to allow such dissociation, and they want to use each for the enrichment of the other" (1970:195).

The period between the launch of COSATU on 1 December 1985 and the promulgation of the Labour Relations Act (LRA) Act 66 of 1995 marked a new era in the history of the labour movement. The build-up of the formation COSATU finds no reference in Mokgethi Motlhabi's *Theory and Practice of Black Resistance to Apartheid: A Social Ethical Analysis*. There are possibly two main reasons for this lacuna. One is that black theologians were at a point of drawing together the implications of black consciousness in black theology. The second reason is that workers were claiming their spaces socially and politically and that the progressive voices of the churches were encouraged to "back off" and allow them to organise themselves. By 1995, however, the SACC records show that there was a last minute scramble by church leaders to make some sense of the Labour Bill. While there was a definite push to affirm worker's rights and to castigate employers who came into conflict with the proposed law, most Churches and their leaders have fallen short of heralding the compromised labour legislation as binding on their workers. It saw significant changes to the political, social and economic landscape in South Africa. It is through these lenses that the relationship between Church and labour will be reviewed to seek to develop a contextual theology of labour for South Africa.

1.2. Review of literature

The Church Struggle in South Africa by John W. de Gruchy first published in 1979, with the twenty-fifth anniversary edition released in 2006. John's son, Steve de Gruchy contributed to additional chapters. This work is a theological interpretation of the ecumenical struggle for justice against the apartheid regime and has become a 'classic,' a standard resource to understand the Churches' response to apartheid. The focus is on the ESC, which almost minimizes the role played by other churches and progressive ecumenical bodies as agents of change. John W. de Gruchy's primary emphasis was on the unified protest of the ESC against apartheid, but this is overstated. He virtually ignored their acquiescence in many regards and made no reference to Church and labour.

Steve de Gruchy's additions in the twenty-fifth anniversary edition included the challenges of poverty, sexuality, gender, pluralism and globalization facing the churches in South Africa today. However, he too did not address the continuing crisis in labour relations or a theology of work as a serious issue.

In his investigation of the relationship between the ESC and the apartheid state, Charles Villavicencio highlights the weak and often contradictory responses of these churches aptly described in the title of his book, *Trapped in Apartheid*. While he does have a chapter entitled, "Gold, Politics, and the Churches," he does not address the issue of Church and labour specifically. He rather points to the presence of "an alternative church, a church in resistance that has throughout history existed adjacent to the dominant church—suppressed but neither silenced nor defeated...(which) occupies the margins of the institutionalized church" (1988:5). It is primarily these groups that this dissertation will seek to give voice to as it seeks to develop a contextual theology of labour.

James Cochrane's seminal (1987) work, *Servants of Power: The Role of the English-speaking Churches 1903-1930*, provides a trenchant analysis of the role of the Church in the South African political economy. He investigates this particular period of history because according to him; "developments in the political economy of South Africa during this time laid the foundation for the next fifty years" (1987:7). Cochrane examines the ESC response to labour policies of the day. This research builds on Cochrane's work as well as that of others until 1995

which is one year after the dawn of democracy. 1995 was also the tenth anniversary of the Kairos Document and the year of the promulgation of the Labour Relations Act.

Cochrane in his (1990) article, “Christian Resistance to Apartheid: Periodization, Prognosis” points out that the ESC while not supporting the government policy of apartheid did not question the legitimacy of the state. He further identifies three characteristic forms of “resistance from 1968 to 1986” (1990:93). These will be tested and further explored. The researcher will especially build upon his assertion that, “the churches can only be expected to lag after popular resistance, and the role of those who keep up with such resistance or even enter the *avant-garde* will likely never be anything but peripheral to the institutional churches—the activity of a relatively small group” (1990:95).

The Three-Fold Cord; Theology, Work and Labour (Cochrane and West 1991) was the first substantial resource by South African theologians and others to consider the history of Church and labour in South Africa. The editors saw their contribution as “part of an incomplete task, an unfinished symphony, which has a central harmony echoing throughout its various contributors” (Cochrane and West 1991:9). Commenting on the role of the Church and labour at the time as did de Gruchy and Villa-Vicencio, they were very conscious of their class position and the limitation of their critique. To use the distinction drawn by Filipino liberation theologian, Carlos Abesamis, they viewed themselves as technicians, “allowing themselves to be utilized by workers to articulate their voice and experience” (1991:284).

In an unpublished dissertation: “An Assessment of the Involvement of the Churches with their Own Members with Regards to the BTR SARMCOL strike: Towards a Theology of Labour,” R. Simangaliso Kumalo observed, “that the role of the church in the worker struggle has been ambivalent” and goes further to pose the question “why” to which he responds, “I think it is because of the lack of a theology of work that would help support and guide the church in its ministry to workers” (2002:60). However, he does not translate this into an action plan but stops at critique. Kumalo (2002:83) rightly asserts that “a true theology of work must come from workers themselves and must belong to them.” In this work, the author will argue that the “theologian” or “technician”—for there to be a genuine theology of work—needs to engage in the process of accompanying workers.

Daryl Balia's (1989) monograph, *Christian Resistance to Apartheid*, reviews Ecumenism in South Africa from 1960 to 1987. He uses the hermeneutical circle as his historical framework that is an important tool for theological interpretation. As with Philippe Denis (1997), Balia believes that the white scholarship is over-represented in religious history and is of the firm conviction that, "Blacks should rewrite their history" (1989:7). Balia provides some answers to the research questions but more importantly, he poses a significant challenge to anyone seeking to develop a theology of labour in South Africa. He declares that "the problem of human labour in a dehumanizing system of social relationships must be addressed with greater magnitude and intensity" (1989:166).

Sibusiso Duncan Gwala in his (2007) unpublished thesis, "A Theological Analysis of the Impact of Unemployment on Youth in Pietermaritzburg with particular focus on Young Christian Workers" reveals that the response of the Church was mostly indifferent. He argues that using the methodology outlined by Gerald O. West in *Contextual Bible Study* (1993), "theology from below will emerge" (1996:95). Gwala challenges the institutional Church to use the model of Young Christian Workers for ministry with the unemployed.

In yet another unpublished thesis, "A Theology of Decent Work; Reflections for Casual Workers in the ND Ethiopian Catholic Church in Zion Estcourt, KwaZulu Natal" (2012) Sithembiso Samuel Zwane also uses Contextual Bible Study as a tool to construct a theology of decent work as proposed by the International Labour Organisation. He considers members of the NDJ Ethiopian Catholic Church in Zion as "victims of economic injustice and abuse" who "has seen an increase in chronic unemployment" (2012:43). For this reason, he draws from his experience of ten years of work with communities of unemployed and casual workers. He interviews members of this group and uses Albert Nolan's theology (1993) as a framework to develop five pillars of a theology of decent work. These are; "rights at work, employment at work, social protection at work, social dialogue at work and human dignity" (2011:65) without any serious analysis.

Zwane's work gives a first-hand account of the experience of casual workers and their understanding of the theology of work. Zwane argues that a genuine theology of work will call for a collaborative effort of workers and professional theologians. He laments the fact the "not much has been written in the area of work" (2011:81). However, he only fleetingly refers to Miroslav Volf (2001) Darrell Cosden (2006) and David Jensen (2006).

Both Gwala and Zwane worked at the Ujamaa Centre for Biblical Community Development and Research and used Contextual Bible Study to develop theologies of work. They did not build on or acknowledge the contribution of liberation, black or traditional systematic theologians (cited above) except Nolan (1993) and West (1993). It seems as if others have nothing or very little to contribute towards the debate on a theology of work. In this study, the author will explore the contribution of some of the systematic theologians mentioned above to assess how their works can help (become building blocks) to construct a theology of labour in South Africa.

The emerging picture from this brief review of South African scholarship shows that there are very few published studies that link theology and labour. More surprising, is the fact that South African Black liberation theologians (Boesak 1979, 2005; Mosala 1989; Motlhabi 2008; Vellem 2007; Maluleke 1995, 1997, 2000) as well as reconstruction theologians (Gous 1993; Villa-Vicencio 1992; Mugambi 1995; Farisani 2002) make only parting reference to the issue of the Church and labour struggles. Since “liberation” is the root metaphor of Black theology, it is supposed to secure not only liberation from “other-worldly salvation” preached in the traditional church but from physical, psychological, socio-political, economic and oppression (Motlhabi 2008:8). Reconstruction theologians on the other hand claim that “the task of liberation has essentially been to say “No” to all forms of oppression.” With the dawn of democracy in some parts of the world, “the prophetic task of the Church must include a thoughtful creative “Yes” to options of political and social renewal” (Villa-Vicencio 1992:1). Their scholarly work pays scant attention to labour issues or the plight of workers as a theme.

Besides Cochrane (1997), Cochrane and West (1991), Kumalo (2002), Gwala (2007) Zwane (2012) and to some degree Balia (1989), there has been little serious academic work and no significant ground-breaking publication, major seminars or conferences on the relationship between church and labour in South Africa in recent years. It is a neglected area of research, and South African theologians have contributed little to the understanding of work. This oversight is significant because much of a human being’s time is spent working which if nothing else, provides an adequate reason for theological reflection. For many South African theologians, this paucity might suggest labour is peripheral to the fundamental tenets of Christian faith. It may further suggest that they failed to develop a paradigm for dealing with labour because of the volatile South African context. For this reason, the proposed study is a step further from that of Cochrane and West in that it seeks to respond to their challenge to the

churches to take labour more seriously. It employs an investigation into how the ESC responded to the challenge during a critical historical period in the development of the country's labour movement. At the same time, it differs from that of Kumalo in terms of coverage. Whereas Kumalo looked at a single event, (the BTR SARMCOL strike), a single year, 1990, and a single church denomination, this study will investigate a group of churches and their relation to the thriving labour movement that was brewing within their membership for a decade. Nevertheless, the study will be informed ideologically, methodologically and historically by the works cited in this dissertation.

The study will furthermore examine and analyse the history of the trade union movement by drawing on the works of Eddie Webster, (1985), *Cast in a Racial Mould: Labour Process and Trade Unions in the Foundries*, J. Baskin (2000), *Labour in South Africa's Transition to Democracy*, Tom Lodge (1983), *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945* and Dennis Macshane, Martin Plant and David Ward (1984), *Power! Black Workers, their Unions and the Struggle for Freedom in South Africa*.

Lessons learnt from recent international scholarship on theology of work by Douglas Meeks (1989), *God the Economist: The Doctrine of God and Political Economy*, Miroslav Volf (2001), *Work in the Spirit: Towards a Theology of Work*, Armand Larive (2004), *After Sunday: A Theology of Work*, Darrell Cosden (2005), *The Heavenly Good of Earthly Work*, Darrell Cosden (2006), *A Theology of Work: Work in the New Creation* and David H. Jensen (2006), *Responsive Labour: A Theology of Work* will be assessed to determine how they may contribute to a theology of work in the South African context.

1.3. Location of the study

The study focuses on South Africa. However, the churches are not evenly distributed in the country. Besides, the larger amounts of material are located in Pretoria and Johannesburg. Although the study is interested in the apartheid period, 1985 to 1995, the political and economic times have changed considerably since the dawn of a constitutional democracy in 1994.

1.4. Objectives

The particular objectives of this study are as follows:

- i. To critically examine the attitude of the ESC towards the labour movements during the period under review;
- ii. To explore the contribution of the ESC, if any, towards labour rights in South Africa;
- iii. To analyse the dominant work and justice theology of the ESC between 1985 and 1995;
- iv. To clarify how the ESC sought to translate their moral protest (resolutions) into programmes of action.

1.5. Questions to be asked

- i. What was the attitude of the ESC towards labour injustices in South Africa between 1985 and 1995?
- ii. What was the contribution of the ESC, if any towards labour rights in South Africa between 1985 and 1995?
- iii. How did the ESC relate to organizations of the labour movement in South Africa between 1985 and 1995;
- iv. What does the history of church-labour relations mean for the Church in contemporary society?

1.6. Research methods / Approach to the study

This study will adopt the practice of qualitative research methodology including narrative critique and informed historical context that is born from the struggles of a subjugated and

working class community. This approach is different from quantitative research methodology in that it seeks to understand behaviour (van Manen 1990:39). The researcher considers the evidence extracted from a narrative critique complementary to such research. It is necessary for making sense of its deductions and not in conflict with its use or exclusion (Chambers 1985; Crites 1971; Fackre, 1984; Villa-Vicencio, 1994).

The author's role as an activist, community worker and church leader influences his perspective. Therefore he does not approach the subject as a passive observer but rather assent to the "inter-subjectivity" of interpretation of narrative texts, in much the same way as a quantitative researcher would need to "interpret" her/his research data.

The researcher managed to locate a variety of archival material such as the records of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa Conferences and Synods at Methodist House, in Bedfordview, Johannesburg. The historical records of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA)—the Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA), the Institute of Contextual Theology (ICT) and the South African Council of Churches (SACC) are housed in the William Cullen Library at the University of the Witwatersrand. The United Congregational Church of Southern Africa's (UCCSA) archive is in Brixton, Johannesburg and the Uniting Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa's (UPCSA) archival material is available in Parktown, Johannesburg. The Aluka digital library was also a valuable resource.²

The initial catalogue search for files on "the church and labour" together with the archivist at the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Geneva, yielded little results until the author read Thembeke Mufamadi's (2011) thesis, "The World Council of Churches and its Programme to Combat Racism: The Evolution and Development of their Fight against Apartheid," which pointed him to primary records of the Programme to Combat Racism (PCR).

The reports, letters, minutes of meetings of all the organizations were valuable for their narrative function. They also captured the thoughts and experiences of the main role players. These sources were useful especially when read in a comparative manner examining the ways in which authors explained, understood and tried to interpret historical events. The investigation was supplemented with internet articles, published works, journals, unpublished

² See: <<http://www.aluka.org.oasis.unisa.ac.za/>>, [Accessed 29 November 2015].

dissertations, and minutes of meetings, conference reports and pamphlets. All these provided a balanced and comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of the time.

Unstructured interviews were conducted with:

- i. Five religious leaders who were active in the ecumenical movement during the period under review;
- ii. Five people who gave leadership to the trade unions and labour organizations from 1985-1995.³

According to Bogdon and Taylor (1984:77), unstructured interviews are modelled on a conversation between equals. The interviewer becomes a research tool that allows the informant to talk freely and share their experiences in ways and words they feel most comfortable

1.7. Validity, reliability and rigour

This study is within the field of Practical Theology and grounded in the relationship between theory and practice. The author has always done theology dialogically—not as a dispute but engaging both sides as a desire to learn from one another—from experience and the context of the community of faith. He found the use of the See-Judge-Act methods or “hermeneutical circle” advocated by Joe Holland and Peter Henriot, of great assistance (1980).

There is a whole corpus of scholarship on Practical Theology (Heynes and Pieterse 1990; Bosch 1991; Browning 1999; van Huyssteen 1999; Heitink 1999; Hendriks 2004). The researcher identified Richard Osmer’s definition of practical theology to be most helpful; “that branch of Christian theology that seeks to construct action-guiding theories of Christian praxis, in particular, social contexts” (2005:15). Osmer uses the hermeneutical circle to propose a model of practical theological interpretation. The pastor/researcher becomes an interpretative guide who asks specific questions as she or he engages in four tasks.

³ Their stories will be told in Chapter 4 below.

- i. The first task is descriptive and poses the question; “What is going on?” while gathering information to understand better the context.
- ii. The second task is interpretative, which asks, “Why is it going on” and entering into dialogue with other disciplines to interpret what is taking place.
- iii. Third is the normative task that asks, “What ought to be going on?” It calls for “prophetic discernment” that “involves both divine disclosure and the human shaping of God’s word (2005:134). Questions are raised from the distinct Christian tradition, normative practices, theology and ethics.
- iv. Fourth, there is the pragmatic task that ask; “how might we respond? An action plan is developed to respond adequately to the context or to develop new forms of Christian practice. In fact, Osmer’s approach provides the theoretical insight for this study.

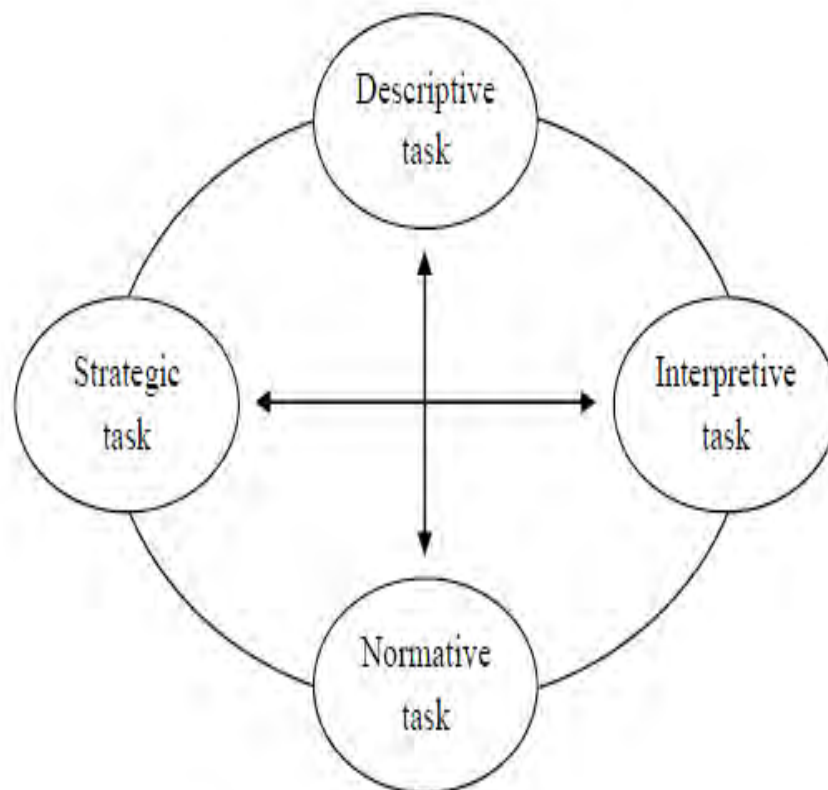


Figure 1.1. The Four Task of Practical Theology according to Richard Osmer. Source: Osmer (2008:22)

There are many scholars such as Don Browning, who claim that all theology is ultimately practical. He argues, “We come to the theological task with questions shaped by secular and religious practices in which we are implicated-sometimes uncomfortable. All our practices, even religious practices have theories behind and within them” (1991:6).

Norbert Mette sees practical theology as “a theological theory of action” (1978:9). Gerben Heitink understands practical theology as an “empirically oriented theological theory of mediation of the Christian faith in the praxis of modern society” (1999:12). Given these definitions and bearing in mind that the focus of this study will be to determine how the ESC responded to labour challenges faced by the workers. The hermeneutical circle will be used to explore the interface between theory (faith and theology) and praxis (historical experience) during the period under review. Osmer’s model of how theory and praxis relate and vice versa enabling theology to become transformative will provide the dialogic between Church and labour which in turn will inform this study.

1.8. Limitations

The author is a South African Methodist minister who has served as a leader of the Church at the national level during the period under review. This may pose a subjectivity challenge since he may be too close to the subject of investigation. However, the methods involved in archived materials research together with interviews with other leaders contributed toward the social scientific study of the problem under review. As an insider, he has particular strengths in researching this topic since he may be able to see certain critical factors invisible to an outsider. Another challenge has been the fact that many churches have varying degrees of development in archiving systems of records. The author attempted to even out this challenge by substantive interviews with the major religious leaders actively involved with and engaged in labour issues during the period under review.

1.9. Chapter outline

This study is divided into seven chapters.

- i. **Chapter One:** Here the motivation and background of the Theo-historical enquiry is presented so that a contribution can be made to develop an adequate theology of labour in South Africa.
- ii. **Chapter Two:** This chapter follows Richard Osmer's model of practical theological interpretation. It seeks to understand the historical context of class oppression in South Africa as a hermeneutical key to critically assess the role of the ESC and their relationship to labour in the period under review.
- iii. **Chapter Three:** This chapter focuses on the issue of church and labour drawing from the Bible and other sources within the Christian tradition. This chapter also discusses the central arguments of four contemporary theologians to illustrate how their works may be used as building blocks for a theology of labour in South Africa.
- iv. **Chapter Four:** This chapter examines the relationship of the ESC's to labour during the period 1985-1995 using interviews, archival research, secondary literacy resources, publications and case studies.
- v. **Chapter Five:** This chapter responds to the Biblical teaching and other sources. It identifies building blocks for a contextual theology of labour that seeks to close the gap between theory and praxis, thereby offering a connection to workers who feel alienated from work and witness of the Church.
- vi. **Chapter Six:** This chapter engages the fourth stage of Osmer's hermeneutical circle and explores practical ways in which the gap between theological understanding of work and historical practice can be closed.
- vii. **Chapter Seven:** This chapter summarises the principal arguments in this dissertation and makes recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER TWO

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF RACIAL AND CLASS OPPRESSION IN SOUTH AFRICA

2.1. Introduction

Any attempt at understanding the nature of labour within South Africa demands an awareness of its social context as a unique social imprint and the birthmark of its former generations. For this reason, this chapter focuses on the first step of Richard Osmer's model of practical theological interpretation. The "descriptive-empirical task" asks the question, "What is going on?" to understand the socio-historical context of the subject under review (2005:134).

It is only through critically analysis and careful reflection on the past that an understanding of the present that strategies for transformation can be developed. Dariso Lisiero makes this point in a salient manner when he claims:

History should not be a teacher of life but rather a questioning and transforming element. It must spur us to look at the future, reaffirming the struggles of the present, which enables us to be in control of the future (1990:66).

The purpose of the historical and social enquiry undertaken here is limited and explicitly defined as a "Theo-history" providing a faith interpretation of events and therefore differently defined from other socio-historical interpretations of developments in South Africa. Other more detailed analysis of developments in South Africa against which this interpretation may be measured is obtainable and available in many other published works. In this dissertation, the author will provide a defined historical context as the hermeneutical key to critically examine the attitude of the ESC towards labour movements in the period under review. He will also explore their contribution, if any, towards labour rights, industrial action and the plight of workers in general.

2.2. Setting the scene

The South African system of racialized capital has its origin in a particular form of settler-colonialism and its logic in the capitalist mode of production. What follows will briefly show how racial oppression and capitalist exploitation have come to feed on and reinforce each other. The purpose of this exercise is to expose the history of the relationship between racialised capital and labour while disputing an underlying assumption that the struggle of workers and the life and work of the ESC is coterminous.

The landing of the employees of the Dutch East India Company at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652 had a dramatic and far-reaching effect on the indigenous people. The colonialist understood permission to occupy the land as implying ownership an assumption that successive generations of indigenous people would challenge. As the historian C. W. de Kiewiet can state: “land was bought with harness, guns and cases of brandy. It was acquired by the process of turning a permission to graze into the right to occupy” (1941:75).

A systematic process of conquest and occupation of land took place not only through overtly violent means but also through the systematic deprivation of land that reduced the indigenous people to servitude. This process of disinheritance of African people from their land was not without resistance and resulted in a series of protracted wars in which the settlers emerged as victors. In most cases, control of land also meant control of the labour. Bernard Magubane (1979:10) argues:

Herein lies the origin of the historic contradiction of South Africa today: caught between wanting to exploit African labour, but not wanting the physical presence of Africans, apartheid has emerged not merely as an ideology, but as a myth that whites have a prior claim to parts of the land.

Arguments used by apartheid apologists of the “empty sub-continent” and the notion that African people were poor agriculturalists who lacked enterprise held back from adapting to modern farming methods by tribal structures resulting in white settlers surpassing them, is nothing more than a myth. Studies have shown that these approaches were simply untrue.⁴

⁴ <<http://historymatters.co.za/content/south-africa--myth-empty-land-shula-marks-1-january-1980-south-africa/>>, [Accessed 2 February 2015].

Rather, there was a sophisticated and deliberately contrived colonial capitalistic system that prevented black competition in the marketplace. The historical development of racial capitalism that sought to maximize economic development to secure white supremacy and material prosperity at the expense of black people can be largely categorized into four distinct phases. It should be noted from the outset that indigenous Africans at the time of colonial conquest and settlement exchanged cattle, land and resources for commodities on an equitable basis. They also used their labour in these exchanges which—under colonial relations—was then corrupted due to a system of “hired labour” with which they were unfamiliar.

2.2.1. First phase: Conquest and European settlement (1652 to c. 1866)

The first white settlers who arrived at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652 were all officials of the Dutch East India Company. Under the leadership of Jan van Riebeeck, they were commissioned to establish a permanent provision station for geopolitical and geostrategic reasons to secure trade routes for the Dutch. When van Riebeeck discovered the Khoi-Khoi vehemently resisting recruitment as labour in 1657, he created a community of Free-Burghers to farm land given out by the company. By 1658, he was able to import slaves from Guinea, Angola, Ceylon and other parts of Asia. W. M. Tsotsi (1985:23) claims that Chief Gonnema of the Khoi-Khoi resisted the recruitment of labour for at least the first ten years before being defeated. The result was that the Dutch East Indian Company policy and practice soon changed strengthening racial consciousness and privilege.

Under the governorship of Simon van der Stel, the Cape was officially made a permanent settlement. Expansion of the settlement was encouraged, and immigration was boosted by the arrival of a vast number of Huguenots who fled France after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. The Huguenots and other settlers were united by adhering to the theology of the Reformed Church and the competition for land and cattle against the indigenous people.

Through a process of conquest, unfair bartering relationships and disease, the Khoi-Khoi in the Western Cape were eventually stripped of their cattle and their independent livelihood. An almost natural situation of “job reservation” developed over the years with the white colonist fulfilling the role of landowners and employers while the slaves, who were all black, did the

menial work. W. M. Tsotsi notes: “Within seventy years of the Cape settlement manual work had come to be regarded as slave work beyond the dignity of white men [*sic*] to perform” (1985:24).

Most of the colonists were Calvinist members of the Dutch Reformed Church who through their isolation were not influenced by the liberalizing ideas of the French Revolution. They often felt that the missionaries acted against their interests. George Schmidt, the first missionary to work amongst the indigenous people at Baviaanskloof, later named Genadendal, roughly translated as the “Valley of Grace” Moravian Mission Station. Schmidt left the colony in 1744 after only six years. The authorities denied him permission to administer the sacraments to his flock. As de Gruchy (2005:13) can claim:

The teaching and practice of George Schmidt was not only regarded as a threat to the theology and authority of the church, it was also a threat to the social life of the settler community to which the church ministered.

The colonial systems of government held no respect for the Khoi and San to whom Schmidt was called to serve. Schmidt maintained that he was called to spread a Gospel which regarded every human being, everywhere as equal before God. The colonial administration took severe exception saying the indigenous people stank and were animals, not human beings. As was the military custom, the Khoi under Schmidt would be plied with “firewater”—reminiscent of the more modern day “dop system”—getting them so intoxicated that they would be forced to carry on any sort of lewd action at the behest of the colonial administration. That apart, Schmidt continued with the Moravian tradition which addressed the Khoi people as “brother and sister” (Kalfus and Masinova, 1962:197). It was only in 1792 that the Moravians, Hendrick Marsveld, Christian Kuhnel and Daniel Schwinn were allowed to reopen Baviaanskloof (Genadendal).

With the British occupation (1795) and the later annexation of the Cape in 1806 a new era in church-state relationships began. In 1799, the London Missionary Society (LMS) was started, with Dr Johannes van der Kemp and three other missionaries. They spearheaded the work of this mission among the *Khoi-Khoi* (more correctly the *Khoi-San* tribes of Attakwa and Gourikwa) and amaXhosa on the Eastern borders of the colony. There was tension between the missionaries and the Dutch Colonists, who feared that new missionary settlements would rob them of their source of labour (Davenport 1997:53). The missionaries also accused the colonial authorities of not upholding justice on the frontier. As a result, circuit courts were introduced

in the district to hear cases ranging from murder to unjust labour practices but Villa-Vicencio (1988:48) contends that:

It was essentially “the gospel of work”...this missionary induced “work ethic” (that) helped provide the vital spark igniting the emerging productive system at first in rural areas and then in the urban areas of the colonized lands.

By the early 1800’s, there was an increase in missionary as well as a colonial activity. New missionary endeavours started on the Eastern frontier, in Bechuanaland and Namaqualand. While the colonial authorities were initially suspicious of work beyond the colony, they later began to recognize the extent to which their endeavours could promote the colonial cause. Faced with the expense of a series of wars with the Xhosa on the Eastern frontier, the colonial authorities introduced a sizeable British settlement in the Albany District known as the Zuurveld. They were to make the frontier area more economically productive and easier to defend. Charles Villa-Vicencio asserts that the Wesleyan Missionary Society instructed their missionaries against, “meddling with political parties or secular disputes” (2005:54). It was a covert way of warning them to support the colonial cause.

Allan Boesak (1995:45) makes the point that:

Reformed scholars like Ntoane, Templin and Adonis do not hesitate to show that the original settlers went to South Africa, not for religious purposes, but for economic reasons. The Boers saw the Khoi-Khoi (Khoi-san peoples) as a source of labour. For the first hundred years of European settlement, it was assumed that adherence to the Christian faith made slave eligible for emancipation. Because the profit motive dominated, however, the intent of this concept was subverted. Boers feared that to let one’s slave hear the Christian message would mean a loss of valuable labourers.

The precise role the missionaries played in the conquest of Southern Africa is still a hotly-debated issue amongst historians and theologians alike. Some historians see the missionaries as “agents of conquest and cultural imperialist” and ambassadors of the mercantile classes who wished to establish new markets and exploit raw materials for industry (Majeke 1952, Bundy 1988, Millard 1989). Others view them differently as “unselfish “hero-saints” who sought to evangelize, civilize and “protect the heathens” (Sales 1971; Hinchliff 1968). No matter which views one embraces, many settlers considered the missionaries as troublemakers. John W. de Gruchy (2005:13) observes that “the basic reason that both the Dutch and English resented some of those missionaries was that the missionaries not only evangelized the indigenous people but took their side in the struggle for justice, rights and land.” While this

might well be the case, there is enough evidence to show that a relationship existed between the imperial government and missionaries.

In many instances, the missionaries acted as intermediaries and came to be used officially and unofficially by the government. They softened the resistance of the Africans to colonial conquest. Dr. Phillip, Superintendent of the London Missionary Society (LMS), in his, *Researches in South Africa*, states:

While our missionaries are everywhere scattering the seeds civilization...they are extending British interests, British influences and the British Empire...Wherever the missionary places his standard among a savage tribe, their prejudices against the colonial Government give way, their dependence upon the colony is increased by the creation of artificial wants. Industry, trade and agriculture spring up. (Dr. Phillip cited in Majeke 1952:3).

The missionaries influenced the government to issue Ordinance 50 in 1828. They agitated for a more liberal native policy that would better control and unlock the potential black labour into the white market and influenced the government on land and labour policy thus causing conflict between Afrikaner and Brit. To many Afrikaners, they were seen as “traitors” to white society. Anna Steenkamp saw the emancipation of slaves as unthinkable. She expressed the Voortrekker sentiment well;

It is not so much their freeing which drove us to such lengths, as their being placed on an equal footing with Christians, contrary to the laws of God, and the natural distinctions of race and colour, so that it was intolerable for any decent Christian to bow beneath such a yoke; wherefore we rather withdrew in order to preserve our doctrines of purity (De Gruchy 2005:19).

All the legislative changes (many of them instigated by the missionaries) did not alter the material conditions of Blacks who still had legal and social restrictions imposed on them. Ordinance No. 49 of 1828 regulated the employment and movement of Blacks (an early version of the infamous pass law which was the principal instrument to control black labour).

The land wars fought against the Xhosa in the Eastern Cape all but destroyed their traditional way of life and communal economy thus reducing them to tenant farmers and squatters on their land. Black labour was controlled through some poll taxes as well as the Masters and Servants Act of 1841 which made it an offence to break an employment contract. A similar situation applied in Natal, annexed in 1843. As Ernest Harsch points out, “between 1845 and 1875

Theophilus Shepstone evolved a policy of territorial segregation in Natal that was to provide a model for the present apartheid regime's Bantustan programme" (Harsch cited in Mermelstein 1987:47). Under British rule, a systematic process of racism and exploitation was established that would shape the future social and economic policies in South Africa.

2.2.2. Second phase: Mineral discoveries and white political and economic consolidation (1866-1920)

The discovery of minerals, diamonds near Kimberly in 1867 and gold on the Witwatersrand in 1886 transformed South Africa from a rural, subsistence economy in the nineteenth century to the twentieth century modern industrial state. It meant that the political, as well as an economic agenda, was now set by the British imperialists who wished to create the optimum conditions to facilitate the exploitation of the mineral wealth.

There was a strategy of territorial annexation that included the Boer Republics and all the African chiefdoms. By 1881, the annexed Republics had regained their independence, but almost all military resistance by Blacks effectively crushed. Repeated attempts were made to subvert the indigenous economy and force black farmers and peasants into the wage labour economy. The Glen Grey Act of 1894 was an attempt to unlock the labour potential and channel it to the mines (Davenport 1977:181). This Act widened the tax base, tightened land tenure and imposed a cash labour tax on all sixteen year old males (Ncube 1985:14-15). The enforcement of Location and Vagrancy Laws, the droughts in the 1890's, the rinderpest epidemic of 1896-7, as well as the discrimination against black farmers, forced black labour to the mines.

Conflict of interests between the isolation-minded racist Afrikaners and the British Imperialists who wished to control the mineral resources in the two Boer Republics led to the Anglo-Boer Wars of 1899-1902. Many black leaders supported the British in the hope that the defeat of the Boers would secure them the franchise (Walshe 1997:19). The Treaty of Vereeniging in 1902, however, brought about a period of reconstruction that sought to reconcile Boer and Brit without the extension of the franchise the Africans (Motlhabi 2008:25).

The Lagden Commission of 1905, which attempted to formulate a unified "Native policy" further tightened land tenure and formulated labour controls that would benefit capitalist

interest and the white community (Davenport 1977:228-230). The Lagden Report embodied much of the discriminatory racial policies that would set the agenda and shape the future South African society (Odendaal 1984:65). James Cochrane (1987:62) confirms that:

The policies of Labour control, the maintenance of the exploitative wages bars, and the segregation of the indigenous people found their first full formulation in the Lagden Commission and their political life in the Act of Union, which established South Africa as a national state governed by a white settler oligarchy.

The Bambatha rebellion illustrates well how peasants resisted the poll tax introduced in 1906. Chief Bambatha Zondi and his clan were prepared to take up arms to defend their right to use their ancestral land without legislation from any colonial authority. The Bambatha revolt was the last major episode of armed resistance to colonial conquest prior to the establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910. The reason for a lack of success, however, may in part be due to the lack of access to sophisticated weaponry in comparison with the British regiments. Another reason may be that leaders such as Walter Rubushana, John Langalibalele Dube and Pixley Seme ka Seme were advocating a negotiated settlement rather than armed resistance.

The 1910 Union of South Africa consolidated the link between the Boer and the British to protect their “interests” at the expense of Blacks. They found their dignity as white people in the negation of those they conquered and exploited. Bernard Magubane (1979:53) described the arrangement this way;

The British conquest and creation of union, whose constitution decreed political servitude for the African, set up the conditions and structures that made it possible for Afrikaner racial nationalism to play its present role in South Africa. Thus, the power structure of white supremacy is in the final analysis a means of perpetuating class interest and the racial discriminatory legal structure is a means by which blasts relationship between the conqueror (British) and the conquered (Boer) is mediated, to the advantage of the capitalist.

The establishment of the Union—which excluded black Africans—signified no qualitative change in the status of the Black majority. Instead, legislation was passed which reinforced oppression, controlled labour and land and created a large class of landless Blacks. Propagation for the franchise of Blacks was first organized through delegations and petitions in 1889 and 1906 (Karis and Carter 1977:5). Renewed attempts at persuasion in 1910 were again unsuccessful which effectively excluded Blacks from the political process. A new era dawned for wide-based National resistance that transcended race. In 1912, the African National

Congress (originally the South African Native Congress) was launched with the aim of creating national unity and defending the rights of the Black majority. In 1913, the notorious Native Land Act was passed which set aside 87 per cent of the land for the white minority while 13 percent designated for use by the Black majority. The Act was also a response to the missionaries such as Reverend William Wilcox (American Board) and James Allison (Methodists) and African political elites such as Pixley Seme, John Langalibalele Dube, and Josiah Gumede who were mobilizing black people to contribute money and by fertile land (Kumalo 2012). Black people were now in a position where they were land-starved and tax-squeezed without any option, but to become migrant works on white farms, mines and in urban industries.

The Industrial Conciliation Act of 1924 regulated trade unionism under the Smuts government but only white workers were allowed to organize themselves. Blacks were not only prevented from doing so but effectively excluded from white unions. As T. Dunbar Moodie (1975:53) has pointed out, “From the beginning, industry was conducted on the principle of high pay to skilled white labour and miserable low pay to Black and African labour.” Accordingly, white workers always supported the *status quo* in as much as it protected their interests. There can be little doubt that white capital and labour collaborated to control and maintain power at the expense of black people. The forms of exploitation and relations that developed in the mines largely shaped the development of labour practices and social relationships in other sectors of the economy.

All indications point to the fact that the ESC placed a low premium on matters other than their institutional life during this crucial period when the cornerstone of the apartheid policy was being laid. There is also evidence that supports the argument that churches collaborated with recruitment agencies by equipping blacks to perform subservient tasks by providing them with industrial or manual education (Villa-Vicencio 1988:53; Cochrane 1987:157). Many Blacks found their way into higher education through the mission schools. However, the majority were trained for the labour market (Cock 1980:116).

There was not much opposition to the Glen Grey Acts or the Lagden Commission report that heaped praises on the churches for educating Blacks to take up their place in white society. Both the missionary societies and churches welcomed the Lagden Report. The many resolutions and opinions expressed by the Churches, leave little doubt that they could not

distance themselves from the dominant values of white society. They benefited from legislation that supplied and controlled labour at minimal cost and “preserve” law and order. Cochrane claims that the general verdict of the ESC contained in the *Christian Express* was that the Lagden Commission “had done its work well” and “it is neither unfair nor unfriendly towards the great native interest it deals with” (1987:63).

The fact that the ESC failed to address the issues of the large black working class through this traumatic process of the development of a modern industrial state in South Africa points to a somewhat impotent and conservative theology that served the ruling class. Charles van Onselen (1982:78-87) claims that it was an indictment on the ESC that they could not respond with half the vigour and moral conviction to the exploitative and discriminatory practices of the day as they did in the “Liquor Crusade” on the Rand. Highly organised white clergy and laity attacked shebeens and sent deputations to meet with the State President.

The way in which the ESC dealt with the labour and liquor crisis at the time reflects its inability to support the cause of the black working class.

It is important to note the emergence of Independent or Black Indigenous churches. There were many caused which gave rise to these churches. Among them, the growing spirit of African nationalism, the indifference to Black aspirations in the ESC and the changing socio-economic trends which colonization and industrialization had on the indigenous people.

There was also a growing ferment from black members to colonial domination in the ESC, and the result was dissent, schisms and secessions. The first of these took place at the Paris Evangelical Mission in Lesotho in 1872 (Hammond and Tooke 1974:418). Kumalo (2011) in a very insightful study draws on five case studies to illustrate how the lack of trust, money and racism all contributed to splits and schisms in the Methodist Church. These splits birthed an African missionary movement.

In 1884, Reverend Nehemiah Tile broke away from the Methodist Church after being accused of “taking part in matters political” (Roux 1966:78). Moreover, “stirring up some hostilities” against the magistrates in Thembuland (Balila 1991:55). He formed the Thembu National Church which became:

More than just a place of religious worship: it signified a political protest movement seeking to escape the reality of colonial rule. In the Thembu church where all men and women were equal and black, there was no white racist control (Meli 1988:10).

In 1892, there was another schism in the Methodist Church when the Reverend Mangena Maake Mokone resigned and, together with evangelists and adherents, formed the Ethiopian Church, later to become the African Methodist Episcopal Church. He opposed the blatant racial discrimination that included disparity of stipends, lack of leadership positions for black clergy and separate synods and conferences (Balila 1991:71). In a letter, “Founder’s Declaration of Independence” he cites more reasons for his resignation (Mokone 1935:10). Mokone was joined by another Methodist, James Dwane, who in 1884 left the Methodist Church in protest at their mistrust of black leadership. Mokone broke away at a time he had been principal of Kilnerton and became one of the early black leaders to contribute to the building of a school and to be a principal in those early days. Sundker (1961:33-33), Theilsen (2005:56) and Millard (1991:21) among others identified the colour line, the land question and African unemployment as some of the root causes of the formation of the Ethiopian Church.

Most of those calling for independence and indigenization within the English-speaking churches came from the Black elite who were products of missionary education. They provided a new kind of religious resistance outside the “missionary” churches. Wellington Buthelezi, who was influenced by Marcus Garvey, called for resistance and a new African Church in which he articulated the needs of the community. Buthelezi was a persuasive individual who had a popular following in the Eastern Cape (Cochrane 1987:92).

Another charismatic figure who attempted to Africanize Christianity was the prophet Enoch Mgijima. He broke away from the Methodist Church to form the Church of God and Saints of Christ at Ntabelanga in 1907. Mgijima taught that Blacks were the real Israelites, God’s chosen people. When ordered to leave Ntabelanga with his followers he claimed that the land was given to them by God and no human decree could make them move. On 24 May 1921, eighth hundred soldiers converged on Bulhoek and mowed down at least five hundred men. There is widespread belief that the attack on Bulhoek was orchestrated by the missionaries who feared competition from the indigenous African Church of Mgijima (Kekana 1992:22-28).

According to Davenport 1987:207), the African Initiated Churches (AIC’s) became “vehicles of religious enthusiasm and political protest” against the white culture and a Eurocentric

Christianity which did not take African leadership, culture and tradition seriously. This revolt against spiritual and cultural domination and white prejudice in many ways offered a spiritual home for black workers and their dependents because it helped them cope with the social problems, especially in urban society. The English-speaking churches were often antagonistic towards these churches and did not recognize them (the only exception being the Order of Ethiopia in the Anglican Church of Southern Africa). The African Initiated Churches formed the basis of a movement for Black Nationalism until the appearance of the African National Congress and the Pan-African Congress (Gerhart 1979:201-204).

2.2.3. Third phase: Repression, dispossession and resistance (c. 1921-1948)

After the First World War, there was a short-lived economic boom that led to increased competition between black and white workers. The worldwide economic depression that followed hurt all sectors of the economy. Black workers at the lowest level of the economic ladder felt the pinch the most.

In 1919, around 40,000 mine workers came out on strike protesting against increasing living costs. The police dealt with them violently. Two years later, white miners took part in a protest united under the slogan “Workers of the World Unite for a White South Africa.” The protest was in response to an attempt by mine-bosses to de-skill white workers and make way for cheap black labour. In what has become known as the 1922 Rand Revolt, 250 people were killed (Callinicos 1988:83-87).

The single most significant outcome of the 1922 strike was the formation of a coalition government between the Labour and National parties in 1926. They promised their supporters relief from insecurity, poverty and unemployment. The “Pact” Government remained in power until 1936 and reinforced white domination and control. They pursued a “civilized labour policy” that resulted in the Wage Act of 1925 and the Mines and Works Amendment (or “Colour Bar”) Act of 1926. The Act disarmed opposition to the skilled white miner.

According to Robert Davies (1979), the intervention of the state led to the institutionalization and bureaucratization of white unions within the state structures. He argues further, “the Pact

regime had succeeded in bringing about the almost complete political capitulation of the white labour movement to capital” (Davies 1979:179-181).

David Yudelman concurs with Davies that the state brought a virtual end to any militant white worker resistance (1983:114-115, 208-211). Eddie Webster goes further to assert that the actions that followed the strike marked the parting of ways of white and black mine workers (Webster 1978:14, 15).

There were contradictions and ambiguities in the ESC response to the Rand Revolt where interests of white workers were at stake. In the early stages of the revolt, they called for a “reconciliatory” and “reformed” between capital and labour but their position changed when violence broke out. Cochrane (1987:131) claims that there is little evidence that the Churches displayed any substantial interest in the workers and their struggle once the strike was over. The fact that the ESC could not identify with the white workers (needless even to mention the plight of black workers) again highlights their ruling class orientation. The leadership supported the industrial bourgeoisie, and there was no clear theology of labour. Hence, their inability to respond to “working class” issues, irrespective of “race issues” involved.

Webster lists some factors that inhibited the emergence of black labour movements, such as the system of migrant contract labour, the hostel system and a battery of discriminatory laws (1978:15-16). In 1919, an active labour organization emerged which could articulate the demands of black workers, namely, the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU). The union drew workers from all walks of life, except the mining sector. According to Luckhardt and Wall (1980:40), the ICU was the first nationally based workers organization in South Africa. The ICU overshadowed the African National Congress (ANC) by its militant character as workers were made aware of their potential through mass action (Roux 1948:161). The leadership of the ICU was, however, ambivalent towards organized religion. The Bible was a frequent source of imagery. Commentators saw Clement Kadalie as, “the new David, ordained to lead the African to the new Africa” while another describe him as a “black Moses sent by God to East London” (Beinart and Bundy 1987:294).

The ICU was the most significant black political organization in the early part of the twentieth century. It is important to note the point made by Don Ncube that its failure to engage in strike action sowed seeds of discord and lack of confidence in a small coterie of a charismatic leader

(Ncube 1985:39). The demise of the ICU brought about the emergence of black trade unions along industrial lines.

The ICU presented the ESC with an opportunity to deal constructively with labour relations but from the few church statements there seems to be a lack of commitment to understanding or support black worker organizations.

In his analysis of the ESC response to the emergent black labour movement, Cochrane (1987:142) claims “the conclusion is unavoidable that the Churches tended to distance themselves as much as possible from organized black labour.” In many ways, the ESC were a mirror image of society. Whites still controlled the leadership positions, and their resolutions, actions and practices all reflected the ruling class ideology of that time. They conformed to the dominant values prescribed by the social, economic and political order. Furthermore, they failed to question the root causes of exploitation and domination always taking a liberal view (proposing minor changes) to legislation that dehumanized and radically affected the lives of black people.

The war years, 1939-1945, was a period of economic development that saw a massive influx of black workers into the secondary and tertiary service sectors. The growing black proletariat soon organized into black trade union activity. The Council for Non-European Trade Unions (CNETU), formed in 1938 and seven years later claimed the support of twenty-nine affiliated unions and 158, 000 members. It was this proliferation of union activity and working class militancy which resulted in the African mine workers’ strike of 1946 (Magubane 1979:42-43). This action shook South Africa to the core. Dan O’Mara claims: “the violence of the state’s response not only indicated the degree to which it felt threatened but foreshadowed the extreme repression after 1948” (O’Mara cited in Saul and Gelb 1981:14).

One of the most significant developments in black politics in the 1940’s was the formation of the Congress Youth League that sought to “unite all in the African community to advance the cause of African freedom” (Lodge 1983:14). It should be noted that two of the most progenitors of the movement, Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo, were both staunch members of the Methodist and Anglican Church, respectively.

In 1949, five years after the establishment of the Youth League, the ANC adopted a Programme of Action. The programme called for non-cooperation with the government through boycotts, strikes and acts of civil disobedience and had as its ultimate goals: “national freedom, political independence and self-determination” (Gerhart 1979:83).

In 1946, the AIC’s tried to address the political crisis through the creation of the Interdenominational African Minister’s Association of South Africa (IDAMASA). They hoped this organisation would unite the voice of black Christians.

The ESC in the meantime, under the banner of the Christian Council of South Africa (CCSA), convened a conference at Rosettenville in 1948 to discuss the “native” problem. The theme of this conference was “The Christian Citizen in a Multi-Racial Society.” In assessing the Rosettenville affirmations, John W. de Gruchy (2005:52) notes that while they do not appear radical, “they were a direct attack on the unfolding policy of apartheid.” Daryl Balia (1989:14) makes the point that while many in leadership in the ESC adopted, “a complaining but essentially passive mode of relating to the established culture of white power, economic privilege, and black suffering.”

2.2.4. Fourth phase: The era of grand apartheid and crisis (c.1949 - 1985)

While some historians argue that a new chapter in the history of South Africa began with the Nationalist Party victory in 1949, Wolphe (1972), O’Mara (1981) and others assert that the apartheid policy of the Nationalist government was nothing more than the refinement of the mechanisms that sought to exploit further black labour and secure white privilege in the development of a capitalist economy. Wolphe (1972:456) convincingly argues that:

Apartheid or separate development merely tightened the loopholes, ironing out the informalities, eliminating the evasions, modernizing and rationalizing the inter-war structures of segregationist labour control.

The segregationist machinery existed to serve and secured white privilege. It was further tightened and formalised through a plethora of legislation like the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act (1953) and the Bantu Education Act (1953).

On the labour front, the Native Act of 1952 strengthened the pass laws and made them applicable to all Africans. The Bantu Building Workers Act No.27 of 1951 forbade Africans doing skilled jobs in the building industry. The Industrial Conciliation Act No. 28 of 1956 gave the Minister of Labour the power to reserve certain positions for a particular race group. The forces of resistance responded to the racist legislation with the Defiance Campaign of 1952 which included strikes and bus boycotts, but the climax was the adoption of the Freedom Charter in 1955. In the same year, the first non-racial confederation, the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) was birthed. They committed themselves to the struggle against apartheid and joined the Congress Alliance to the extent that the leadership of the two organizations overlapped (Luckhardt and Wall 1980:156-157).

Afrikaner nationalism made racism and ethnicity the ordering principles and policy that governed every facet of life. This reality moved the ESC from temporary inertia to become critical of racism. Many condemned the plethora of apartheid legislation that was introduced by the Nationalist Party through resolutions at synods and conferences (Villa-Vicencio 1988:93-107).

There were courageous Christian individuals who resisted the new regime. Collectively, the ESC were not ready to resist apartheid. It failed to throw its weight behind organisations that opposed government like the Congress of South African Trade Unions (SACTU), Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW) and the Congress Alliance (Fine and Davis 1991:131). The loudest protest, however, came when the State threatened the institutional life of churches by Clause 29c of the Native Law Amendment Bill, which forbade different races from worshipping together. Churches united around this issue to the point of opposing the bill by acts of civil disobedience (de Gruchy 2005:54-55; Worsnip 1991:135-139; Sadie 1990:54-58).

The Sharpeville massacre on 21 March 1960 marked a turning point in the black resistance. It became evident to the Liberation Movements that a revolutionary strategy was necessary to win liberation for Blacks. In 1961, both the ANC and PAC formed military wings to engage in armed resistance. As a Church response to Sharpeville, the World Council of Churches (WCC) sponsored the Cottesloe Consultation. At this consultation, Balia contends that the ESC once again raised nothing more than their opposition to apartheid while “complacent in its Western views” and “dominated by a white hierarchy...black voices were rarely heard” (1989:22). The Sharpeville crisis not only challenged the Church to commit to a non-racial society but also

sowed the seeds of organized religious resistance that gave birth to prophetic organizations such as the Christian Institute in 1963.

Following the Sharpeville crisis, the state increased repressive action. The State detained people and banned organisations. In contrast, there was a tremendous wave of economic expansion and foreign investment (Pomeroy 1986:27). With black political organizations having to operate “underground,” it seemed as if a sense of disillusionment captured the black community until the birth of black consciousness in the early 1970’s. The political repression had created a vacuum in the black community and churches were constantly under pressure to become a critical voice in society. In May 1965, the CCSA met to discuss issues of “multiracialism” and the Church.

Following a National Consultation on Church and Society held in February 1960, the Christian Institute and the South African Council of Churches (formerly CCSA) formulated “A Message to the People of South Africa” (Sprong and Mason 1993:139-143; SACC Archives, AC623). This document went beyond denunciation of apartheid and called Christians to search for an alternative society. To this end, the Study Project on Christianity in Apartheid Society (SPROCAS) was started in 1969 (Balía 1989:37). Balía, in assessing the work of SPROCAS makes the point that it was a white initiative to help the oppressed. He argues that rather than working with the oppressed for their liberation, “it was doomed from its inception and not surprisingly was overtaken by events in the country” (1989:41).

During the 1970’s, multinational companies controlled a large portion of South Africa’s manufacturing industry. The State’s capacity to defend investment and its ability to curb labour unrest and general dissent eroded confidence in the country’s investment potential. Julie Frederikse (1982:95) commenting on the period 1974-1976 can write:

Western investment totals \$30 billion and provides technology vital to the country’s economic development and military security. Twelve hundred British firms, 375 U.S. companies and sixty-five transnational corporations account for 85% of South Africa’s foreign investment...white earning profit margins amongst the highest in the world.

Foreign capital played a critical role in the development and configuration of the South African economy. Through their investments, foreign companies profited from apartheid and were complicit in the oppression of black people. As early as 1969, the World Council of Churches

(WCC) stepped up its campaign against the apartheid state. It put in place a process that would lead to the formation of the Project to Combat Racism (PCR). This process would mobilize international pressure at all levels (diplomatic, cultural, religious, political and economic) against racial domination in all the Southern African countries but South Africa in particular. There was disagreement and even condemnation to the Statement of the Consultation on Racism (PCR Collection Box 4223.1.03) from South African church leaders. Villa-Vicencio (1988:109-117), Balia (1989:48-49) and others point out that the PCR marshalled resources and facilitated debates with the exiled community. Often, many of these initiatives were without the full support and cooperation of the South African member churches of the WCC. Despite apprehension from many quarters, there was no compromise on the WCC course set to end apartheid.

William Pomeroy (1986:28) was adamant that, “without the huge influx of foreign capital, which at certain times of crisis was stepped up to save the economy from collapse, apartheid would not have survived.” Churches were slow to realize this truth. Besides individual clergy joining the chorus of anti-apartheid groups and trade unions that called for mandatory sanctions and divestment, the morality of sanctions was debated ad nauseam in ecclesiastical circles without consensus.

The 1970's and 1980's saw unparalleled resistance in South African history especially through the black consciousness ideology which “preached” black solidarity, self-respect and pride. The Black Consciousness Movement under the leadership of Steve Bantu Biko communicated in a way that captured the hearts and the minds of ordinary people. An alliance between students and workers was formed when the South African Students' Organization (SASO) birthed the Black People's Convention (BPC) and the Black Allied Workers Union (BAWU). Towards the end of 1972, there was a re-emergence of black industrial resistance in Durban when over 100,000 workers went on strike resulting in the greatest wave of strikes in the country's post-war history (Friedman 1987:41-50). According to Sithole and Ndlovu (2006:190), the strikes rapidly spread to Johannesburg and other major cities in South Africa. While short-lived, the strikes were more than just a demand for higher wages. The opportunity was seized to challenge the apartheid workplace laws, express anger at the political system, and it demonstrated that unity by workers across the many different sectors of industry.

After the collapse of the colonial governments in Mozambique and Angola in 1975, black expectations were raised in the Church as well as in the land. In the Methodist Church, a Black Methodist Consultation (BMC) was formed under the leadership of Reverend Ernest Baartman. Amongst other things, it sought to ensure; “that white domination was progressively reduced, and the entrenched hierarchy transformed” (Theilen 2003:28).

The Soweto uprising on 16 June 1976 marked a watershed in defiance as young black students and youth became the harbingers of hope in the liberation struggle. When the state responded with unbridled repression against the forces of change, many students left the country in large numbers to join the ANC and PAC. The Soweto Revolt marked a point of qualitative change in the anti-apartheid struggle. There was a readiness to confront the state. Umkhonto we Sizwe, the military wing of the ANC increased attacks.

By 1977, all the main black consciousness organizations were banned, and progressive leaders detained. It soon became apparent that any loosely organized protest like Sharpeville or Soweto was ineffective against the repressive capacity of the state. The proliferation of independent unions that gave birth to the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) showed the growing confidence of workers (Maree 1987:1, 2).

As a result of the 1976 Soweto uprisings, the threat of sanctions, the call for disinvestment and growing militancy from workers, in 1977 the government appointed the Wiehahn Commission of Enquiry into labour legislation. The Commission recommended among other things the full union rights of black trade unions through the 1979 Industrial Conciliation Amendment Act and the abolition of statutory job reservation. Luckhardt and Wall (1981:54) argued that the reforms in no way changed the position of black workers in the apartheid system. Darcy du Toit (1981:266) saw the reforms as nothing more than co-option and bureaucratization of the trade union leadership. It was thus clear that while black workers had secured labour rights they were still without political rights, and this set the stage for a shift in tactics to secure real freedom.

In the early 1980's, the state tried to take the strategic initiative to address its legitimacy crisis through the co-option of the black middle class and constitutional reform. The United Democratic Front (UDF) formed in direct opposition to these initiatives. The UDF was a working class movement linking some 600 organizations (trade unions, churches, youth groups

and civic bodies) varying in size, function and popular impact. It sought to “unite diverse and often disparate elements into a regional and national organization with the slogan, UDF Unites-Apartheid Divides” (Seekings 2010:534-542). As a further response to the state and the UDF, the National Forum was launched in 1984 to unite black consciousness, groups. The political mobilization of the UDF laid the foundations of the most powerful trade union movements in South African history.

After four years of planning, the Council of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) formed in 1985 when thirty-three unions that comprised of the old FOSATU affiliates and independent unions amalgamated (Baskin 1991:34, 66-77). A year later, the Black Consciousness-aligned unions formed the Council of Unions of South Africa-Azanian Confederation of Trade Unions (CUSA-AZACTU). Luckhardt and Wall observed that these unions were not only linked to pursuing the improvement of the conditions of workers but overcoming apartheid. They argued:

Insofar as Black workers suffer the double yoke of national oppression, and class oppression, their emancipation from both is a necessary condition for freedom of not only their class but of all South Africans (1980:36).

A national strike in October 1984 and insurrections in townships throughout the country forced the government to declare a state of emergency on 20 July 1985. Mass arrests and banning orders did not cause a subsiding of the anti-apartheid struggle like in the 1960’s. In fact, quite the opposite happened, repressive acts, however, violent, led to more militant reactions from the people and forced the state to declare a second nation-wide state of emergency on 12 June 1986.

During the anti-apartheid revolts of the 1980’s the ANC was embraced by many as an important national liberation movement. Through sustained pressure from anti-apartheid groups in the country and abroad, a watershed was reached on 2 February 1990. The door to the politics of negotiation opened with the release of Nelson Mandela and the unbanning of political organizations.

2.3. Conclusion

This chapter engaged in the first step of Richard Osmer's model of practical theological interpretation that seeks to understand "what went on" during the apartheid system between 1962 and 1985.

The historical and social enquiry provided a faith interpretation of events in South Africa as a hermeneutical key to critically examine the attitude and contribution of the ESC towards labour movements and the plight of workers in general.

This chapter illustrated that black resistance was continuous and at different levels of intensity. Over the years, racial oppression and capitalist exploitation conspired against the majority of South Africans through a battery of security, constitutional and labour legislation. This process kept economic and political power firmly in the hands of the white ruling class.

What can be drawn from the various theological commentators highlighted throughout the period is that the ESC lacked the political resolve and ability to support workers and challenge the oppressive forces in society. According to Kumalo (2011), missionaries such as William Wilcox and Allison took the side of the poor workers in mission stations, helping them to own land and teaching them new methods to be self-employed as agriculturalists. Their children were given good education so that they could be independent and not exploited by white employers. Michael Worsnip (1991:147) however, appropriately sums up the lives of many in the leadership of the ESC when he describes Bishop Clayton as, "middle class who moved in white circles and understood suffering intellectually, but apart from his gout had suffered little." To corroborate this point, no less a church historian as Jeff Guy writes of the benevolent, proactive and culturally friendly and radical for his time, Bishop John William Colenso, as follows:

We have always to be aware of the historical context of Colenso's religious tenets. For example, when he spoke of the Brotherhood of Man as the fundamental principle of his religious faith, we must remember what a father and a brother were to Colenso as a member of the bourgeoisie in the mid-nineteenth century. For him the family was a stabilising and conservative influence in a world disrupted by revolutionary change: it was a hierarchical structure, the father demanding of his sons, not only love, but obedience and the unquestioned recognition of his authority. Colenso's universalism and the belief that God's love was present within all human beings implied the need for respect between individuals, but not equality. Communities and the individuals

within them, were ranked and it was the duty of some to lead and others to follow. When Colenso spoke of the Brotherhood of Man [*sic*] this was an expression of selfless commitment to others, but it was not an egalitarian ideal.

After the 1976 revolts, progressive sectors within the ESC—a century after the progressive work by Colenso and others, forced them to become a more vocal and constructive actor in the social and political crisis. Churches did little more than steer a cautious course with resolution after resolution condemning apartheid at a time that required a strong prophetic witness. It was only in the mid-1980's that these churches were seriously challenged to translate their resolutions condemning apartheid into practice.

The next chapter will examine the source book of the Christian church, the Bible, and other theological sources within a later, more democratic and egalitarian context and consciousness to build a theoretical framework for discussing the issue of church and labour.

CHAPTER THREE

THE WORD, WORSHIP AND WORK: THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR WORK AND LABOUR

For this reason the human righteousness required by God and established in obedience—the righteousness which according to Amos 5:24 should pour down as a mighty stream—has necessarily the character of a vindication of right in widows, orphans and aliens. For this reason, in the relation and events in the life of His *[sic]* people, God always takes His *[sic]* stand unconditionally and passionately on this side and on this side alone; against the lofty and on behalf of the lowly; against those who already enjoy rights and privilege and on behalf of those who are denied and deprived of it. What does all this mean? It is not really to be explained by taking in abstract of the political tendency and especially the forensic character of the Old Testament and the biblical message generally. It does, in fact, have this character, and we cannot hear it and believe direction indicated (Barth, *Church Dogmatics II/I*).

3.1. Introduction

This chapter will focus on the issue of Church and labour by drawing from the Bible, Richard Osmer and the central arguments of four contemporary theologians, namely, Pope John-Paul II (1981), Mirsoslav Volf (2001), Darrell Cosden (2006) and David Jansen (2006) to consider how their works can identify the sinews of a theology of labour that will be used hermeneutically to analyse and interpret the role of the ESC from 1985 to 1995 and to lay a theological framework for this study.

3.2. The Bible in the South African context

The present researcher has chosen a materialist and contextual approach to Biblical interpretation. Issues of socio-economic, racial and economic justice are too frequently overlooked in the historical-critical method that “strives for impartiality and objectivity in exegesis” that the body of interpretation appears almost “docetic,” i.e., promoting scripture as an ethereal body of text without any earthly substance. When read in this manner, there is no objective history, only “pie in the sky” ideology. Terry Eagleton asserts that there is no access to history but through the dialectical relationship between a given event and history. To engage

in history in any other way is “folly” that belongs in the realm of “naïve empiricism” and must be discarded (Eagleton 1979:70). In this way, the Bible is humanized, and any inter-class readings dismissed. The primary point of reference for a materialist reading of the Bible is “revolutionary praxis.” The material reality and struggles of people are taken seriously.

When Karl Barth read the Bible from the vantage point of the oppressed in Western Europe (during the First World War), he discovered, “the strange new world of the Bible.” It radically altered his perspective and understanding of human nature and destiny. Similarly, Christians in the black working class confronting the crisis in South Africa in the 1980’s found the Bible to be an important source of empowerment and authority (Cochrane and West 1991:272). Takatso Mofokeng rightly points out, “it is an open secret that black people have, ever since the Bible was brought to them, asserted their right to appropriate and interpret it according to their socio-economic, cultural and religious needs” (1988:34-42). Many biblical texts and stories have often been appropriated selectively as a source of inspiration for community struggles against injustice.

Biblical texts have always been sites of struggle. Itumeleng J. Mosala suggests that rather than rejecting texts opposed to communal concerns or appropriating a text un-problematically there should be a commitment to, “struggle with the dominant forces within the text to get beyond them to the suppressed oppositional forces” (1989:187). Takatso Mofokeng (1988, 1992) argues that if the Bible is engaged in this way it can become the key to unlock the prison doors of alienation and a weapon to destroy the negative orientation imposed on people by a hostile and racist ruling class culture.

It is worth noting that although the Bible has much to say about poverty and the economy, it is not an economics or labour relations handbook. Rather, it sheds light on worldviews and mirrors certain aspects of experiential reality. Mosala (1986:171) is adamant that the experience of oppression and exploitation of the black working class should form the basis of a biblical hermeneutics of a theology of labour. It must become the epistemological lens for perceiving the God of the Bible as the God of liberation. If the Bible is read in this way, many stories like the Exodus can be seen as a workers struggle against injustice and the account of Israel’s *Heilsgeschichte* becomes a paradigm of the plight of workers in South Africa (Tamez 1982:41).

3.3. Labour in the Hebrew Bible

There are two dominant views of labour in the Hebrew Bible. It is understandable because the various writers encountered different material conditions and their class position in a particular society coloured their theological perspective. The perspectives of the writers as well as the factors that precipitated changes in the mode and relations of production in the pre-monarchical and the monarchical period are examined. This is done to determine how the changes in the forces of production affected relations. According to Karl Marx, “the mode of production determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual process of life” (Marx cited in Bottomore and Rubel 1982:39).

3.3.1. The pre-monarchical period and the theology of Yahwistic editors/redactors

Many Hebrew Bible scholars agree in principle with the documentary hypothesis of Julius Wellhausen and the literary origins of the Torah or first five books of Moses in the Hebrew Bible, that they are the work of editors or redactors who drew from four different sources to piece the narrative together—the so-called JEDP theory. The four hypothetical literary sources in this theory are: “J” or *Jahwist* or *Yahwist* because it describes God as Yahweh, “E” the *Elohist* who primarily describes God as *El* or *Elohim*, “D” that stands for Deuteronomist code associated with Josiah’s reforms and “P” which stands for the priestly writer.

From the different biblical traditions, there are two distinct understandings of labour. The first is a “repressive” tradition in which the “Priestly” author understands work as toil, drudgery and punishment. The second is a (“liberator”) tradition of liberation in which the Yahwistic author sees work as a blessing and a divine mandate. Humans are co-workers with the Creator, and they are urged to live in harmony with each other and their Creator.

The Yahwistic theologians who wrote in the Davidic or Solomon era had a positive attitude towards agricultural civilization (Fohrer 1968:151). They wrote from the perspective of a Palestinian peasant in a subsistence economy who had respect for manual labour. It was through toiling land that humanity participated with God in cultivating and preserved the earth (Gen. 2:15).

The theological reason given for the division of labour is human sin (Gen. 3). As a result of sin, work is no longer an expression of service to God but a means to enrich oneself. The harmony that existed was replaced with self-centeredness and jealousy. Whereas work united humanity in a common task, after the fall, humanity became alienated from their work and each other (Gen. 4:8-9). The fall into sin was blamed for the alienation between humanity and the means of production (the land). The solidarity that existed between humans and the earth (Gen. 2:7) was broken, and the earth was neglected (Gen. 3:18). The cooperation between humans and the creator changed into enmity and resistance. Instead of looking to God for blessing and prosperity, humanity regarded work and technical progress as a mean to prosperity (Gen. 11:2-8).

The Yahwistic theologians were biased towards city-dwellers that expose the rural-urban dialectic between two modes of production. These were an egalitarian and a tributary mode of production (Gottwald 1979:462). Many townspeople did not earn their keep through manual labour but rather got their food and labour off the backs of peasants. Cain portrayed as a “wanderer” estranged from nature and God wanted to ensure his future through his own economic and military system in the city (Gen. 4). The development of cities had much to do with the rise of class division. The city was the place of Israel’s exile (Gen. 11).

While the Yahwistic redactor gave a theological answer to the breakdown of the peasant economy, for any material answers it is important to reconstruct early Israelite society. Robert Coote and Keith Whitelam claim that this can only be done by researching broad patterns and generalities that throw light on periods of social change (Coote and Whitelam 1986:108).

Norman K. Gottwald’s reconstruction of early Israelite society in his seminal work, *The Tribes of Yahweh; A Sociology of Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 BCE*, suggests that there was no observable class division. The immediate producers were the consumers, those who worked the land benefited from their labour. Production was organized, distributed and consumed along essentially egalitarian lines, and there was no evidence of a tribute extraction class.

Gottwald characterized Israel as a native Canaanite peasantry who revolted against their overlords then joined forces with a group of infiltrators from the desert. These successful revolutionaries then embarked on a socio-political course of decentralization, egalitarianism

and non-stratification that developed in direct opposition to the oppressive agrarian economic structures of those around them. Gottwald (1979:43) presented the Yahwist tradition as the inspirational revolutionary faith that mobilized the oppressed and propelled them to “a level of eventful struggle and inordinate self-consciousness that had all the marks of a striking historical consciousness.” Gottwald claims that the Yahwistic religious ideology was lost after the introduction of the monarchy.

Marvin Chaney (1983:39-90) supports Gottwald’s theory on the development of the religion of Israel as a social phenomenon. In agrarian societies there often seem to be a greater sense of sharing and equality. Both Chaney and Gottwald agree that Israel was well on its way to becoming a model of a socially democratic society, but the Philistine crisis led to the formation of the monarchy, which thwarted any such plans.

Coote and Whitelam (1986:110) hold that by attempting to reconstruct Israel’s history by starting from the biblical account will merely perpetuate the redactor’s perception of salvation history. They rather looked to the economic and political evolution of Palestine as well as anthropological, geological and demographic evidence using the Bible as a secondary source.

From their research, they conjectured that the upheaval of major powers in the Mediterranean set the stage for the emergence of Israel. The indigenous population had to reduce the risk of their livelihood by either shifting or expanding agriculture or pastoralism. The most obvious area for them to have settled to pursue their new expanding methods of economic production was in the hill country away from any domination. The reduction of trade meant that the bandit groups had to be flexible and cooperate with one another and the peasantry to survive. Israel emerged from an agreement amongst the tribes to have stability and a subsistence economy. The toil and hardship of the peasant’s labour were due to basic elements of the environment as climate, soil and vegetation.

For Coote and Whitelam (1986), the monarchy was a natural extension of the internal dynamics inherent in a frontier society. Once a plateau was reached, and there was no more room for expansion, productivity intensified, social stratification developed, and the need for stable government either led to a society’s disintegration or becoming more centralized.

Gottwald (1979), Coote and Whitelam (1986) and Chaney (1989) amongst others saw the threat of the Philistines as part of the reason for the development of the monarchy. Perhaps as important was the kind of long-term perennial agriculture which was being cultivated in the hill country that demanded long term stability. The need for “stability” meant that there had to be a change in the forces and relations of production. As a result, forced labour was introduced. The ruling elite within Israel (e.g., wealthy landowners, leaders, officials, judges, prophets and priests) now became the new oppressors of their kinspersons by extracting tribute from them.

The next section explores the biblical writers’ theological interpretations of forced labour as well as the resultant changes in the social order.

3.3.2. The monarchy and the establishment of forced labour

It seems reasonable to believe that the use of forced labour started towards the end of David’s reign. The biblical narrative points to an unprecedented programme of international cooperation and economic expansion during Solomon’s reign where a systematic, centralized compulsory labour scheme was fully operational (1 Kings 5:27-30, 9:15ff). This thesis is presented by Alberto Soggin and further developed by Gunter Wittenburg (1991:91-108).

Roelf Haan points out that Solomon’s prosperity and imperialism drastically undermined the simple structure of Israel’s agricultural economy. He creates a system where enormous wealth existed side by side with profound poverty and slavery (Haan 1991:28-34). Samuel gives some insight to the position of workers and labour during the period of the monarchy:

These are the ways of the king who will rule over you; he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run his chariots; and he will appoint for himself commanders of the thousands and commanders of the fifties and some to plough his ground and reap his harvest, and to make implements of war and equip his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his servants. He will take a tenth of your grain and your vineyards and give it to his officers and his servants. He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves (1 Sam 8:4-5, 10-17).

Roelf Haan (1991:28), Conrad Boerma (1979:31) and others argue that workers (i.e., peasants and slaves) were grossly exploited. They did not willingly accept the ideological legitimization

that David and Solomon tried to give to their kingdoms. A counter ideology expressed by the prophets protested against the *status quo* of ruling class privilege and deprivation of the poor. For them, Yahweh was the critic of society and champion of the poor. Yahweh's people were created for freedom and not servitude. They consistently looked backwards to how Yahweh brought Israel out of slavery and always pointed forward towards an egalitarian society. For them, the ideal of justice was where, "everyone will live in peace among his vineyards and fig trees, and no one will be afraid" (Micah 4:4). It was this counter ideology that spurred on the Northern tribes under the revolutionary leader Jeroboam to rebel against Rehoboam and establish their independence as the Kingdom of Israel (2 Chron. 10:3).

In seeking material answers for a change in relations of production that supported the ideological legitimating for the monarchy, Marvin Chaney (1986:67) suggests that the answer could be the conquest of the land. The fact that alluvial plains that were more fertile than the hill country were made available for state administration meant that inequalities developed in the means of production as the lowlands yielded surpluses above that of the highlands.

Norman Gottwald claims that army conscription, as well as work conscription, had a tremendous effect on the labour needs of an agrarian society which resulted in the neglect of peasant crops and decreased surpluses. Gottwald (1985) identifies three forms of surplus extraction in the monarchic period. Taxes and tithes were imposed by the indigenous monarchy and priest. Tribute was also extracted from the Israelite ruling elite by foreign oppressors and rent demanded from the growing numbers of people living off the land (Gottwald 1983).

Robert Coote estimated that the peasantry made up 60%-80% of the agrarian population. After they had drawn from what they produced on the land the surplus was transferred to the ruling elite in the form of payments for rents, taxes, tributes, tithes and interest on debts. The ruling elite use these to support themselves directly and through distribution to merchants, craftsmen and other groups that did not farm but contributed to the elite's standard of living. It is estimated that over half or more of the local goods produced in Israel during the period of the monarchy was controlled by the ruling and middle classes who only made up to 2% of the population (Coote 1981:29).

There can be little doubt that the period of the monarchy was one marked by intense social tensions and class conflicts. The messages of the prophets, as well as the book of the Covenant

and Deuteronomy, are all concerned with the plight of the peasants and the dispossessed that were exploited and abused by the ruling elite.

The next section will deal exclusively with the theology of the Deuteronomistic writers who sought to redress the situation of injustice in Israel. They consistently pointed to the God of the Exodus who freed Israel from all forms of slavery (Deut. 5:15) and called all Israelites to celebrate that freedom at all times.

3.3.3. Life under the Deuteronomistic Law

Deuteronomistic theology does not tire in stressing the Divine sovereignty of Yahweh, the Creator King, who freed Israel from bondage in Egypt. The writers in the Deuteronomistic tradition sought to revive the cultic and nationalistic ideals of the ancient Yahwist tradition. George Fohrer (1973:299) sees the Deuteronomist attempt at a synthesis between cultic and nationalistic theology on the one hand and prophetic theology on the other.

Wittenberg (1991:101-106) points out that Deuteronomist legislation encroached on the interest of the ruling class and severely restricted and limited the power of the state. Legitimation of the monarchy in 2 Samuel 7 is interpreted in Deuteronomic style in 1 Samuel 23:5. The Deuteronomic law laid down what the monarch was not allowed to do. There were to be no foreigners as kings, no multitudes of horses, no sale of subjects to Egypt, no expansion of the mercenary army, no wars of aggression, no significant wealth. There were also restrictions on luxury goods and reduction of taxes (Deut. 17:14ff).

The Deuteronomic writers constantly point out that there was equality under God's law and that it was the people who appointed the king. The Deuteronomic law did not legitimate the rule of the king it rather called for a political community modelled on the system of the free agrarian society of ancient Yahwist tradition. The people governed, appointed the king, judges and officers of the towns (Deut. 16:18-20, 17:9-13). In fact, after the liberation from bondage in Egypt, the Deuteronomic law called for the restoration of the militia composed of all free citizens.

In many ways, the Deuteronomic law protected the quality of human life. It strictly forbade the king from introducing any measures that would lead to enforced labour. It forbade interest taken from Israelites (Deut. 23:20-21); no instrument that was used to produce a livelihood could be offered as a pledge (Deut. 24:6). In cases where a pledge was offered (usually a cloak), the lender was not entitled to enter the other's property to demand the promise. It had to be brought out. If the person offering the pledge was poor, it had to be returned for the night (Deut. 20:10-13).

The ruling elite exploited day labourers to gain the maximum profit from production. Hence, the law protected the right to fair wages (Deut. 24:15) as well as the right to rest from one's labour (5:1ff). Sewn into the fabric of Israelite society with work was a day of rest and every seven years by a year of rest. Work was considered a social activity that contributed to world building and ordering for the common good. It was the means of experiencing and securing the liberation that God had won for Israel (Deut. 5:13-15).

The Deuteronomic law protected the right to food for the poor and the landless. Subject to certain conditions they could satisfy their hunger with another's grapes or grain (Deut. 23:24-25). There were also stipulations in the law that protected the rights of the fatherless and the widows to have food (Deut. 14:28-29, 24:19-22).

The Sabbatical institutions for land, debt and slaves was designed as "a kind of primitive agrarian science" which left the land fallow as in modern crop rotation (Paget-Wilkes 1981:90). Deuteronomy 15:2, 3 refers to the Sabbatical year and shows humanitarian concern for the landless poor and also for those landowners whose debt was heavy in comparison with their real resources. Any person who became insolvent and was forced to become a wage labourer or sell themselves into slavery could not be a slave for life. The sabbatical institutions ensured that all Israelites were released from debt every seventh year. The inequalities between creditors and debtors were corrected, and this prevented a large gap developing between the rich and the poor. In fact, through Deuteronomic legislation, prophetic criticism was transformed into practical rules that placed the creditors and debtors on the same social and theological footing before God. The Deuteronomic law also illustrates a biblical grasp of "Care-of-Creation" where the land would lie fallow in the Jubilee Year, also every seventh year and where wealth would be redistributed to those who owed the debtor. This is also illustrated in the Levitical texts decreeing that the crops were never to be totally gleaned but that the

choicest portions of vineyards and other harvests were to be left in the fields where the “poor, stranger, widowed and orphan” could find their provision of food. All Israelites delivered as slaves by the liberating God of the Exodus were forbidden to enslave each other (Wright 1984:120).

In summary, Deuteronomy’s legislation was against ruling class interests. It sought to alleviate the burdens imposed on the peasant community, preserved the dignity of the non-productive and the marginalized, and it offered affirmative action for the victims of structural oppression. Wittenberg (1991:104) argues that when one considers the extensive scope of laws in Deuteronomy one cannot but conclude that the laws derive their legitimacy from the people. Deuteronomy unambiguously states that all law comes from God, and all other claims to the contrary unequivocally rejected. According to Gerhard von Rad (1966:154), “the lawgiver does not let himself be guided by theological considerations but rather by the concept of human dignity that may not be offended.” The purpose of the law imprinted on heads and minds was to protect the freedom won for Israel.

From the Hebrew Bible review of labour, there are three essential elements that one can draw from to develop a theology of labour.

- i. The imagery and language of Yahweh the worker invites humanity to become co-workers in the creative process of the universe. All work, innovations and discovery of resources should be seen as God’s continued development of the creative activity. As Orlando Costas puts it, “man [*sic*] is a co-worker, but God still remains THE WORKER. Without his sustaining grace, man cannot function” (Costas 1974:257, Upper case in the original).
- ii. There is a liberationist strand (often silence and suppressed) running through the Mosaic, Prophetic and anti-monarchical tradition that concern the poor and the oppressed. The writers do not deal with the problem in abstract terms. There is no glorification of poverty instead they refuse to accept it as an accident or inevitability of history. They rather point to structural causes and acts of injustices of the oppressors. These writers see God as the one who hears the cries of the oppressed. God sides with the poor and stands up for them (Miranda 1974:88; Boesak 1984:19).

- iii. From his reflection on Deuteronomy, Gunther Wittenberg raises a provocative question, pointing out that it is only through resistance in particular against the monarchy that Biblical law came to be what it is. He asks if this holds any significance for the theology of labour debate in Southern Africa (1991:106).

3.4. New Testament perspective of labour

The New Testament is full of people at work, farmers, fishermen, harvesters, vinedressers and many other occupations. The Palestine of Jesus' day was primarily an agrarian economy with some commerce performed by people who were predominantly peasants. John Stambaugh and David Balch (1986:65) claim:

The large majority of workers in the ancient economy of the New Testament were involved in gathering food by farming or herding. Noting that—Synoptic Gospels devote much attention to the processes of planting seed, harvesting fruit, grinding grain, eating bread. Sometimes there is a surplus to gather into barns. Sometimes it is a matter of bare subsistence: When the disciples do not catch any fish, they expect to go hungry (Luke 5:1-11; John 21:3-5).

Many modern scholars believe that physical labour was not held in high esteem in the Greek and Roman civilization. Richardson (1952:11) states:

Unlike the Greeks, who thought that working for one's living was beneath the dignity of a gentleman, the Hebrews looked upon daily work as a normal part of the divine ordering of the world, and no man was exempt from it.

St Paul, however, gave labour its place of an egalitarian charter, human worth and dignity. For him the value of work was service to the community, completely eradicating any distinction there was between slave and free person (Col. 3:11). While many theologians have drawn on 2 Thessalonians 3:8-15, as an essential element in the theology of labour, what follows will focus on the gospel story of Jesus' teaching, especially the parables.

The Gospels share how carefully Jesus observed people going about their various occupations. There was the peasant farming (Mark 4:3ff; Luke 9:62), the labourer in the vineyard (Matt. 20:1-15), the fisherman and their nets (Matt. 13:47-50), the housewives with their leaven and meal (Matt. 13:33; Luke 15:8). His teaching was about ordinary working people in all walks

of life, builders, tax gatherers, soldiers, doctors, farmers, craftsmen, peasants and slaves. The stories of Jesus' life and ministry in the gospels will be examined to determine if workers can draw on this source of the Christian tradition as a weapon to legitimate their struggle and nourish their faith.

3.4.1. Jesus the worker in the socio-economic setting of first century Palestine

Jesus was a worker who embodied the Messianic promise to the poor and alienated. He opted to live like the landless poor of his day and incarnated God's presence and concern for the needy. Jesus inaugurated his public ministry in his hometown Nazareth by announcing that:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me
Because God has anointed me to
Preach good news to the poor.
God has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty those who are oppressed
To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord (Luke 4:18)

In one of the darkest periods of Israel's history Jesus proclaimed that the Messianic age had dawned. He brought good news to those unjustly impoverished and marginalized (the landless, helpless, indigent, hungry, woman, and humiliated) who wanted to see a change in their material conditions. Jesus announced that the kingdom belonged to them rather than those with influence in society. This inverted understanding of the kingdom is central to Jesus' preaching and teaching (Mark 10:13-15; Luke 14:15-24).

The majority of the Jewish population belonged to the peasantry and landless poor who through systematic economic and political oppression were expropriated from their land and forced into a wage economy in a limited market. It is, however, important to note that the vast majority of the Jews during the first century Palestine were agriculturalists. The Palestinian workers lived off the land and carried the extra burden of having to supply labour, food and a tax on land for the upkeep of the Roman Empire's military.

Palestine lost their independence in 64 BCE when Pompey thought military victory declared it a colony of Rome. The mechanisms of surplus extraction at every level of society benefitted the Roman ruling, class (Clevenot 1985:50).

The impact of Jesus' ministry can only be understood within the context of first century Palestine. Here political, economic, social and religious forces combined to create an extremely stratified class society in which the nobility and absentee landlords had accumulated great wealth on one hand and the landless peasants and slaves who lived a life of abject poverty on the other.

A brief analysis of the social structures and various groups in colonized Palestine will help locate Jesus' class position, as well as the meaning of his ministry.

3.4.2. The ruling class: Herodians, Sadducees and rich landowners

In Galilee, the Herodians were the principal "owners" of rich agricultural land that was acquired by confiscation (Grassi 1985:7). Many disenfranchised Galileans saw King Herod and his family as the main oppressors to the extent that they requested Galilee rather fall under the Roman rule. The revolt in 6 CE was a result of Jewish discontent with the Herodians.

Many Sadducees were wealthy landowners and priests who collaborated with the Romans and always acted in ways hostile to the masses. They formed a prominent elite ruling class, who because of their control of the Sanhedrin exercised some political and ideological leverage. They were very much in favour of the status quo that supported their privileged position.

Many landowners worked the land themselves, but there were some who could afford to employ hired labour and yet others who owned large estates but lived in the cities and did not work themselves. They had a supervisor to manage the estate, employ labourers and collect debts. In this way, the estates yielded significant profits to the absentee landlords who saw it as a source of income rather than sustenance. It was often this group who was able to lend money to the peasants and so increase their estates by appropriating land.

The large estates produced mainly for the domestic and foreign markets while the smallholders who produced any surplus sold it for cash with which they bought goods and services in return (MacMullen 1974:88-120).

3.4.3. The dominated classes: Craftsmen, Pharisees and peasants

Crafts and craftsmen occupied a prominent place in the economic life of Palestine during the first century (Draper 1991:123-126). Although Josephus makes little reference to craftsmen, the Mishnah and the Baryta held craftsmen and artisans in high esteem. They formed a small but significant class. Many of them worked for themselves while others employed workers and apprentices. They were respected in Jewish society and often had security above that of the majority of the population.

Many carpenters formed “guilds” or “trade organizations” that protected the trade increased cooperation and built group solidarity amongst the tradesmen. Draper claims that these “guilds” or “trade organizations” gave, “identity and influence in the community, far beyond their wealth and social standing purely through their solidarity. The unions also served the function of protecting the community through communal meals and providing funeral insurance for members. As a carpenter Jesus most probably belonged and shared this solidarity with other carpenters” (Draper 1991:124).

The Pharisees were conservative nationalists who had an obsession with the law and its observances. While committed to nonviolent resistance in matters of religious belief, there was a radical Messianic wing called the Sicarii who favoured direct military action to overthrow the government. This group arose from the class conflicts and had popular support from peasants.

Smallholder peasants managed a subsistence living in the villages. The threefold Roman tax laws like land taxes payable in produce and money, a poll tax on everyone except children and the elderly and market sales taxes, tools and customs duties effectively crippled them financially. Also, there were the Jewish religious taxes. Galilean peasants were severely oppressed and exploited by the Herodians who siphoned off 30%-40% of their income as a tax (Draper 1991:126).

Many peasants found themselves restricted to small plots of ground and even pushed into a wage economy (Matt. 20:1-10). Many had no savings and after drought or a protracted war, they would borrow from rich landowners using their land as security. Failure to repay any debt meant they had to forfeit their property, their only means of production, and forced into the wage economy. The peasants and their families either had to earn their livelihood through some form of tenancy, sharecropping or as hired labourers. If they lost their land, they were often worse off than slaves who could never become unemployed or die of hunger because the Mosaic laws guaranteed the release of slaves.

From the earliest Jesus tradition together with the sources and the socio-historical information it can be deduced that Jesus enjoyed the security and privilege as a tradesman. Despite this, he left home, friends and trade to express solidarity with those who marginalized at the bottom rung of the economic ladder.

The daily labourers were usually impoverished peasants who were forced to relinquish their properties. These landless peasants were the most vulnerable to exploitation by the estate owners. They did not always find work (Matt. 20:1-18) and when they did it was hard work from sunrise to sunset for a denarius a day. Jonathan Draper claims that “at best the standard of living of the ‘free poor’ was basic and insecure; at worst starvation must have been a real prospect” (1991:129).

The poor and beggars (Matt. 11:2-5, Luke 6:20ff; 14:21, 23), the largest sector of the population were economically dependent on others. They were with day labourers or individuals rendered destitute by economic conditions. Willy Schottroff and Wolfgang Stegemann (1984:145) claim that it was this group who were part of popular uprisings who burnt records of debts and to hit back the oppressors.

It was not by chance that so many people in the first century Palestine found themselves in an economically hopeless situation but rather due to inherent contradictions and structural causes. There was a distinct connection between oppression and poverty. The oppressed were poor because they had no means of subsistence. Accordingly, Douglas Oakman (1999:164) argues:

Agrarian debt was pushing peasantry of Jesus’ day either entirely off the land (wage labour on estates) or into client-dependency relations on the land *vis-a-vis* the Roman

overlord (e.g., Caesar's large estates in the Esdraelon Plain or the land controlled by Judean-Herodian aristocrats in Sepphoris-Tiberias). The insecurity of the tenant or wage labourer was evidenced in the increase in beggary and brigandage. Brigands perhaps would have been more impressed by a zealot-like religious movement, but the ministry of Jesus, which clearly shows concern for the beggar and disadvantaged, sought alternate ways to resolve class tensions and reconcile class interests (Oakman 1999:164).

3.4.4. Good News for the oppressed

New insight is gained when reading the sayings of Jesus and the parables in the light of the above analysis of the social structures of colonized Palestine. Mosala reminds us never to forget the gospel writers' ideological intentions and recommends three important steps for people in the black working class to engage all biblical text. Mosala thus argues that:

- i. One has to approach the text in a political way with hermeneutical and ideological suspicion (1989:180).
- ii. When the text is engaged appropriately from the perspective of the black working class struggle and be prepared to "interrogate the silences of the black working class struggle" (1989:183).
- iii. All text should be appropriated in a projective way. Mosala explains that despite the class character and ideological commitments of the text for it to have any meaning in contemporary South Africa must be tested against the experience and agenda of the black working class (1989:185).

It is only when the Bible is engaged making a hermeneutical connection with the Jesus who was in solidarity with the poor and the oppressed workers of first century Palestine that it can serve as a source of inspiration for the current struggles of workers in South African.

Jesus was the embodiment of the poor and never tried to disown that image. Jesus unequivocally took sides and made a determined effort to show all who were discriminated against, that it was their faith that would make a qualitative difference in their lives. The fact that Jesus constantly took the side of those most physically and spiritually in need should pose

some challenges to the Church and workers in their struggle. The Church has a prophetic mandate to speak for those who have no one to speak for them and to be a defender for the defenceless. It also challenges the Church to see things from the side of the weak and powerless as well as becoming an instrument for workers to experience the liberating power of God.

3.5. Summary of the Biblical insights

When reading the Bible through the lenses of the working class with a view to freeing humanity from oppression, it speaks powerfully to the South African context. There is a shocking similarity in the economic profile of first century Palestine and industrial South Africa in the 1980's and Christians are obligated to imitate Jesus' concern for the oppressed. While the Bible does not give a blueprint for action, it rather describes how God took the side of the oppressed and championed their cause. It is through the mediation of the poor that Jesus entered human history. God identified with the Galileans, who was dehumanized and exploited by their kinsfolk who regarded them as socially and culturally inferior.

The fact that Jesus identified with the most exploited sector of the community can illuminate the struggle of workers. It can sharpen the vision and strengthen the hope of workers. The stories of oppression are their stories, and the God, who continually takes up the cause of the oppressed working against the powerful and the wealthy is their God. Faith in the God of the Bible should provide workers with the basis for their struggle. The oppressed must become agents of their liberation transforming themselves from the objects of history to become subjects, co-creators with God to make a new world possible.

Throughout the scriptures sometimes suppressed and eloquently silent, there is a protest to remedy what Gutierrez (1988:15) calls "the scandalous condition of spiritual childhood." Too often the Bible has been used as a tool justifying oppression. The perspective from which Christians should approach the Bible must always be with hermeneutical suspicion and a decision to read reality through the eyes of the oppressed. In this way, it becomes Good News.

Albert Nolan is clear that, the Bible will be rediscovered as a book of the oppressed and for the oppressed. Nolan (1989:39) argues that, "a Christianity that does not challenge the poor and the oppressed to join the struggle for liberation is simply unbiblical."

The Bible is often meant to prompt one into some form of action, Conrad Boerma (1997:29) warns, “reading the Bible is more dangerous than we often like it to be. It puts us under obligation.”

3.6. In search for a deeper understanding and definition of work

Work is more than paid employment or a pay cheque. David Jensen (2006:2) contends that it is often assumed that “real work is paid work.” If this were true, a lot of the world’s workers would be marginalized as women do most unpaid work. He argues that “these assumptions about work reflect the interest of patriarchy” (2006:2). Work, therefore, cannot just be measured by remuneration or the value of goods produced rather it is central to who we are as human beings. The value of work has to be measured to which extent it grants freedom to develop human potential, contribute to peace and security and the health of our planetary home, earth.

There are many popular definitions of work, but any holistic understanding must go way beyond the economic aspects. Paul Stevens (2000:17) defines work as “purposeful activity involving mental, emotional or physical energy, or all three, whether remunerated or not.” David Jensen suggests that work is, “any activity undertaken with a sense of obligation to self, others, one’s community or one’s God” (2006:3). The Croatian theologian, Miroslav Volf (2001:11) argues that, “work is honest, purposeful, and methodologically specific social activity whose primary goal is the creation of products or states of affairs that can satisfy the needs of working individual and their co-creatures.” From these definitions, work is more than manual labour or the process of transforming raw materials into products, rather work contributes directly or indirectly towards making the world a better place. Work, therefore, cannot be considered outside a social group and without taking nature seriously. No product of labour is purely material because goods produced by work satisfies more than just physical needs. A good example is the services rendered by those in the caring professions or social sciences where work cannot be measured in economic terms.

It is at the workplace where the majority of South Africans spend a significant part of their life activity. Often the way people live and experience themselves is largely about their work. Work is an indispensable part of human existence because through work life becomes

meaningful. Work offers dignity and respect. It is through work that one is supposed to experience what it means to be human. Work should contribute to the benefit of society and strengthen a system that guarantees fundamental human rights and identity. Walter Rauschenbusch (1912:342) warns that industrialized society has, “divested the labourer of ownership, therefore of capital, therefore of the means of production, therefore of the means of freedom in community, therefore of a means of grace.”

While liberation theology starts from experience and uses the inductive methodology, traditional or “systematic theologies” of work are mainly abstract. It relies on Christian dogmas and uses the deductive methodology to draw conclusions about life in the world. Darrell Cosden (2006:5) makes the point well in describing both his and Miroslav Volf’s studies of work as;

Dogmatically reflecting on the nature and place of the phenomenon of work in God’s universe; that is in both human life and non-human creation. It is a theological exploration of work itself by exploring work with reference to some doctrines within a systematic theology. One cannot engage a theology of work without considering all the theological approaches to this subject.

Having clarified the different starting point of theologies, four contemporary theologies of work, will now be highlighted, which are, “all propelled from its long existence by the dramatic economic and technologically changing global landscape in the early eighties” (Volf 2001:4).

Pope John-Paul II (1981) in his third encyclical letter, *Laborem Exercens* was the first theologian to acknowledge the new social, political and economic developments and its influence on the world of work. He offered fresh insights into the nature and purpose of work consistent with the social teaching of the Roman Catholic Church.

The starting point of his reflection was “the mystery of creation” and the fact that humans like no other creatures are created “in the image of God.” He asserts that it is “through work that man must earn his daily bread and contribute to the continual advancement of science and technology and above all, to elevating increasingly the cultural and moral level of society (*Laborem Exercens* 1). John-Paul II affirms the dignity of work and the worker in the face of rapid globalization.

John-Paul II further provides an inclusive understanding of work as vocation through which humans share in creation with God. He suggests, “Human work is a key, probably the essential key, to the whole social question” (*Laborem Exercens* 3). He stresses that it is the Church’s conviction that “work is a fundamental dimension of man’s existence on earth” (*Laborem Exercens* 4).

Work is an expression of dignity and solidarity with others in creating history. It serves to humanize people and holds within it the possibility to form and shape the world. Through work, human beings become more fully subjects of their world and not an object of other people’s control. *Laborem Exercens* states very explicitly that labour has priority over capital and where this principle is violated work becomes a curse.

In his third chapter, John-Paul II examines the conflict between labour and capital. He refers to the conflict between capitalism and Marxism but points out that the Church’s teaching strive to ensure ‘the priority of labour’ (*Laborem Exercens* 12). John-Paul II argues that “rigid capital continues to remain unacceptable and calls for a revision in theory and practice” (*Laborem Exercens* 14).

In considering the rights of workers, John-Paul II contends that fundamental human rights derive from work. He sees work as an obligation which has corresponding rights of employers and workers. For him, “in the context of the present there is no more important way for securing a just relationship between worker and the employer than that constituted by just remuneration for work done” (*Laborem Exercens* 19). Unions are considered important to protect the rights and “an indispensable element of social life” and Catholic social teaching endorses strikes and work stoppages as legitimate “in the proper conditions and within just limits” (*Laborem Exercens* 20).

There is a call to re-evaluate the role of women in the workplace, and there is a specific focus on mothers, the dignity of agricultural workers, disabled persons and immigrants.

Since human labour share in the creative activity of God, the encyclical calls on the Church to:

See it as her particular duty to form a spirituality of work which will help all people to come closer, through work, to God, the Creator and Redeemer, to participate in his

salvific plan for man and the world and to deepen their friendship with Christ in their lives by accepting, through faith, a living participation in his threefold mission as Priest, Prophet and King (*Laborem Exercens* 24).

Laborem Exercens concludes by John-Paul II drawing a similarity with human work and that of Jesus Christ in his life and death on the cross. Essentially, human work is portrayed as sharing in the work of the Creator and should be understood as having value in that:

The Christian finds in human work a small part of the Cross of Christ and accepts it in the same spirit of redemption in which Christ accepted his Cross for us. In work, thanks to the light that penetrates us from the Resurrection of Christ, we always find a *glimmer* of new life, of the *new good*, as if it were an announcement of 'the new heavens and the new earth' in which man and the world participate precisely through the toil that goes with work (*Laborem Exercens* 27).

The idea of human work as co-creational is central to the encyclical and is further developed by Miroslav Volf (2001), Darrell Cosden (2006), R Paul Stevens (2000) and Armand Larive (2004) in their theologies of work. John-Paul II gives a positive view of work, acknowledging its redemptive qualities, as long as it is not used to oppress, exploit and commodify workers.

Miroslav Volf in his (2001) book, *Work in the Spirit; Towards a Theology of Work*, focuses on industrial and post-industrial societies where many people hold more than one job at a time. For Volf, the starting point of a theology of work is the Spirit. He builds his theology of work anchored on a new creation rather than from an understanding of vocation that runs the risk of honouring work that is exploitative and demeaning. Volf (2001:70-87) also argues that a person will hold many different jobs in their lifetime according to their gifts and competencies. He further contends that both vocation and creation is not comprehensive enough and draws on pneumatology and eschatology to argue that it is the Spirit that gives gifts, talents and abilities to transform nature. For him, work has lasting significance value when done in cooperation with God.

According to Volf, an eschatological understanding of a theology of work leaves one with "two fundamental theological models", namely destruction and transformation of the world. These hold different outcomes and understanding of the value of human work. Volf (2001:100, 102) argues for a pneumatology of work where all human work is "active anticipation of the exclusively divine," cooperation with God towards the restoration and transformation of existing creation.

Volf makes the point that a pneumatological understanding of work, “is not simply to interpret work religiously as cooperation with God and thereby glorify it ideologically, but to transform work into a charismatic collaboration with God on the project of the new creation” (2001:116). He claims that when people exercise gifts granted by the Spirit, the work of both Christians and non-Christians has value for the new creation. This understanding of work does not make a distinction between the spiritual and secular because all work is a gift of the Spirit.

Volf (2001:195) recognizes that “for the majority of people in the modern industrial and information societies, work is no end in itself, but a necessary means.” Volf, however, argues that work must be “an end in itself” and a person is only fully human through working cooperation with God in anticipation of the new creation (2001:197). In theory, the pneumatological understanding of work seems ideal, the simple reality however, is that many people occupy jobs that do not match their Spirit filled gifting.

In his monograph, *A Theology of Work; Work and the New Creation*, Darrell Cosden describes his work as “a theological exploration of work itself by exploring work with reference to a number of doctrines within a systematic theology” (2006:5).

Cosden (2006:10, 178-179) explores what he calls a “threefold nature of human work” as:

A transformative activity essentially consisting of dynamically interrelated, *instrumental*, *relational* and *ontological* dimensions whereby, along with work being an end in itself, the worker’s and other’s needs are providentially met; believers sanctification occasioned; and workers express, explore and develop their humanness while building up their natural, social and cultural environments thereby contributing protectively and productively to the order of this world and the one to come.

To develop his threefold nature of work he builds on the works of his mentor, Moltmann and critically engages Luther, Calvin, Barth, Bonhoeffer and the theologies of work of Pope John-Paul II and Miroslav Volf.

According to Cosden, instrumental work is a means to an end. It provides for what is necessary for survival or a spiritual purpose while the relational aspect of work provides self-fulfilment as well as strengthened and improved social relationships. He argues that in the past theologies of work focused primarily on the creation without a proper eschatology.

He claims that ontological work has value through its relationship to God the Creator. He argues that all human work has significance no matter how mundane because it models God's nature and related ultimate purpose, a new creation. He inter-relates these three aspects of work by examining and building upon the work of Alasdair MacIntyre and Oliver O'Donovan. Following O'Donovan, Cosden argues for a dynamic relationship between teleology and anthropology. For him, work is more than instrumental or relational but is open to the future and will be sanctified in the new creation where "the distinction between work, rest and play will disappear" (2006:170).

The final contemporary theological work to consider is David Jensen's *Responsive Labour: A Theology of Work*. Jensen (2006:x) attempts to "recover a Christian vision of ordinary work, a vision that grounds human labour in God's initiating activity." He differs from other approaches in that it begins "not with a general account of God's activity or revelation but by describing the pain in a North American context" (2006:xi). He questions the idea of human work as co-creativity and argues that all work is grounded in the Creator, the Triune God.

According to Jensen (2006:27), "Work has meaning because it comes from God and directed back to God." For this reason, he critiques the encyclical of John Paul II, the work of Armand Larive and the theology of Miroslav Volf. He argues that work as co-creative might run the risk of placing a greater emphasis on the creature rather than the Creator. He goes even further to claim that, "co-creativity implies a cooperation that is often not present in human labour; most of the time we do not align our work with God's creativity" (2006:41).

For Jensen, work like everything else in human life can be claimed, blessed and redeemed by God and "as the triune God transforms our work, we are made participants in God's life" (2006:63). He contends that work has eternal value when aligned with God's work in Jesus Christ who is continually renewing all creation.

In the final two chapters of his work, Jensen explores worship and liturgy in understanding work and critiques the realities of an untransformed world. In his conclusion, he affirms that, "work has value in the global economy because persons in God's image respond to the work God has already accomplished. The measure of good work and economic systems, therefore, must always be measured in terms of the impact on the worker" (2006:121).

By introducing and highlighting the central arguments of four contemporary theologies of work, namely, that of John-Paul II (vocation and co-creation), Miroslav Volf (co-creation and pneumatology), Cosden (instrumental, relational and ontology) and Jensen (God the Trinity). The question is: “Will this in any way strengthen the link between theology and the reality of work and if so, will such contemporary theologies make any qualitative difference in the South African workplace?” In other words, how do theologies of work find practical application in the workplace? Stated otherwise, will the workplace find a unique role in the formative factors of theology and by consequence, can such theology assist Christians bring transformation to the world of world in the twenty-first century?

As pointed out in the preliminary discussion, this dissertation is grounded in practical theology, and Richard Osmer’s (2005, 2008) methodology used as a theoretical framework. Osmer’s methodology for practical theology has four interactive movements.⁵

In his recent book, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Osmer 2008), Osmer contends that practical theology’s starting point is descriptive-empirical which poses the question: “What is going on?” Here information is gathered to understand the context—(priestly listening). The next step is interpretive, where one asks: “Why is it going on?” Entering into dialogue with the social sciences to interpret and explain why particular pattern are taking place is important—(sagely wisdom). The normative follows with the question: “What ought to be going on?” Here questions are raised from theology, ethics and other fields—(prophetic discernment). Osmer completes the hermeneutical circle with the pragmatic where he asks: “How might we respond to form an action plan?” Through this movement, an attempt is made to shape the context to embrace better Christian witness and mission (servant leader).

3.7. Conclusion

Drawing from the Biblical themes, the insights, approaches and methodologies of the four theologians examined, four essential elements or building blocks of a theology of work were identified.

⁵ See Figure 1.1. above.

- i. A theology of work and labour needs to read the signs of the times and be a theology from below that can discern what God is doing to build the world free from exploitation and want. As in the materialist-dialogic reading of scriptures, the knowledge of *YHWH* is filled with references to the liberationist God revealing its presence in delivering the poor and oppressed from their misery and indignity. The Hebrew Bible is filled with these stories, most appropriately the Exodus story and these become the reference for Jesus' reference in the Christian texts as "the signs of the times."
- ii. A theology of labour must affirm that every human being has inalienable dignity because work gives meaning to life. It is an opportunity to participate in God's creative and continuing work of liberation to build a more just world. It is for this reason that everyone has a right or obligation to work. If the central message of Jesus is the liberation of humanity from drudgery and despair to hope and transformation of values, this dissertation should contribute to the understanding of a liberationist God through Christian Education, including liturgical transformation.
- iii. Human work has significance only insofar as it is shaped toward the transformation and improvement of human and social relationships within the world of work. We work not just for ourselves but to improve the lot of all humanity as we move into God's ultimate purpose, the new creation.
- iv. As with all authentic Christian theologies, a theology of labour must be a theology of hope. In essence, a theology of labour sees human work as part of God's salvation plan and is eschatological, not in the sense that the nations are separated before God's judgment throne as "sheep and goats" (Matt. 25: 40ff). It is eschatological in the sense that Jesus taught us to pray for a realisation of kingdom values "on earth as it is in Heaven."

These four elements or building blocks will be used as a hermeneutical key to analyse and interpret the data from the field research. Careful consideration will be given to the rights of workers to be paid a fair wage, a negotiated way forward in terms of non-exploitative labour relations between workers and employers, the right to a day of rest, or Shabbat amongst others. A well-reasoned "Theology of Work" needs to draw on the dialogical process, intimated, and would need at some point, to include both workers and employers. This will require an overhaul

of the labour legislation in its current form for, as long as the employers are the historical owners and controllers of capital and resources, there will never be a fair resolution to the current stalemate witness in South Africa.

A simple example of the difficulty of moving on in the negotiations between owners of capital and workers is the stalemate of Marikana where workers are fighting for a basic salary of R12,000 per month. While the arguments on negotiations are as slippery as “wrestling with a greased pig,” Australian rock drillers earn the equivalent of R40,000 per month. The Church should be involved in brokering a decision on fairer worker wage deals and just working conditions.

Chapter four will explore the opportunities Churches have had in responding to the labour crises while journeying to democracy between 1985 and 1995.

CHAPTER FOUR

CHURCHES AND LABOUR RESPONDING TO THE CRISES: JOURNEYING TOWARDS DEMOCRACY IN SOUTH AFRICA, 1985- 1995

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents a brief overview of the origins of four ESC, namely, the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) the Uniting Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa (UPCA), the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA) and the Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA) to explore their theological assumptions on labour.

Through (semi-structured) interviews, archival research and consultation of some literary resources, the researcher will show that the decade 1985-1995 was one in which South Africa underwent a dramatic change.

Interviews were conducted with five church leaders and five people associated with labour organisations and grass-root community organisations, namely Dr Desmond van der Water, research fellow at University of South Africa (UNISA) and former General Secretary of the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA), Reverend Alastair Arends, current General Secretary of the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA), Prof. Peter Storey, former President of the MCSA and SACC, Reverend Vuyani Nyobole, current General Secretary of the MCSA and community activist in the 1970's, Dr Vukile Mehana, MCSA minister and chaplain to the African National Congress and Reverend Zipho Siwa, Presiding Bishop of the MCSA and current President of SACC, and a person who worked in labour relations on the mines, Mr Allan Roberts, Lands Claims Commissioner and former National Organiser and General Secretary of the Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU), Dr Maria van Driel, gender and community activist, former regional organiser for South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) and project organiser for Public Services International, Dr Goolam Aboobaker, Advisor to the Presidency and a former political activist charged by the United Democratic Front (UDF) to organise the religious sector, Ms Ruth Lewin, Head

Corporate Sustainability at Discovery Heath, held senior positions at Independent Electoral Commission and Truth and Reconciliation Commission and as a community activist worked for Churches Urban Planning Commission in the 1980's and Mr Oupa Lehulere, Director of Khanya College and former researcher and educator at COSATU.

The interviewees were all “veterans of the struggle,” well versed in the history of the Trade Union Movement and the ESC in opposition to successive apartheid regimes. The present researcher notes the conundrum that these Church Leaders faced in having to deal with their workers as endowed with the Labour Relations Act and its implications for church workers.

The history of churches, trade unions, social movements and civil society organizations will be reviewed to illustrate how they mounted active campaigns to bring about the demise of apartheid. De Gruchy (2005:207), De Borer (2007) and others confirm that civil society organisations were the real “midwives” of South Africa’s democratic dispensation.

This chapter includes three case studies of church-related organizations that worked in close association with organized labour in South Africa to show how they persistently called the ESC to translate their moral protest into action.

After reviewing how the ESC responded to the political crisis and labour issues, I move to the second stage or interpretative task of Osmer’s hermeneutical circle (2005:134). An attempt is made to interpret what was taking place in the churches and what theology undergirded their decision or indecision.

4.2. Origins of English-speaking Churches (ESC) in South Africa

The preliminary discussion referred to the works of Charles Villa-Vicencio (1988), James Cochrane (1987), Daryl Balia (1989) and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. They all use the term “English-speaking churches” (ESC) to refer to those denominations in South Africa whose origin can be traced back to Britain through its colonial relationship. These include: Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational Churches. Ironically, the majority of the members of these congregations are indigenous Africans whose first language is not English.

4.2.1. The Methodist Church of Southern Africa

Methodism traces its roots to the Revival Movement of the eighteenth century. It began by as a reform movement within the Church of England directed towards the poor by John Wesley (1703-1791). Methodists broke away from the Church of England in 1795 and became the centre of working class politics and the nascent labour movement (Hempton 2005:16-17).

Wesley's emphasis on Christian perfection that combined personal and social piety shaped Methodist identity. Wesley encouraged Methodists to transform society in the same way they were transformed. Wesley's commitment to those on the margins of society, the sick, the poor, the worker, and those in prison is well documented (Reiger and Vincent 2003; Heitzenrater 2002; Jennings 1990). He started class meetings (in which each member contributed one penny a week for the needs of the poor) and bands of local preachers who empowered working class people to transform the social conditions of their day.

Many leaders of the early Trade Union Movement in Britain were members of the Methodist Church. The most famous being the "Tolpuddle Martyrs" convicted for organising the first Agricultural Workers Union in 1834 and were exiled to Australia. Nigel Scotland (1977) argue convincingly that Methodist principles of organisation and mobilisation played a significant role in the formation of the English Labour Movement.

Methodism came to South Africa with British soldiers stationed at the Cape of Good Hope in 1795 (four years after John Wesley's death). The first exhorter-lay preacher, George Middlemiss sowed the seeds of Methodism that flowered into a separate Conference from the British Methodist Church in 1883.

Sergeant Kendrick, a Methodist lay preacher and class leader founded the first official Methodist Society in 1812. The Reverend Barnabas Shaw was resolved to follow what he believed to be God's purpose. When he was denied permission by the governor of the Cape to minister to the colonists, he trekked inland to serve the indigenous people. After the emancipation of slaves, he bought land in Somerset West in 1834 on which he settled those freed from slavery.

The turn of the nineteenth-century saw an influx of missionary activity in South Africa. The emphasis on most Methodist missionary efforts was on personal and social piety. The string of mission stations, schools, the establishment of a printing press for publication and translations, the building of hospitals and the numerous projects to improve the lives of ordinary people is all evidence of the attempts at Christian perfection.

Distinguished Methodist laypersons like, Bobby Godsell, John Rees, Viginia Gcabashe and many others too numerous to mention played a leading role in the SACC.

Dion Foster identifies seminal moments in Methodist recent history in the Church's pursuit of social holiness.⁶ In the face of apartheid legislation they proclaimed that "it was the will of God for the Methodist Church that it should be one and undivided, trusting to the leading of God to bring this ideal to ultimate fruition" (*Minutes of Conference* 1958:202). The formation of the Black Methodist Consultation in 1975 as a movement within the church ensured that the church took the realities of the black majority seriously, and there was representation at leadership levels in the church. Through "Obedience 81" the church offered prophetic leadership a time of unbridled apartheid oppression. "The Journey to the New Land" in 1993 was a renewed call to social and personal holiness in anticipation of the dawn of democracy. The Convocation in 1995 identified six calls that positioned the church to move from "maintenance to mission" and from "protest to reconstruction." A decade later in the Mission Congress of 2004, the golden thread of "social and personal holiness" still prevailed as the mission priority shifted to "healing and transformation."

Since its early beginnings, Methodism has always been concerned with the issues of justice and dignity of working people. David Hempton in his monograph, *Methodism and Politics in British Society, 1750-1850*, argues, "Methodists were able to hold places of influence in local trade unions out of all proportion to their numerical strength" (1984:215). In order to express solidarity with workers in the mines and factories, the Methodist Episcopal Church was the first denomination to adopt the Social Creed in 1908. It states that the Methodist Episcopal Church stands for:

For equal rights and complete justice for all men in all stations of life.
For the principles of conciliation and arbitration in industrial dissensions.

⁶ <[http://uir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/handle/.../Forster-SHEXXXIV\(1\)-July2008.pdf/](http://uir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/handle/.../Forster-SHEXXXIV(1)-July2008.pdf/)>, [Accessed 20 March 2015].

For the protection of the worker from dangerous machinery, occupational diseases, injuries and mortality.
 For the abolition of child labour.
 For such regulation of the conditions of labour for women as shall safeguard the physical and moral health of the community.
 For the suppression of the "sweating system."
 For the gradual and reasonable reduction of the hours of labour to the lowest practical point, with work for all; and for that degree of leisure for all which is the condition of the highest human life.
 For a release for [from] employment one day in seven.
 For a living wage in every industry.
 For the highest wage that each industry can afford, and for the most equitable division of the products of industry that can ultimately be devised.
 For the recognition of the Golden Rule and the mind of Christ as the supreme law of society and the sure remedy for all social ills.
 To the toilers of America and to those who by organized effort are seeking to lift the crushing burdens of the poor, and to reduce the hardships and uphold the dignity of labour, this Council sends the greeting of human brotherhood and the pledge of sympathy and of help in a cause which belongs to all who follow Christ.⁷

The creed has been adapted, revised and written into the Discipline of many Methodist denominations. It is an integral part of the Methodist heritage and social teaching on worker justice and labour.

4.2.2. The Uniting Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa (UPCSA)

The Presbyterian Church traces its history primarily to Scotland and England but more especially to the sixteenth-century French Reformer, John Calvin and the Scottish National, John Knox.

John Knox organised the Presbyterian Church in Scotland. Under his leadership, the Scottish Confession ended papal rule in 1560. The denomination takes its name from the form of church governance in which congregants elect presbyters/elders to lead them.

⁷ <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_Creed_\(Methodist\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_Creed_(Methodist))>, [Accessed 14 April 2015].

Presbyterian theology places emphasis on the sovereignty and omnipresence of God, the unique authority of the Bible as the Word of God and justification by faith alone for salvation. Presbyterians hold that labour is a calling from God.

It was during the British occupation of the Cape that Scottish soldiers formed the “Calvinist Society” who regularly met for prayer, Bible study and worship. Dr John Adamson served as the first minister of St. Andrew’s Church from 1827 to 1841. St Andrews is considered the mother Church of the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa.

The Glasgow Missionary Society in the meanwhile sent John Bennie and William Thomson as missionaries in the Eastern Cape to work amongst the indigenous people. Education was fundamental to the Scottish missions that flourished in the Eastern Cape. The legendary Lovedale College opened in 1841, Mguali in 1887 and Blythwood in 1987.

In the wake of the Great Trek (1930), the discovery of diamonds in the Northern Cape (1870) and gold on the Witwatersrand (1886), the church expanded as it followed its people. In 1897, the first General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa was held in Durban. The Scottish missions, feared white domination and stayed out of the union in 1923 and formed The Bantu Presbyterian Church. In 1979, it was renamed the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa. The Uniting Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa was formed on 27 September 1999.

The submissions of the Reverend Douglas Bax of the Presbyterian Church give significant insight into the attempts to offer a unified witness in a divided South Africa.⁸ The church’s response to apartheid will be examined in detail later to see to what extent if any their policies, statements or actions impacted the lives of workers.

From the Reformed tradition and the writings of John Calvin, Presbyterians view work as a divine activity.

⁸ <http://web.uct.ac.za/depts/ricsa/commiss/trc/pcsa_t.htm/>, [Accessed 20 March 2015].

4.2.3. The United Congregational Church of Southern Africa

The United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA) was formed in 1987 with the merger of the Congregational Union of South Africa (CUSA), the London Mission Society (LMS), and the Bantu Congregational Church (BCC). They all trace their origin to the Reformation and the teaching of John Calvin (Briggs and Wing 1997:71). The preamble of the UCCSA constitution list five affirmations (Wing 1980:6):

We believe in God our heavenly Father;
We confess Jesus Christ as God and Saviour;
We depend on the guidance of the Holy Spirit;
We seek to live in God's presence according to all that he *[sic]* has made known to us
or will make known to us;
We covenant to worship, work and witness together in the fellowship of the UCCSA
for the building up of the Body of Christ and the extension of the kingdom of God on
earth.

The London Mission Society (LMS) established in 1795 sent the first English-speaking missionaries to South Africa. They particularly focussed on the indigenous peoples. Pioneering missionaries like Theodorus van der Kemp followed by Dr John Phillip, Robert and Mary Moffatt, Newton Adams and many others sought to make a qualitative difference to the lives of people they served. Robert Moffatt developed skills in gardening, building printing and translation. In 1872, he translated the Bible into Setswana and established the famous Moffatt Mission at Kuruman.

In 1835, the Congregational Churches in America through the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions sent missionaries to the Natal. Some of the medical and educational facilities established include: Inanda Seminary, McCord Hospital and Adams College.

Although the UCCSA is a product of the mission work of the London Missionary Society of England and the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, this trans-national church that spans five countries in Southern Africa has its distinctive history shaped by local circumstances and conditions.

In their submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, written by Desmond van der Water and Steve de Gruchy they claim that the missionaries, “notwithstanding their failings, were uncompromising in their stand for justice freedom and equality” (1997:1).

Congregationalists celebrate the fact that two of their ministers, John L. Dube (1912) and Albert Luthuli, (the first South African Noble Laurette) were presidents of the African National Congress (ANC). The church also acted swiftly to distance themselves and remove from the role of ministers two former Chairmen, Reverend Alan Hendrickse and the Reverend Andrew Julies, who led the Labour Party in the Tri-cameral Parliament.

The challenge of ministering to migrant labourers in the Witwatersrand brought the three churches, CUSA, LMS and BCC together to develop a shared vision and witness. The work towards union was threatened not only by conservative members of the church who wanted to hold on to “white privilege” but through apartheid legislation. In response to the UCCSA’s support of the World Council of Churches’ Programme to Combat Racism, the Evangelical Fellowship of the Congregational Church was formed. The UCCSA gave strong leadership in the struggle against apartheid opposing a plethora of legislation like the Group Areas, Bantu Education and Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Acts (Briggs and Wing 1970:29).

The Congregational Church has a large working class constituency. They endorsed “The Message of the People of South Africa” (1968), the “End Conscription Campaign,” the resolution of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches that “Apartheid is a Heresy” (1982), and the Kairos Document (1985). The support of these statements is examples of the extent they engaged the realities of political and social life. The Church took a very clear stand on comprehensive sanctions against South Africa and encouraged conversation with leaders of labour and the Liberation Movements to bring about a free South Africa (UCCSA Bulletin No. 106).

Many clergy and laypersons such as Ben Ngidi, Cyril Hartland, Martin Macabe, Fred Hufkie, amongst others suffered detention without trial for supporting labour and civic organisations (UCCSA Bulletin, No. 89 February 1984; UCCSA Bulletin No. 104, June 1986).

4.2.4. The Anglican Church of Southern Africa

The Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA) was until 2006 known as the Church of the Province of Southern Africa (CPSA).

Military Chaplains accompanied the troops during the British occupation of the Cape in 1795 and 1806 (Hinchliff 1963:10-180). In 1821, the first missionary, Reverend William Wright was sent by the United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (USPG). He was followed by Allen Gardiner from the Church Missionary Society (CMS) and went to Zululand and while Francis Owen went to the Royal Palace of King Dingane. The work expanded rapidly after the consecration of Robert Gray as Bishop of Cape Town in 1847 (Hinchliff 1963:20, 23).

The modern history of the Anglican Church dates back to the English Reformation of the sixteenth Century when Henry VIII broke with the Church of Rome. The Church of England followed explorers, armies, merchants and missionaries as the British Empire expanded. The Anglican Church has a threefold ministry of bishops, priest and deacons. They are united by a common form of worship found in the Book of Common Prayer and hold scripture, tradition and reason as the sources of authority

The Anglican Church like many of the other ESC made a significant contribution to education in South Africa. Many of the mission schools also doubled up as centres of trade, agriculture and health care (Cochrane 1987:82). Anglicans have an impressive record of challenging the realities of apartheid oppression. Iconic figures like Geoffrey Clayton, Joost de Blanc, Trevor Huddleston, Michael Scott, Allan Paton, Sally Motlana, Sheila Duncan and Desmond Mpilo Tutu all challenged the apartheid state in various ways.

Clergy such as Bishop Tutu played a critical role in filling the political vacuum left by political leaders who were either in prison or exile (Borer 1991:45-46, 51, 52; Allen 2006:175-76). Besides passing resolutions condemning apartheid and condemning the arrest and detention of trade union leaders, they allowed their buildings to be used for protest meetings. The mother church, St George Cathedral situated next to parliament became the symbol of protest against the Apartheid regime.

Tutu was appointed the chairperson of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) which sought to uncover apartheid atrocities to grant amnesty and start a process of national healing. A cabinet minister, Kader Asmal called the TRC process a “civil sacrament” (de Gruchy 2010:226).

Although there was no formal relationship of the ACSA with any labour organisation, from the activities and pronouncements of the leadership, there is a strong underlying assumption that this church supported workers in their pursuit of justice.

4.3. An examination of the relationship between Church, State and labour

The year 1985 was a significant turning point in the history of church, state and labour. It saw the publication of a few landmark documents and declarations by churches. The SACC’s “Call to Prayer for the End of Unjust Rule,” the “Kairos Document,” the National Initiative by Evangelical Christians and the launch of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) all ushered in a new theological discourse that tried to respond to the crisis in South Africa.

It is important to understand some of the underlying tensions in the labour movement before the launch of COSATU.

After more than four years of negotiations, COSATU was officially established on 1 December 1985. COSATU brought together 33 unions with a membership of close to 500,000. Many of the unions were organised under the South African Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU), founded in 1979 on the principles of non-racialism and industrial unionism. Other unions represented were independent.

FOSATU and its affiliates focussed on shop floor issues challenging unfair dismissals and low wages thus winning them recognition by workers (Baskin 1991:29; Webster 1985:231-255). They learnt from the way the State dealt with the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU), who was part of the ANC’s alliance of organisations in the 1950’s and 1960’s. Webster and Adler (2001:124) argue that with SACTU banned, it meant that “the new unions could develop innovative approaches to organising that differed from the populist strategies

and tactics of the nationalist-lined unions of the 1950's." Many of the independent unions still held strong ties with the exiled SACTU leadership and were more community based and aligned them with the United Democratic Front (UDF), (Baskin 1991). These unions could be described as "populists" (aligned with the national liberation struggle) while the FOSATU unions were considered "workerist" (those who focussed on workplace issues). It is important to note this distinction regarding union's relationship with the Church.

The 1984 countrywide protest, as well as troops in the townships, was a watershed moment for many unions. Trade Unions were forced into alliances with community organisations, churches and other groups opposed to the apartheid regime (Baskin 1991). COSATU aligned itself with the national liberation struggle. In his keynote speech the Congress, Cyril Ramaphosa, the General Secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers cautioned:

Our most urgent task is to develop unity among workers. We wish COSATU to give firm political direction for workers. If workers are to lead the struggle for liberation we have to win the confidence of other sectors of society. But, if we get into alliances with other progressive organisations, it must be on terms that are favourable to us as workers (SALB, 1985:45).

At their launch COSATU resolved:

- To establish one union for each industry within six months.
- To focus on the exploitation of women workers.
- To call for the lifting of the state of emergency, withdrawal of troops from the townships and release of all political prisoners.
- To continue the call for international pressure, including disinvestment.
- To demand the right to strike and picket.
- To determine a national minimum wage.
- To extend the struggle for trade union rights in the homelands (Extract of Aims and Objectives contained in COSATU Constitution.⁹

Soon after the launch COSATU's leadership travelled to Lusaka and endorsed the ANC leadership of the liberation struggle (Webster and Adler 2001:129). Although COSATU remained a visible and active force in the 1980's working together with the UDF and affiliated organisations, the alliance with these organisations was often on their terms of the unions. Cyril Ramaphosa (*Africa Report*, March-April 1986) contrasted the democracy and accountability of the union movement to the populism of the UDF. With the banning of the UDF in 1988, COSATU and the Churches filled the vacuum and launched the Mass Democratic Movement

⁹ <<http://www.sahistory.or.za/>>, [Accessed 14 April 2015].

(MDM) (Borer 1998:45). They launched a mass action campaign that involved marches led by clergy in Cape Town, Johannesburg, Durban and throughout the country. There were protests, acts of civil disobedience, nonviolent interventions and strikes to make the country “ungovernable.” Ordinary workers became “the first line of defence against repression” (Baskin 1991:453).

The disbanding of the UDF in 1991 was a crucial moment in the liberation struggle. Jeremy Seekings (2000) in his analysis of the UDF claims that the ANC encouraged the dissolution of the UDF. Ingrid Van Kessel contests the idea that the UDF dissolved (2000). Many felt that since the ANC could operate legally, the UDF and other organisations were redundant. At this point, the relationship with the churches which were a major constituency within the UDF and labour became unhinged. With new labour legislation pending, the Church did not have any legal mandate to mediate in labour disputes

As South Africa prepared for the first democratic general election in April 1994, the ANC, SACP and COSATU alliance pressured the government through mass action. The ANC agreed to adopt COSATU’s Reconstruction and Development Programme in return for support in the elections. After the overwhelming ANC victory in the polls, many trade unionists, were rewarded with seats in parliament.

It is interesting to note that historiographers of trade union movements in South Africa, Maree (1987), Marais (1988), Webster (1985), Baskin (1991), Macshane, Plant and Ward (1984) seldom acknowledge the direct role played by the Church as bona fide partners in the labour movement. However, many union leaders, like Freda Oosthuyzen, current COSATU General Treasurer and others boldly proclaim their faith and extoll the extent to which the Churches assisted in their leadership development (*The Shopsteward* 19/1 December - 09 January 2010).

Allan Roberts sheds light on the birth of COSATU as a watershed moment for the Trade Union Movement as well as the “unhinging” of relationships between churches and labour.

Roberts acknowledged that prior to 1985 unions relied on churches for support and recalled, “Things changed once unions could organise freely where they did not depend heavily on churches for venues or material support as before” (Allan Roberts, Interview 2014).

Goolam Aboobaker agreed with Roberts but made a critical observation. He contends that “while the unions affiliated to the UDF were willing to form broad alliances focusing on national issues, many “worker” union leaders were Marxist in thinking and strategy and were only concerned with mobilizing workers on the factory floor as they were considered the only ones to lead the revolution thus alienating some church groups” (Goolam Aboobaker, Interview 2014).

In fact, COSATU was engaged in “social movement unionism” that can be defined as a model of labour movement activity that allies and networks with other civil society actors. Hein Marais (1988:222-224) goes so far as to argue that in COSATU’s alliances with the African National Congress (ANC), South African Communist Party (SACP) and a large number of social movements to oppose the regime became a social movement *par excellence*.

Community activist, Maria van Driel explains that in the labour organisations there was, “always a pervasive presence of the Christian idiom...the rise of the deeply religious men and women of peace who enjoyed popular support” (Maria van Driel, Interview 2014). Oupa Lehulere recalls that, every union meeting started with a prayer. He explains that, “it was only with the consolidation of the hegemony of the ANC that religious voices began to decline or were deliberately left out” (Oupa Lehulere, Interview 2014).

Peter Storey describes 1985 as a year in which, “the struggle of the people and the system came to a head in which events did not unfold but rather explode.” (Peter Storey, Interview 2014).

This period, according to Storey, marked the beginning of a deepening political crisis, repression and a state of emergency. It led to increased police brutality, detentions and political deaths which forced religious activists, church organizations and civil society organizations to take a far more overt role in opposing the apartheid regime. Within this context of social and political crises, we critically examine the role of the EPC.

4.3.1. Call to pray for the end of unjust rule

The Call for an End to Unjust Rule was a logical consequence of the South African Council of Churches’ (SACC) declaration that apartheid was intrinsically evil and heresy. The call was a

concrete attempt to translate resolutions taken at the National Conference of the SACC in 1984 into effective practice. It touched a raw nerve especially amongst white church leaders, many who were still at the helm of the ESC and could not relate to the masses of their Black members.

Charles Villa-Vicencio contends that The Theological Rationale and Call to Prayer for the End to Unjust Rule published on 24 May 1985 was; “a moderate and deliberately cautious document that ‘stands in continuity with a broad theological tradition, which reaches back to biblical times and identifies the obligation of a church to resist a civil authority that rules in contradiction to the will of God’” (Villa-Vicencio and Boesak 1986:15). Despite their succinct and eloquent theological and historical explanation for the call, it created a firestorm in the media and theological circles.

For many, to link prayer with political power was ridiculous. The President of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, Reverend Peter Storey, and the Most Reverend Phillip Russell, Archbishop of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, issued joint press statements distancing themselves from the call.¹⁰ The main thrust of their argument was that the SACC never adopted the Theological Rationale and that churches were never consulted. However, in an interview with Reverend Storey, he clarified that that the production of the appeal was “less than honest” and was part of “a strategy in search of a theology” (Peter Storey, Interview 2014). When pressed to clarify this statement, Storey admitted, “looking back in the cool light of day things could have been handled differently as the differences in the SACC damaged the witness of the church however, as a Wesleyan and Arminian, I had to leave space for grace and change...even the most hardened person can change” (Peter Storey, Interview 2014).

The Cape of Good Hope District Synod, as well as the Methodist Conference, reversed the decision of their then President, Reverend Storey. It adopted the Theological Rationale and decided to refer it to its congregations as a basis for prayer on 16 June (*Minutes of Conference* 1986). At both the Synod and the Conference, delegates felt that it was necessary for local congregations who were affected by the 1976 student revolts to respond. At the Synods and Conference, the Black majority was more in touch with what was happening on the ground than their leaders.

¹⁰ See Appendix 1.

While church leadership was embroiled in a debate, trade unions were reorganising themselves to engage in the broad social struggle for economic and political justice, through access to the tripartite negotiating organs of the ANC and the South African Communist Party (SACP). Through this institutional and political engagement, COSATU eventually became an integral part of government's policy making mechanisms. With hindsight, it is clear that the Churches did not respond adequately to the labour movement, which sought wider and more meaningful alliances with the ruling ANC.

4.3.2. The Kairos Document

The Kairos Document (KD) published in September 1985 soon followed the theological rationale. It was a response to the intensified turmoil and political crisis in South Africa, a time of critical awakening, a challenge to the Church and an attack on the apartheid regime. In the first chapter, it opened with the words:

The time has come. The moment of truth has arrived. South Africa has been plunged into a crisis that is shaking the foundations and there is every indication that the crisis has only just begun and that it will deepen and become even more threatening in the months to come. It is the KAIROS or moment of truth not only for apartheid but the Church (Kairos Theologians 1985:1).

The KD identified three types of theology present in South Africa, namely, State Theology, Church Theology and Prophetic Theology.

The KD defined state theology as legitimating the racist, totalitarian apartheid regime through the misuse of theological concepts and biblical texts. The document critiqued this theology that sought to entrench the *status quo*.

In their critique of Church theology, the Kairos theologians identified the liberal ESC as part of the problem in South Africa. They were compromised by remaining neutral and disengaged in situations of conflict. They accused the ESC of focussing on mediation and reform instead of advancing progress towards justice and peace. The document argued powerfully that fairness and injustice, as well as right and wrong, were irreconcilable. They further argued that church

theology lacked in-depth social and political analyses and, subsequently, had a superficial understanding of the politics of apartheid.

The Kairos theologians rejected both state and church theology and offered prophetic theology as an alternative. This meant reading reality from the perspective of the oppressed or “from below.” They argued that this would usher in justice that comes from below, determined by the people of South Africa. They drew a distinction between the structural violence of the state and that of people in the townships who defended themselves. The drafters of the Kairos Document presented Prophetic Theology as the only legitimate theology that challenged all to “participate in the struggle for liberation and a just society” (Kairos Theologians 1985:28). There was also a challenge to action that included “Church activities,” thus:

The Church has its own specific activities: Sunday services, communion services, baptisms, Sunday school, funerals and so forth. It also has its specific ways of expressing its faith and its commitment; that is, in the form of confessions of faith. All these activities must be reshaped to be more fully consistent with a prophetic faith related to the KAIROS that God is offering today (Kairos Theologians 1985:29).

Tristan Borer (1998:110), amongst others, highlights that “the document was unequivocal that one could not remain neutral and be prophetic. The Kairos document rejected the absolute principle of nonviolence and called Christians to take sides and stand with the oppressed in their struggle for liberation.

The response of the ESC, apart from the UCCSA, was that of contestation, scepticism, resistance, denial, confrontation and reservation. Desmond van der Water points out that under the leadership of Reverend Joe Wing, the UCCSA welcomed the Kairos Document. He went a step further to appoint a task force to develop a Pastoral Plan as a concrete response (Desmond van der Water, Interview 2013). He further explained that the “Pastoral Plan” guided the UCCSA’s transformation process for over a decade. As a member of the initial task force, van Der Water went on to become the church’s “mission enabler” of the “pastoral plan” and later the General Secretary of the UCCSA.

Storey, however, expressed his frustration with what he claims was the “secret production of the document.” He argued that, “it almost caricatured the courage and witness of many in the ESC leaders who had gone before and who gave substance and shape to resist apartheid” He insisted that “to suggest that the de facto government could not change and that one cannot

forgive unless the other person repents is not Wesleyan at all...after all history showed that Caesar, F. W. de Klerk did move” (Peter Storey, Interview 2014). Among the ten characteristics of the Kairos documents, Robert McAfee Brown (1990:9-12) identifies the fact that it was written with a sense of urgency, and part of a group process as most important. It is interesting that many who considered themselves in the forefront of ecumenical leadership were not invited to be part of the drafting process.

Darryl Balia’s assessment of the situation is that the KD had little impact on moving white South Africans to change their theological or ideological perceptions (1989:126). This view was endorsed by most of the clergy interviewed. They claimed that most of the leadership of the ESC were white liberals. Many of whom only had a philosophical understanding of oppression and were not prepared to embrace the most radical position captured by the KD—i.e., to directly challenge the *status quo*.

Wolfram Kistner, former SACC director of the Justice and Reconciliation in a paper, “The Influence of the Churches on the Development of Apartheid” (1988:137-159) claimed that, “business tried to negotiate the release of Nelson Mandela as a means to allow for the on-going exploitation of black labour and “ensure that white predominance will be maintained.”

Kistner raised six points that complement the KD. He warned against a theology of reconciliation that justifies the apartheid state. For Kistner, “reconciliation will not be possible without confrontation” (1988:157).

Kistner also argued that violence against the apartheid state had to be seen as a response to the primary violence practiced by the state that had no moral legitimacy. He drew attention to the origins of labour conflicts in South Africa claiming that they had roots in the European ideological dynamics of the free enterprise system. Kistner (1988:157) explained how racism became “rooted in political, economic and even church structures. He went on to state:

It is a strategic point where faith of Christians living in Western countries enabling it to maintain the apartheid system...to be enriched by many people who suffer in the context of an extremely oppressive political and economic system but who nevertheless take up the struggle for liberation and justice without hating the perpetrators of such injustice and with an intense desire to have them also liberated from their fears and obsession with enemy images (Kistner 1988:157).

Kistner (1988:157) saw the KD as a sign of hope. It “offered Christians a singular opportunity to contribute towards a new and fundamentally different social and economic order by relying on God’s presence and His [*sic*] concern for the poor and oppressed.” In the same way, de Gruchy (1991:38) considered the KD, “a decisive break with the colonial and neo-colonial captivity of the churches in southern Africa and with the “State” or “Church theology” underpinning it.”

Reverend Edwin Arrison, General Secretary of Kairos Southern Africa in his assessment of the impact of the 1985 KD, believes that the ESC “dropped the Kairos ball” by “giving a rich theological heritage away cheaply” especially after the Rustenburg Consultation.¹¹

In its critique of Church and State Theology, the KD does not address worker rights or a theology of labour directly. In the chapter, “towards a prophetic theology” there is a call to engage in social analysis. It identifies those who benefit from the apartheid system while others are, “treated as mere labour units, paid starvation wages, separated from their families by migratory labour...all for the benefit of a privileged minority” (Kairos Theologians 1985:39). The KD calls for a radical change in society. In the challenge to action it lists, there is mention of participation in the struggle, special campaigns and civil disobedience. The KD, unfortunately, does not identify alliances with major interest groups in civil society like trade unions, working for economic justice and worker’s rights as central challenges of the day. In other words the KD and/or its followers failed to translate both prophetic theology and state theology into the moral and ethical programmes it could support.

The KD, however, provided the hermeneutical rational as well as the prophetic mandate for many progressive leaders within the ESC to unite with liberation movements and labour organisations in order to confront the apartheid state and become progenitors of a constitutional democracy.

¹¹ <<https://kairossouthernafrika.wordpress.com/tag/kairos/>>, [Accessed 6 February 2014].

4.3.3. National Initiative for Reconciliation

In the wake of the Kairos Document's call for direct participation in acts of civil disobedience, a group of 400 Evangelical Christians under the leadership of Michael Cassidy met at Pietermaritzburg from 4-9 September 1985. They discussed the political crisis with the aim of launching a National Initiative for Reconciliation (NIR).

At the conclusion of the Conference, they published a Statement of Affirmation calling for amongst other things a day of repentance, mourning and prayer. Although Bishop Desmond Mpilo Tutu supported this call, it was largely rejected by most workers.

John de Gruchy's identified a few fundamental differences in the NIR and the KD. The KD offered a critique of both the church and the state while the NIR did neither. The KD saw the state as, "the enemy of the common good" while the NIR assumed that the government can reform, and Christians could make a special contribution towards reconciliation. The KD believed in a common struggle for liberation (De Gruchy cited in Tlhagale and Mosala 1986:200).

4.3.4. Harare and Lusaka Declarations

A new religious discourse followed the publication of the KD and the NIR. The World Council of Churches (WCC) together with the SACC organised an emergency meeting with the liberation movements. The ANC, Pan African Congress (PAC) and South West African Peoples Organization (SWAPO) were all observers in Harare, Zimbabwe to respond to the challenge to action of the Kairos Document. The result was a joint declaration of intent, called the Harare Declaration. Amongst other things, it called for an immediate end to the state of emergency; the release of political prisoners; the return of exiles; the unbanning of liberation movements and implored the international community to apply "immediate and comprehensive" sanctions on South Africa as well as implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 435, which called for South Africa's cessation of the colonial occupation of Namibia and the right of its people to exercise its democratic right to choose its own government. An appeal was also made to churches inside and outside South Africa to

observe the 16 June 1986, the tenth anniversary of the Soweto student uprising as a World Day of Prayer to end Unjust Rule in South Africa (Balia 1989:103-104; Borer 1993:61).

Jay Naidoo, the first General Secretary of COSATU, confirms that his first meeting with leaders in exile was only possible through the efforts of religious leaders who convened in Harare (2010:104). On 19 March in a talk to students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg about the political environment in which unions operate, Naidoo stressed that workers were determined to play a role in the struggle towards a non-racial South Africa in alliance with progressive community organisations. He outlined COSATU's policy as follows:

Our experience has taught us firstly, to avoid isolating ourselves as workers and defining our friends and allies too narrowly, i.e., the danger of workerism; and secondly, to avoid subsuming ourselves in an incoherent mass mood or populist desire for ill-defined freedom, i.e., the danger of populism; and thirdly to choose our allies on the bases of what we know, what has been our experience as workers, and not on the basis of abstract principles of what is or is not a 'correct approach,' i.e., the danger of impractical but nice sounding theories (*South African Labour Bulletin* 11/5, 1986).

In 1986, the SACC's National Conference passed the Harare Declaration. According to Borer (1998:62-63,111) the declaration closed the gap between "prayer and political action." It also led to the call for economic sanctions as the only remaining nonviolent method to end apartheid and secure a negotiated settlement. These actions cemented the relationship between the Church and the Liberation and Labour Movements. On 1 May 1986, 1.5 million workers responded to COSATU's call for a stay away. The State was forced to recognise May Day as a public holiday. Churches supported this action by declaring the first Sunday in May, "Workers Sunday." Many liturgies were drafted to participate in May Day celebrations. The following year 2.5 million people joined the May 5-6 stay-away. In August, black miners went on strike for the first time since 1946 to demand higher wages. While the ESC did not issue any statements on this event, many local churches lent their support to these endeavours.

In May 1987, another conference was held in Lusaka with the liberation movements (who were this time full participants) and 200 representatives of churches, political, trade union and civil society leaders. They met to review progress on the implementation of the Harare Declaration and assess how the churches could bring about justice and peace in South Africa. The Lusaka Statement reaffirmed the Harare Declaration, confirmed that the apartheid state was illegitimate and raised the issue of the use of force by the liberation movements to end

oppression. Tristan Borer (1998:112-115) asserts that the Lusaka Statement was a turning point for churches because the issue of violence was considered a matter for theological debate especially since the state was found to be illegitimate.

Peter Storey argues that the subtext of both the Harare and Lusaka statements was to get the churches to endorse the armed struggle something that his conscience and deep commitment born out of his faith would not allow (Peter Storey, Interview 2014). Wolfram Kistner, on the other hand, argued that that the South African government was morally illegitimate and therefore other governments must deny its legality. He went even further calling churches to understand and support all “strategies of non-co-operation with a government system that is considered to be evil” (1988:213-221).

In adopting the Lusaka Statement in 1987, the National Executive Council of the SACC gave theological backing for the armed struggle to forge closer cooperation between church activists, trade unions and the liberation movements. The statement boldly declared:

It is our belief that civil authority is instituted of God to do good and that under the biblical imperative all people are obliged to do justice and show special care for the oppressed and the poor. It is in this understanding that leaves us with no alternative but to conclude that the South African regime and its colonial domination of Namibia is illegitimate” (SACC AC623, Report on Meeting in Lusaka, Zambia 1987; *The Churches Search for Justice and Peace in Southern Africa*, 28-29).

After the Lusaka meeting, there were increased calls for the “use of force along with other means to end oppression” (Zunes 199:158). There were calls for sanctions, support of for rent boycotts, tax resistance and conscientious objection to military service. Apart from the UCCSA the ESC were not prepared to support economic sanctions.

Desmond van der Water saw the UCCSA’s stance and his role as the co-ordinator of the task team that prepared a resolution calling for “immediate and comprehensive sanctions” as a significant milestone in his spiritual journey. He argues “sanctions were not just the straw that broke the camel’s back but undermined the camel’s ability of a meaningful existence” (Desmond van der Water, Interview 2013).

The 24 February 1988 saw the largest clampdown on legal protest and the banning of 17 anti-apartheid organisations. Church leaders responded with a statement declaring that the ban was

directed at the Church's mission because "the banned organisations are organisations of and for our people, the majority who belong to our church." The statement concluded with a strong challenge to those in authority, "if the State wants to act against the Church of God in this country for proclaiming the Gospel, then so be it" (SACC, Frank Chikane, *SACC Booklet* 1988). This statement signalled the turning point for the SACC, who were prepared to engage in more direct political action.

4.3.5. Standing for the Truth Campaign (SFT)

During a convocation held on 30-31 May 1988, the Standing for the Truth Campaign (SFT) was launched. More than 230 participants from 26 churches, regional councils and organisations attended the convocation. Frank Chikane argued that the campaign amongst other things "sought to engage in effective non-violent action" and "force the regime to stop its violence and repression and negotiate with legitimate leaders of the people" (ICT, SACC Pamphlet, *Standing for the Truth Campaign*, File C7).

The Campaign was a direct result of the banning of 32 dominant organisations and restriction of 55 popular individuals. As a consequence of the political crisis, churches were drawn into political activism to fill a vacuum to, "restore essential liberties, such as the rights of freedom of assembly and access to information" (ICT, *Standing for the Truth Campaign*, 1988 Pamphlet, File C7).

The Convocation did not prescribe how local communities should engage in the campaign but offered some suggestions;

Prayers for the end of unjust rule, pastoral care for victims of apartheid, witness to the Gospel of Truth irrespective of restrictions according to the State of Emergency regulations, acts of non-collaboration and non-cooperation with apartheid, intervention strategies in crisis situations, symbolic actions of protest and international solidarity action and pressure on the regime (SACC, Pamphlet, *Standing for the Truth Campaign*, File C7).

The campaign that started on 12 June and ended on 18 July coincided with Nelson Mandela's seventieth birthday. Trade unions embraced the campaign and called for work stoppages. There were many innovative local initiatives. Acts of civil disobedience, mass demonstrations, protest

marches, wearing symbolic clothing, motorcades, the establishment of alternative institutions (street committees and people's courts), strikes, sanctions and boycotts were the order of the day. Many of the SFT Committees were led by clergy and union leaders. They highlighted the racist nature of public facilities like hospitals, transport, parks and beaches.

4.3.6. Mass Democratic Movement: Peace marches, consumer boycotts and protests

Many church organizations, particularly those represented in the SACC and the SFT Campaign supported the Mass Democratic Movement's (MDM) Defiance Campaign launched on 2 August 1989 as a response to the September tri-cameral elections. This Campaign was similar to the 1955 Defiance Campaign. It had multiple goals, from non-violent direct action to forced desegregation of social services such as hospitals, schools and transportation, to set up "a process through which people and organisations will gradually unban themselves" (SACC, *Crisis News*, September 1989). In many ways, the MDM became the amalgam that held the many disparate anti-apartheid groups together including the exiled ANC, which often drew strength from each other.

The Defiance Campaign strengthened cooperation between the Church, labour and civil society organisations. COSATU and the Churches emerged as the strongest and most active part of the new alliance in which church leaders often led marches, made their buildings available to workers when needed and initiated campaigns. One such campaign was a church service in Cape Town where 20 activists decided to unban themselves. In supporting the actions of this group, the church leaders declared;

We believe that if their demands are not met they would be justified in ignoring the terms of their restriction orders and in asserting their right to move freely and to engage in peaceful political activity (ICT, *Negotiations, Defiance and the Church*, pamphlet ICT and SFT Campaign).

The State responded with unbridled oppression. It bombed the headquarters of the SACC in Johannesburg, the General Secretary of the SACC, Frank Chikane was poisoned, the SACBC headquarters set alight, homes and offices of church leaders were raided, members detained and publications banned. Church resistance reached a climax with the largest "Peace March" seen in Cape Town since 1960. In other major cities, there were marches and church services

where organisations simply “unbanned” themselves. All participants interviewed identified the role of clerics in the marches as the amalgam that held the broad range of anti-apartheid bodies together at that time.

During this period, church leaders were also exploring negotiations with President F. W. de Klerk about lifting the state of emergency, unbanning of political parties and setting the scene for negotiations. Five months after these meeting with church leaders—and continued pressure from community organisations—it came as no surprise when the State released Nelson Mandela after twenty-seven years of imprisonment.

Soon after the release of Mandela, the WCC held an emergency meeting with representatives from South African church leaders in Harare from 16-17 February 1990 to consult amongst other things about sanctions (PCR Collection Box 4223). In a letter to President De Klerk, Frank Chikane stressed that the SACC together with the ANC, PAC, UDF and COSATU would continue to call for sanctions until the entire dismantling of apartheid (Borer 1998:168).

On his visit to the WCC in March 1990, Nelson Mandela expressed appreciation for the role the PRC played for the freedom of South Africa and reaffirmed the call for continued sanctions. Despite the dismantling of all apartheid laws in February 1991, it was not until September 1993 when the date was set for elections that Mandela called for the lifting of all sanctions.

4.3.7. Rustenburg National Conference of Church Leaders (1990)

The idea of a National Church Leader’s Conference initiated by F.W. de Klerk in his Christmas message invited church leaders to discuss the role of the church in transition. After much discussion with the SACC and other stakeholders, F. W. de Klerk withdrew from the process. The way was paved at Rustenburg for 230 representatives from 97 denominations together with 40 para-church organizations to rediscover its calling and to unite Christian witness in a changing South Africa” (Alberts and Chikane, 1991:15).

It was the first time since the Cottesloe Consultation in 1961 that such a broad cross-section of traditions and confessions gathered to discern what role the Church should play in response to the apartheid regime.

Speaker after speaker at this Conference called upon all to intervene to stop the violence that gripped the country and for the need for reconciliation. This Conference was dubbed by many as, “the Conference of Confessions” (Alberts and Chikane, 1991:16). The Dutch Reformed theologian, Professor Willie Jonker, confessed to his and his Church’s role in supporting apartheid while Methodist theologian, Charles Villa-Vicencio confessed that the ESC passed many resolutions against apartheid but failed to translate them into meaningful action.

Many church leaders commended the Rustenburg Declaration as meaningful. The SACC’s 1991 National Conference resolved to; “receive the Rustenburg Declaration and refer it to its member churches for action” (SACC *National Conference Resolutions* 1991). Some progressive theologians like James Cochrane, Beyers Naude and Albert Nolan were critical of what they termed, “cheap reconciliation” that was not in keeping with the prophetic theology of the Kairos tradition (*Challenge Magazine*, February 1992).

As the socio-political landscape changed so did the theological metaphors and theological emphasis. There was a shift from liberation to reconciliation, development, reconstruction and negotiation (Borer 1998:167).

4.3.8. The National Peace Accord

There was escalating violence and the erosion of the rule of law in the early 1990’s that almost brought South Africa to the brink of civil war.

On many occasions, church leaders were called upon to mediate in the spiral of violence that gripped townships like Sebokeng, Thokoza, and Kagiso and in many parts of KwaZulu-Natal. While the tireless efforts of these leaders will not be chronicled here, except to acknowledge one notable initiative by the Churches and progressive business leaders.

On 14 September 1991, The National Peace Accord (NPA) launched representing all the main political parties including twenty trade unions, religious and civil society organisations. They committed amongst other things to; a code of conduct, a commission to investigate the causes of violence and an adjudication process for resolving disputes. For the first time, warring political factions gathered to begin a negotiation process.

All the main political parties participated in the National Peace Committee (NPC) co-chaired by Bishop Stanley Mogoba of the MCSA and John Hall, a respected business man. Bishop Mogoba managed to organise a summit between Nelson Mandela and Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi in June 1993 during a critical phase of negotiations. Peace bodies were established at regional and local levels. Like the national committee, these included church, business and political leaders. These committees together with the independent church-based monitoring programme, Ecumenical Monitoring Programme in South Africa helped to stem political violence to build a culture of tolerance and ensured a peaceful journey towards the polling booth.

4.3.9. A new political and religious context

After the unbanning of organisations and as the democratic process unfolded there was a qualitative difference from the religious discourse of the 1980's. The Church struggled to identify its place and role in the political transition and new democratic dispensation. The SACC's National Conference themes took on a different tone—"From Egypt to the Wilderness, the Ecstasy and Agony" (1991), "The Crucified God and the Easter God: Seeing in light and darkness" (1992), "Koinonia, witness and service" (1993) and "Being a Church in a new Land" (1995).

In the post-election period, Villa-Vicencio (1992) and Borer (1998) amongst others argued that the new political context require a shift from resistance to reconstruction. The theological emphasis was now on reconstruction, nation-building and economic justice (Borer 1998:192). A call to action from the Rustenburg Declaration all came into sharp focus like reviewing church land policies and commitments to make available financial and human resources. In fact, it is out of this process that the Ecumenical Service for Socio-Economic Transformation (ESSET) was birthed to build capacity for churches to promote meaning participation in the economic justice discourse of the country. While all this was happening, the Labour Relations Act (LRA), Act 66 of 1995, a major victory for the trade union movement was passed. It went by almost unnoticed to the Churches.

The first major legislative achievement of the transition and a landmark victory for workers who now had entrenched rights and collective bargaining at the work place was the LRA of

1995. The Act established the Council for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration, (CCMA), Labour Court and Labour Appeal Court with exclusive jurisdiction to decide on labour matters. Many trade unionists, today, however, regard the LRA as a compromise in favour of employers, owners and controllers of capital.

All clergy interviewed were unequivocal in their understanding that while the ESC did not articulate a clear “theology of labour,” they intentionally provided the norms, values, vision, voice and material support that sustained labour resistance efforts, clearly demonstrated in the case studies that follow.

4.4. Case Studies

Three case studies of “progressive church groups engaged with workers during the period under review will be presented, namely, the Churches Urban Planning Commission, Institute for Contextual Theology and the Young Catholic Workers.

4.4.1. Church’s Urban Planning Commission: Industrial Mission Project

The Church’s Urban Planning Commission (CUPC) was an ecumenical service organization consisting of ten member churches in the greater Cape Town area. It was a training ground for many Christian activists who served in the numerous community and civic organizations at the cutting edge of radical transformation in South Africa.

During 1983, CUPC became increasingly aware of the gap that existed between the church and workers in the Cape Town area. A feasibility study conducted showed only two churches actively involved with workers. The Dutch Reformed Sending Kerk held mid-day services for railway workers, and the Lutheran Church had a programme with farm workers in the Philippi area. While most of the Churches had passed resolutions in support of the workers struggle, the study found that there was reluctance from clergy and Church councils to grant permission for workers to utilize facilities. Many local congregations were unsympathetic and hostile to worker groups. Zipho Siwa confirms that many Church Councils then perceived worker organisations and unions as “socialist” or “communist” (Zipho Siwa, Interview 2013).

On 19 February 1985 the Industrial Mission Project (IMP) launched at a conference entitled, “Church, Workers and the Christian Challenge.” The conference unanimously agreed to draw up workers’ codes that gave a theological rationale for the worker’s struggle. This code also formed the basic foundation and grounding principles to guide the IMP.

In July 1985, a draft of the worker’s code was published for endorsement by churches and local Ministers’ Fraternals (local gatherings of clergy and or lay Christian leaders under an ecumenical format of churches mostly but not exclusively defined as members of the SACC). The purpose of the draft was to stimulate debate and galvanize support from clergy for the project. Many local Ministers’ Fraternals endorsed a worker’s code.¹²

They committed:

To a prophetic mission to affirm and defend the rights of workers and denounce infringements wherever these are found.

To encourage workers to participate fully in the worker’s struggle, especially by active and critical involvement in trade unions.

To give priority to these workers who are most victimized and exploited—agricultural workers, migrant and domestic workers, women, young people and the disabled.

To allow workers full and creative participation in the life and decision-making of the church.

To provide the necessary financial support to the personnel who work full time in Industrial mission on an ecumenical basis.

To provide educational programs for congregations about worker's problems and rights.

To establish courses in Industrial mission at our theological institutions.

To establish the Sunday nearest May Day as a Worker’s Sunday and to relate Church worship more directly to the real lives of congregants, particularly the workers and the unemployed.¹³

The IMP established strong ties with organised labour and positioned themselves on the side of workers. In the forward to the worker’s code they could state:

As we publish the Church and Worker’s Code, we are very aware that the document cannot itself achieve very much. It will need to be followed by a vigorous campaign of education so that the commitments made can become a reality in the life of the Church.

The Minister’s Fraternal became the focal point of activity. Clergy in Bonteheuwel assisted in drafting a liturgy entitled “responsible stewardship” distributed by churches on Worker’s

¹² See Appendix 2.

¹³ See Appendix 1.

Sunday, the Manenberg Ministers Fraternal endorsed an unemployment poster that highlighted the plight of those who were unemployed. The letter circulated in all the Churches in the Western Cape. The Mitchell's Plain Minister's Fraternal drafted a theological rationale and prayer around unemployment used at various services focusing on unemployed.

Ruth Louise Lewin recalls that before the formation of COSATU in 1985, the ministers' forums supported with solidarity work by collecting food for workers and their families who were unemployed, dismissed or retrenched (Ruth Louise Lewin, Interview 2014). Ministers were also called upon to mediate between workers and management in strikes, and a successful symposium held by the Mitchell's Plain Minister's Fraternal to inform health professional and community workers of the socio-psychological effects of unemployment. The CUPC acted as mediators in the Grand Bazaar Stores and the Retail Allied Workers dispute as well as in the Murray and Roberts and South African Allied Workers Union negotiations after strike action by 1,500 workers.

In September 1985, an investigation was conducted which highlighted the plight of clothing workers. At that time, it was estimated that more than fifty percent of the workforce in the Cape Peninsula, mostly women employed in the clothing or clothing related industries. The report drew widespread support from clergy of all denominations and faiths. The report as well as a letter affirming that workers have rights before God signed by ten Muslim and ten Christian religious leaders.¹⁴ The clergy delivered the letter to the factory bosses, the Cape Clothing Manufacturers' Association. The Cape Clothing Manufacturers' Association was very critical of the IMP report into the clothing industry and invited the signatories of the letter to discuss the contents of the report as well as gain first-hand knowledge of conditions on the factory floor.

The religious leaders rather offered a theological response to every critical remark made in the correspondence of 6 December 1985 and 17 January 1986 in which the bosses comment:

For a group of church leaders to allege exploitation in any situation is a serious matter and where the allegation relates to the clothing industry it is a matter that concerns this association directly.

¹⁴ See Appendix 3.

Religious response is that we are scriptural, prophetically and ethically justified to have a bias to the poor. Good news to the poor is obviously bad news to the rich, and this serves as a moral foundation for our document on the Clothing Industry. Harassment, detention, being dragged to the courts of the rich for the emancipation of the poor and oppressed masses, even losing one's life in the process would bring honour to God and advance the cause of the poor (Minutes and correspondence of Cape Clothing Manufacturers Association, 6 December 1985 and 17 January 1986).

The response from the religious leaders to the Cape Clothing Manufacturers' Association, as well as the publications of IMP, reflects both the context and the ideological position of those involved in the project.

Towards the middle of 1986, the IMP was suspended for a variety of reasons. Ruth Louise Lewin explain that:

The State of Emergency and increased police harassment made it difficult to operate. The objective conditions had changed since the inception of IMP. The unions were growing stronger and were getting material and moral support beyond the Churches. The position of workers was strengthened, and workers themselves now did solidarity work done by church groups. There was a change in the emphasis within the CUPC itself (Ruth Louise Lewin Interview 2014).

In assessing the work of IMP, it is important to recognize that passionate and committed lay persons did most of the work. They often had very limited theological training, but who could identify entirely with workers and their struggle. The IMP publications were an attempt to reconstruct traditional representations of the faith with an emphasis on radical praxis. Sympathetic clergy and advanced sectors within the church as the Social Action Groups (Anglican) and Concerned Christians (Moravians) were in the vanguard encouraging the rest of the community.

The IMP was action oriented. It believed that a genuine theology of labour would only evolve if there were an organic relationship between the church and workers hence the emphasis on closing the gap between the two to build an authentic relationship.

4.4.2. Institute for Contextual Theology: Labour Project

The Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT) was birthed as a result of the political crisis in Southern Africa. A group of concerned Christians felt that the Churches were either unwilling

or ill-equipped to help Christians deal creatively with the dynamic of power and conflict, which was a constant part of the South African scenario. One of the main purposes of the Institute was, “contributing towards a theological base for the realisation of a new society in South Africa” (ICT, *Constitution* 1981). It would seek to do so through appropriating the prophetic traditions of the Christian faith in such a way that would highlight the liberating and empowering elements of the gospel to help the oppressed challenge the structures of domination. The Institute also hoped to develop theological tools to use in the struggle against exploitation and discrimination.

The ICT saw its first task to address itself to the realities of the South African situation especially as it affected those at the bottom pile of the economic ladder—the victims of apartheid. It came to the conclusion that “Church Theology” in South Africa legitimated the *status quo* because it served the interests of the dominant groups. A conscious decision was made to work with groups dedicated to change to develop a theology that would unmask idolatry of the political power structure. For an advent of a new society, reflection had to begin within the context of real life experience and location of the struggle against apartheid. After a series of workshops, seminars, discussion groups and conferences eight projects and programs emerged. These were: Theology of Labour Project (TLP); Black Theology; Feminist Theology; Ministry in Conflict Situations; Pastoral Care; African Independent Churches; the Kairos Document, and Evangelical Theology.

The TLP carefully monitored industrial relations and trade union activities. It had a healthy relationship with national trade unions and worker organizations where work and discussion took place with workers at grassroots levels. There were meetings with workers and groups at the regional level to network and pool resources around creating an authentic theology of labour.

After an extensive workshop at the Annual General Meeting of the Institute, James Cochrane was mandated to produce a booklet that would help facilitate a programme to develop a worker’s theology. The result was a publication entitled, *The Church and Labour in Southern Africa*. It hoped that a series of resource material would be produced to enhance the ministry of the church to workers (Cochrane 1987:28).

The booklet extensively examined “the history of Church and Labour” and came to the conclusion that the Church wittingly or unwittingly identified with those who dominated the economic and political life in South Africa. James Cochrane points out that very little had changed throughout the years and that churches placed a small premium was on workers and their most pressing concerns. Most churches focussed on their institutional existence (Cochrane 1987:7).

The booklet also shared information and ideas about the plight of the black worker, worker’s rights and the relationship between the Church and workers. A series of case studies were presented where churches were involved with worker and exposed as either lacking skill or being unwilling to minister to or face up to the challenges presented by workers.

The ICT booklet was the first to challenge the Churches seriously to go beyond resolutions and platitudes and face the reality of the contradictions in the workplace, society and within the very structures of the Churches itself.

One of the more ambitious projects tackled by the Labour Project was a process of participatory research to determine the relationship and experience of workers who were church members. The research team conducted some workshops arranged by local congregations to test if respondents felt alienated from church leadership, ritual worship and structures.

The assumption was that trade unions would be “highly critical and unappreciative of the church and that churches would have little understanding of a worker’s life and provide little support, care and solidarity” (Labour Research Project Group 1991:257).

James Cochrane makes the point that it is hard to measure empirically religious alienation. For this reason, “the results must be seen as indicative rather than empirically definitive of the reality of workers in South Africa about the Church” (Cochrane 1988).

The research finding showed that 74.9% of the sample tested felt that there was a definite rift between the church and workers. Amongst the reasons given by respondents for the gap was: a lack of communication, misconceptions about the labour movement and a dualism that

pervades Christian thinking of sacred and secular realms (Labour Research Project Group 1991:263).¹⁵

While approximately two-thirds of those sampled felt that the Church currently did not help trade unions and worker organizations. Three-quarters believed that the Church had the potential to help and should, amongst other things, make their facilities available to workers. Despite the fact that a vast majority of the respondents had negative perceptions and experiences of the church, 89% believed that democracy was desirable and possible. 80% regarded the Bible as having significance in their daily lives (Labour Research Project Group 1991:269).

The study was important for many reasons. Among these:

- i. It was long overdue and created an opportunity to move beyond conjecture and mere generalizations about workers and the Church. While the vast majority of church members were workers, no substantive research had been done on the question of the relationship between church and workers in South Africa.
- ii. It allowed the church to come under scrutiny by workers. They shared their perceptions, fear and hoped that despite the mirror image of an apartheid society, they saw in the church a potential ally in the quest for liberation. They diagnosed and shared what they perceived to be the debilitating factors in forging unity between the Church and workers.
- iii. Most importantly, the Church and those giving leadership could no longer plead ignorance. The challenge before it was, to get its house in order so that workers could claim their rightful place as the people of God.
- iv. The research gave trade unions and worker organizations some insight to the value Christians attach to their church, heritage and religious tradition.

¹⁵ This matter will be dealt with more fully at the conclusion of this chapter.

- v. The method of the research raised important questions for organizations who wished to be part of the transformative process in South Africa especially. Very often, research is conducted on subjects as if they were objects but, in this case, the research “subjects” were an integral part of the project.

If all parties took the issues raised in the research project seriously and responded appropriately, there is little doubt that a symbiotic relationship would have developed between the Church, workers and worker organizations having far-reaching consequences.

The work of the TLP pointed the churches to fresh insights and new possibilities for theological training. It is unfortunate that the recommendations were never taken up at the time. The TLP warned that churches could become more alienated from the working class who would seek alliances and inspiration from sources outside the traditional church.

4.4.3. Young Christian Workers

A Belgian priest, Father Joseph Cardijn, founded the Young Christian Workers (YCW) in a working class suburb of Brussels in 1924. Cardijn’s experimental teaching method helped workers to reflect on their lives in the light of their faith. In turn, this would enabled them to diagnose the malaise in which they found themselves and to search the wellsprings of the Christian tradition for strength to remedy the situation. The founder was clear that it was a movement of young workers, by young workers for young workers (Dumortier 1991:227).

The movement was introduced to South Africa in the 1950’s by Eric Tyacke, a Catholic lay worker. Though it has its origins in the Catholic Church, it was open to all young workers who wish to shape their history and build a new society based on justice. It is an action orientated movement that takes the real life experiences of workers seriously. Local groups usually consist of five to ten young workers who meet weekly. All their programs and meetings follow the simple pedagogical principle of see, judge and act.

They engage in social analysis and use the hermeneutic circle as they reflect on their daily experiences as workers. After a series of in-depth reflection, a pastoral plan is initiated (Holland

and Henriot 1980, Noland 1987:53). The challenge for each member of YCW is to transform themselves from the status of objects of history to participants.

Father Lafont, the YCW chaplain, makes the point that “young workers are not drawn into YCW because they are Christian but because they are young workers” (Lafont 1991:221). He explains further that faith formation within YCW takes place in three distinct phases. First, members identify with Christ the worker and the poor and the outcast with which he identified. They often see the process of transforming their situation as consistent with the mission of Jesus. The second stage is one of identifying with the disciples, critical questioning, recruiting more people to work with them in changing conditions for the establishment of the kingdom. Renewed commitment—or the challenge of transformation—often takes place during this stage.

The third and final phase is the discovery that the struggle for justice and peace requires more than just strength and determination but self-denial. Workers recognized their limitations, the contradictions in the church and even the limitations of the struggle as well placing their hope and confidence under the direction of God asking, “Lord where should we go?” (Lafont 1991:223).

In many ways, the members of YCW cherish their identity as an organization not bound to any church structure. For many of its members, the experience in YCW is their only positive experience of the Church. They often see their task as furthering the work of Christ and helping the Church to discover its true mission. While there was a class struggle within the Church itself, there is often a strong bond and comradeship within YCW because they united as the working class. Within the structure of YCW, they get the necessary analytical tools and find a space to reflect on issues of faith and responsibility in the wider society.

YCW educates workers about their rights. While no real “popular religiosity” emerges from YCW, it has enormous potential and during 1985-1995 was at the cutting edge in the church and labour debate and praxis. The evangelized in the small groups often became the evangelizer organically linked to workers who sought an authentic theology that could transform both church and society. Through working and sharing in small groups, Base Christian Communities are created that has the possibility of inverting the traditional church hierarchies and presented a model of the possibility of an egalitarian and communitarian society and church. The YCW

prepares many young people for participation in political and social life from which they once felt excluded. Many members were arrested and detained during the State of Emergency.

In an address to YCW, President Nelson R. Mandela praised the YCW for the significant contribution they played in the liberation struggle. He recognised that, “the YCW’s approach has always been to acknowledge and challenge injustice, and then to build the capacity of the oppressed to act in a constructive way that will bring an end to injustice and create a better world for all of us.”¹⁶

4.4. The SACC, the torchbearer of the English-speaking Churches

Although there was no memorandum of understanding or any other such document between churches and trade unions, the brutal acts of state repression united these social stakeholders without the need for a formal mandate. There was always a good rapport between those who gave leadership to the SACC and organised labour. In fact, at one time many trade unions were housed in Khotso House, the SACC headquarters and many trade union leaders like Emma Mashinini and others later worked for churches in senior positions.

As identified in Chapter Two, the relationship between the Church and unions has always been somewhat ambiguous. On many occasions during the 1970’s and 1980’s the SACC facilitated meetings of trade unions opposition to registration and created a platform for discussion and planning responses to the Wiehahn Commission (SACC, Minutes of Meeting with Trade Unions, File 32.3). The Council also mediated in a protracted dispute between Fattis and Monis management and workers in Cape Town (SACC, Correspondence Fattis and Monis File 32.2). It also received reports from German friends informing them of “Codes of Conduct” adopted by the European Economic Commission on German firms doing business in South Africa (SACC, Code of Conduct File 32.5). With the bombing of COSATU House on 07 May 1986, the SACC assisted not just by offering moral support secured a loan of R150, 000.00 for rebuilding and security. All correspondence from union leaders shows a profound respect for SACC Secretaries (Bishop Tutu, Beyers Naude and Frank Chikane). A letter from the National

¹⁶ Speech by President Nelson Mandela during the opening ceremony of the Young Christian Workers World Council, 26 November 1995, Oukasie. < <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=3639/>>, [Accessed 29 November 2015].

Council of Trade Unions (NACTU) to the 1987 National Conference of the SACC urged the Council to be “non-sectarian in all its activities” and aware of “political plurality within the oppressed and exploited.” It further suggested:

The neutrality of the Church especially where different genuine Black political groups are concerned.

Equal, sharing of the Church’s resources by all needy without any, demand by the Church for political or ideological affiliation to any group.

Consultation with all existing genuine community organisations and Trade Unions in important issues concerning the struggle of the oppressed and exploited.

The Church must work tirelessly for the unity of the oppressed and exploit through their different organisations, and must open and use its good offices for conciliatory efforts (SACC, Letter from NACTU File 32.5).

During the 1987 State of Emergency, the SACC continued to support Trade Unions through a major pamphlet campaign to highlight the plight of workers (SACC Letter of appeal from Diakonia File 32.5). From correspondence later that year there was a shift in the relationship between the SACC and Trade Unions. Jay Naidoo, General Secretary of COSATU, tried to get the R150, 000.00 written off. This proposal was not accepted (SACC Letter from COSATU File 32.5) and request for financial assistance from unions referred to Kagiso Trust and COSATU (SACC, Letter from Kagiso Trust File 32.5).

Allan Roberts, Oupa Lehulere and others interviewed are correct that after 1985, the Labour Movement had come of age and workers looked to their unions rather than churches to negotiate and support them during strike action. There are many example of grassroots cooperation of churches, community organisations and organised labour. The entire KwaZulu-Natal region contributed in the SARMCOL strike. There was fundraising as well as a one-day strike and boycott of all white business (Zunes 1999:115; Kumalo 1998).

During the period under review, there was only one major conference on “Theology, Work and Labour” held in 1989 in Pietermaritzburg. The aim of the conference was for churches to gain a better understanding of work and the life of black workers in South Africa. Unfortunately, most of the participants were academics, clergy and students. Cochrane and West capture some of the presentations in a valuable reference work, *The Threefold Cord: Theology, Work and Labour* (1991). Of the nineteen of contributors, only three were women of whom two represented the labour movement. These statistics indicate that while those representing churches and academic institutions wished to dialogue with workers there was no real

commitment to having them present at the Conference. The Conference was yet another forum that spoke “about” workers and a theology of work rather than speaking with workers about their values, vision and struggles in the workplace and beyond.

It was only a decade later, 22-29 January 1999 that the Interdenominational Council for Industrial Mission held a Theology of Work seminar at the School of Theology at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Pietermaritzburg. The papers presented there showed that little progress was made to close the gap between workers and the Church even in the post-apartheid era (*Bulletin for Contextual Theology in Africa*, 1999).

On the whole, this chapter underscores the fact that the ESC did not seize the opportunities to relate meaningfully to the labour issues raised by organizations birthed by clergy and lay workers in their very own ranks.

4.5. The English-speaking Church: Trapped in the values and forms of “Church Theology

During the period under review, the ESC were shaped and conditioned by the historical and social context—a context defined by class, power and economic structures of the time. Sociologist of religion, Otto Maduro (1982:132-142) and political scientist Peter Walshe (1983:20) among others show that churches either serve as reinforcement (strengthening force) for the ruling class by legitimating its domination or lending itself to revolutionary service in the interest of those dominated.

The role of the ESC has at times been ambiguous and contradictory as it frequently identified with the ideology and interest of the mostly dominant middle classes yet there were always voices of protest like those of CUPS. ICT and YCW which sought to “rescue the Church from its bondage to the ruling classes. Is the Church is condemned to perform a conservative function?

Maduro (1982), Borer (1998), Levine (1986), Villa-Vicencio (1990) amongst others, argue that the social function of religion changes. In particular situations, churches can either become agents of transformation or preserve the *status quo*. In other words, there is an ambiguity about

religion and the Church. If allied with the dominant classes it serves a conservative role reinforcing the power of that class, but if allied with the oppressed it can play a revolutionary role in building a new society. Boff (1981), Gutierrez (1973), Bonino (1975) and Atherton (2003) amongst others recognize the revolutionary potential of religion. They claim that only once the oppressed groups recapture and reinterpret the dimensions of liberation within the Christian faith will the revolutionary process begin (Boff 1981:133).

In reviewing the literary and archival material as well as the oral interviews, the lack of attention to the meaning and purpose of work and the relationship to labour movements is amazing. There is no convincing documentary evidence to show that an institutional relationship or formal alliance existed between the EPC and organised labour despite laudable efforts of the SACC and groups on the periphery of the Churches like CUPS, ICT and YCW. Siza Njikelane in his preface to the book, *The Three-fold Cord: Theology, Work and Labour*, make the point that the efforts of these groups, “met resistance and strong reservation within the churches” (Cochrane and West 1991: ix). Peter Storey, on the other hand, admits that the questions that emerged during the interview process identified a blind spot in the life and witness of the Church during the decade reviewed as well as today (Storey interview, 2014).

The interviews, as well as the case studies, point to committed individuals and groups associated but on the fringes of the ESC. It was often left to these “progressive” individuals and groups to define a relations and interaction between church and labour. It was the mobilization of all these stakeholders, often ordinary members at local church or union branch level that led to the actualization of the transition and the eventual democratization of South Africa.

The records of Provincial Synods, Conferences and Assemblies, all contain pronouncements and resolutions that affirmed the right of trade unions to organise workers. Others went further to deplore the harassment and persecution of trade union leaders and included appeals for buildings available for trade union meetings. There was, however, little or no focus on the needs and values of workers or attempts to link theology and work.

A careful examination of the resolutions of most ESC, for example, the MCSA Minutes of Conference, 1985-1995 was written to commend those in authority and power. “The Conference commends those farmers who are genuinely endeavouring to improve salaries”

(Minutes 1985:250, 1986:298, 1987:264, 1988:286). In another case, “The Conference resolves that a letter be written to the Minister of Labour commending his efforts to improve labour conditions and opportunities” (Minutes 1985:252). “The Conference calls on the State, together with farmers to improve conditions of their workers” (1989:270). The records of most ESC point to the fact that even during the State of Emergency they still considered that those in power would and could bring about change. By this time, many Black clergy felt very strongly like Bishop Tutu that apartheid could not reform, it had to be destroyed.

The Conference of the MCSA also requested the General Secretary of the Christian Citizenship Department to establish a Task Force to conduct a “study of the theology of work” (Minutes 1985:302). Despite being requested “to report to Conference when this matter is brought to finality.” (Minutes 1998:289) Three years later there was still no report. The Conference dropped this item from its agenda in 1995.

The above examples show to what degree the issue of labour was taken seriously by one of the major ESC. The MCSA like most other churches at that time found themselves strapped in the values that legitimated and consolidated the *status quo* rather than engaged in a thorough analysis, critique and challenge.

The response of the ESC to the labour issues from 1985-1995 were no different to that found in Cochrane’s seminal work, *Servants of Power* (1987) that focused on the period 1903-1930. Cochrane’s argument that churches were captive to the ruling powers in the first three decades of the twentieth century still held true as they continued to struggle with ambiguities and contradictions at the close of the century (1987:183). Those who held leadership positions in these churches and who controlled the agenda were least affected by apartheid. Marjorie Hope and James Young endorses the view that leadership was predominately white and of middle class orientation. They failed to recognize that membership was largely made up of workers and many ministers “had little or no relationship with the black working class and only rarely did rank-and-file members carry the banners of eloquent resolutions into the field of action” (1983:231).

A cursory examination of resolutions of the ESC, all bear the marks of what the Kairos Document identified as “Church Theology.” There was a general lack of social analysis. The emphasis was on reconciliation without justice and repentance, and condemnation of violence

but not the systemic violence apartheid. There was also an inadequate understanding of spirituality and the failure of political understanding and strategy. In fact, it seemed as if the ESC was tone deaf to the plight of workers and not committed to dealing with the structural challenges necessary in church and society at the time. They failed to rise to the challenge of the Kairos Document to “serve the real religious needs of the people and to further the liberating message of God and the Church in the world” (Kairos Theologians 1985:29).

4.5.1. The marginalization of organisations working with workers

Organisations such as the ICT, CUPC and YCW all offered models of ministry to workers often found themselves on the fringes of the ESC. There is little evidence that the ESC supported these groups or had any co-ordinated policy focusing on workers and their struggle. Five aspects are however clear:

- i. Despite the fact that these groups worked with local clergy at grass roots, they were not given due recognition by any of the ESC. There are no reports of their work in Conference, Synod and Assembly records. Despite the publications, pamphlets and material support these progressive groups made to sustain labour resistance there was no national endorsement or adoption of the Industrial Mission Project’s, “*Church and Workers Code*” (1985). Even the SACC paid little attention to the damning findings of the Church and Labour Project Research Group, entitled “*Workers, the Church and the Alienation of Religious Life*” (ICT 1991). It is perhaps necessary to restate that the research was long overdue and created an opportunity to move beyond conjecture and mere generalizations about workers and the Church.
- ii. It allowed the Church to come under scrutiny by workers.
- iii. The Church and those giving leadership could no longer plead ignorance to the plight of employees. The challenge before the Church was, to get its house in order so that workers could claim their rightful place as the people of God.
- iv. The research gave trade unions and worker organizations some insight to the value Christians attach to their church, heritage and religious tradition.

- v. The methodology was participatory and held some serious challenges especially for those doing research.

The CUPS, ICT and YCW all placed emphasis on radical praxis, social analysis, the option for the poor, action and prophetic witness in situations of conflict. These groups presented the Churches with fresh insights and new possibilities to close the gap between religious belief and practice. Unfortunately, the ESC did not seize the opportunity to express solidarity with workers who formed an important constituency in their churches. Instead, they continued to focus on institutional preservation. The question that prompted this study then arises: “How did the ESCs relate to labour?” Despite critiquing particular policies, the Church, by and large had little to say about worker’s struggles, strikes and labour disputes in general. It did even less to enhance active participation of workers in the life and witness of the Church.

4.5.2. A context seeking understanding

In trying to understand the seeming inability of the ESC to respond to the plight of workers that formed their major constituency, Charles Villa-Vicencio holds the view that two theological tradition resides in these churches. One view identifies with and legitimates oppressive regimes while the other is a repressed tradition that works and speaks for the poor, and the oppressed (Villa-Vicencio 1990).

The responses of those interviewed varied considerably. Vukhile Mehana in an animated response asked the question: “What else did you expect to find from a church that in the main during this period was led by white liberals” (Mehana, Interview 2013). The Presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa was more conciliatory when he explained:

Churches were simply overwhelmed by the bigger apartheid issues and while there was not a written theology of labour and while it can be argued that the church not rise to the occasion there is little doubt that many trade union leaders were nurtured and nourished by the church” (Siwa, Interview 2013).

Peter Storey in an honest assessment of the Methodist Church’s response to labour, admits that, “during this period, I can’t remember the Church having a spelt out policy towards labour and unions but in retrospect it could and should have had a clear policy” (Peter Storey, Interview

2014). According to Reverend Vido Nyobole, the General Secretary of the MCSA and one time President of the Black Methodist Consultation: “ideological differences amongst the leadership of the English speaking churches made it difficult for it to be prophetic hence they often looked to the SACC before embarking on any prophetic initiative” (Nyobole, Interview 2013).

Desmond van der Water offered a simple but plausible explanation for the absence of explicit church statements on labour. He asserts that during the period under review, “much energy was expended with internal battles trying to get a minority constituency on board.” He goes further to explain, “while the church did not address specific labour issues, apartheid was so pervasive that it affected every sphere of life so that in addressing apartheid injustice through prophetic statement, expressions and other actions, it indirectly supported black labour that brought the apartheid structures to a virtual standstill” (van der Water, Interview 2013).

The two women interviewed were in agreement with van der Water; they point to the fact that the largest number of workers in the textile retail and food processing industries were women who supported the strikes and boycotts. They also look to the Manyano and other women’s group that form a large constituency in the Churches that played a significant role in community organised protest and political campaigns. Their voices gone unheard as there is not much literature devoted to the role of women activist. Their voices are largely missing from the history of this period (van Driel, Interview 2014). Shireen Hassim indicates that during 1991 and 1994 women fought vociferously against marginalization and exclusion from the constitutional process, “women’s participation in the constitutional negotiations tempered if not undermined the power of conservative force” (2006:138).

While addressing patriarchy is not the primary focus of this study, the present researcher agrees with Hassim and the female interviewees who view politics in South Africa as the domain of the elites and mainly males. The role of women as political actors is undervalued and diminished (2006:132). The issue of patriarchy, however, as related to this study of church and labour requires a distinct, separate and rigorous enquiry and research.

Notwithstanding the arguments made thus far, in the final analysis, the ESC did make a positive contribution to apartheid resistance and nurtured values to sustained labour resistance but could have done much more. They found themselves trapped in “church theology.” While they were

strong in addressing racial inequality, they failed to close the gap between theology and labour. It is, however, ironic, that the very ideology that sought to separate people brought trade unions and a progressive sector within churches much closer.

Wolfram Kistner considered trade unions as, “the most important forces in the struggle for justice, democratization and, in general, for a change in South African Society (1988:210). During the reconstruction period, the labour movement was able to present itself as one of the strongest actors in the political arena. It made a substantial contribution to formulating policy and shaping the political agenda. Trade Unions worked side by side with churches to promote social cohesion and to usher in a democratic future. Some of these joint projects included the repatriation of exiles, voter education, mobilization and election monitoring. They also participated in the design and development of the world’s most progressive constitution. A constitution that guarantees rights and freedom of association and practice of religions as well as the protection of a host of internationally recognized rights to labour relations.

4.6. Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the history of churches, trade unions, social movements and civil society organizations. It further illustrated how together they mounted active campaigns to bring about the demise of apartheid and the dawn of a democratically elected government in South Africa in April 1994.

The three case studies of church-related organizations illustrated how progressive clergy and lay people built stronger ties with labour to understand their struggles. These groups also persistently called the ESC to translate their moral protest into action.

After reviewing the position of the ESC and their relation to labour, the present researcher sought to interpret what was taking place in the Churches and what theology undergirded their decision or indecision. In this way, the second stage of Osmer’s hermeneutical circle was engaged, namely the interpretative task of practical theology (2005:134).

However, the present researcher is constrained to address the questions about misconceptions by the Church on its relation to government. It was regrettable that it appeared that the churches

would become less open to connect with the secular world after the release of Nelson Mandela. This position was perhaps best expressed by, amongst others, the MCSA General Secretary, Reverend Vivian Harris who declared that “change of the status quo was good for the Church because now the Church can concentrate on being ‘Church’ again.” Instead of giving a message that the Church was ready to embrace change and a new political dispensation, Vivian Harris gave the message that the Church was happy to return to an introverted self.

The dualism with which the SACC had grappled in terms of “secularity and sacredness” was perhaps best described by the SACC Resolution on Being Church that claimed for itself a position of “critical solidarity” with government in 1992/1993. This statement was careful to declare that the SACC would be neither the lapdog of government nor the “official opposition.” The idea of “critical solidarity” developed and was intended to allow the newly formed “government be the government” and “the church, the Church.”

Toward the end of the 1990’s, the SACC was forced to adopt a different relationship, forged by SACC National Executive Council member, Prof. Tinyiko S. Maluleke who, at a Land Summit Conference claimed that churches have no business being in “critical solidarity” with government. The only biblical model for solidarity of the Church was with the “poor, marginalised and excluded persons in society.” This position was later modified for the work of the SACC Public Policy Liaison Office, defined at the 2003 SACC Triennial Conference as one of “critical engagement.” In the light of Luther’s ‘Two Kingdoms Model,’ it could be argued that the “critical solidarity” model allowed the Church to be swallowed up by the State, leaving it with little autonomy to defend its authority over the “spiritual realm,” possibly having to relinquishing its dominion over spiritual matters to the State. On the other hand, “Going back to where the Churches historically were the Churches,” as advocated by Reverend Vivian Harris, placed the Church at risk in giving up its space to refuse an “engagement” with the State on issues of justice, care for citizens’ wellbeing and the eradication of poverty. By 2003, the SACC had adopted a model of “critical engagement” enabling its member churches to be represented in a negotiation of ethical policies with the state, including the formation of a “tripartite alliance with the SA NGO Coalition (SANGOCO) and COSATU, providing sufficient negotiating muscle for the churches without being co-opted by either SANGOCO or COSATU. Unfortunately, the SACC position on Church and State—enabling the SACC churches to “critically engage” government, was usurped by SACC Church workers and certain Church members who insisted that the SACC return to a position of “critical solidarity.”

Misconceptions about the trade union movement being held hostage by Marxist and Communist party ideologies are unfortunate and appear to be borne out of a western theological mentality that essentially Marxism was evil and that the Protestant work ethic—of pulling one up by the bootstraps—was the prevailing theology.

This summary leads us into the next chapter which will seek to answer the question, namely, “what does the history of labour-church relations in the period under review mean for churches today?” Balia’s concern (1986:166) that people must react “with greater magnitude and intensity” to the labour matters is addressed by drawing on the scholarship of liberation theologians to expand on the building blocks of a theology of labour.

CHAPTER FIVE

A CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY OF LABOUR

5.1. Introduction

This chapter will respond to the Biblical teachings and expand on the building blocks identified in chapter three to develop a contextual theology of labour to close the gap between theory and praxis thereby offering a connection to workers who feel alienated from the work and witness of the Church.

The third stage of Richard Osmer's hermeneutical circle is engaged in an attempt to develop a contextual theology of labour. The normative task of practical theology asks, "What ought to be going on"? It calls for "prophetic discernment" and reading the signs of the times that, "involves both divine disclosure and the human shaping of God's word" (Osmer 2005:134). Here questions will be raised from the specific Christian traditions, normative practices, theology and ethics. Put another way, the question is, what forms ought Christian praxis to take in the South Africa social context?

5.2. The building blocks of a Contextual Theology of labour in South Africa

With respect to a contextual theology of labour, four aspects are important to note:

- i. A theology of work labour needs to read the signs of the times in order to discern what God is doing to build a world, free from exploitation and want. As intimated previously, any theology of a marginalised people and workers (who are by and large marginalised) must be a theology that assesses reality from "below," from "the underside of history." Much more need not be said here since the importance of reading the Bible to understand the nature of YAHWEH as a God of liberation who is known primarily in works of justice, mercy, kindness to the poor, excluded and exploited was spelt out in chapter three.

- ii. A theology of labour must affirm that every human being has inalienable dignity. Work gives meaning to life and is an opportunity to participate in God's creative and continuing work of liberation to build a more just world. It is for this reason that everyone has a right or obligation to work. As stated above, work is intended to build a coexistent (Jer. 22:13-16), and pleasurable (Eph. 2:10) relationship between God and humanity. It is never intended for humanity to live in drudgery, want and misery.
- iii. Human work has significance and must improve social relationships. Work is not just for ourselves but to improve the lot of all humanity as we move into God's ultimate purpose, the new creation.
- iv. As with all authentic Christian theologies, a theology of labour must be a theology of hope. In essence, a theology of labour sees human work as part of God's salvation plan and is eschatological (Eph. 2:10).

The theological reflection on these four building blocks of a contextual theology of work that follow is drawn from the Bible, the writings of the theologians identified in this dissertation, the interviews conducted and the author's experience of growing up in a working class home where both parents were unionized workers.

As a Christian activist, researcher and pastor who ministered in mostly working class situations, this study seeks to make a contribution to a contextual theology of labour by drawing on the insights gained from the previous chapter. Cochrane (1991:279) affirms these insights as "local, existing and incipient theologies of work."

5.2.1. Reading the signs of the times: A theology from the underside of history

A theology from below has to start with the experience of those who are oppressed and be prepared to listen and work with others in their quest for liberation. Albert Nolan is adamant that a "genuine theology of work will have to be a worker's theology, a theology that is constructed by workers for workers" (1991:160). Cochrane goes further to argue, "a fully mature theology of work...will only emerge when there is a fully autonomous presence of

workers and Christian community workers who are helping to define the theology by which the community understands itself, its ministry and its mission in the world” (1991:188).

South African contributors to the debate, Cochrane (1977), Balia (1989), Nolan (1991), Kumalo (2002), Gwala (2007) and Zwane (2012) all stress that a genuine theology of work must be a “theology from below.” Such orientation is often suspicious of the Christian tradition that uncritically supports the economic and political *status quo* that invariably metes out injustice to workers.

All work, whether remunerated or not is explicitly theological as it has significance to self, others, the earth and God. As such, work is a transforming and liberating activity. Liberation theologians such as, Mosala (1989), Boesak (1976), Vellem (2007), Aquino (1993), Oduyoye (1986), Bonino (1975), Gutierrez (1976), Boff (1987) all affirm that the starting point of theology is not from some dogmatic assertion about God but from “critical reflection on praxis” (Gutierrez 1976:9)

Steve de Gruchy (1999), however, makes it clear that any theology in/for/of/about work must begin with faith reflection on the experiences of concrete realities of the marginalised and needs to become a commitment to liberation. He argues that it may disturb “previous ways of doing theology” (1999:57) because theology is never a final statement. Rather, it is an on-going process of reflection open to change and transformation as it seeks to formulate concepts and action in the light of contemporary experience. Theology should be a reflection on praxis and always the second movement that comes after involvement (Boff 1987:22; Aquino 1993:10-11).

Does that mean that the professional theologian has nothing or little to contribute to a theology of labour? The idea that academics, church leaders and theologians are unable to express solidarity with or make a contribution toward a theology of labour makes no sense. Ideally, a theology of labour must be a reflection of workers upon their experience and their struggles in the workplace, but theologians should assist in this process by sharing insights and help conceptualise such a theology, yielding a dialogic and collaborative process. The researcher concurs with Sithembiso Zwane that the professional theologian and the worker need each other in a collaborative effort to write a genuine theology of work. One cannot do without the other; they need each other (2012:47).

Charles Villa-Vicencio in, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, (1992:221-25 and 234-37) does an excellent summary understanding of Frederick Engels, Karl Marx and John Rawls. In his analysis of economic justice, labour and theology, he argues,

When an economic system denies Christians the opportunity and right to live for the sake of God's universal household it strikes at the very basis of what it means to be a person created by God to be in community with other people. (1992:218)

For Villa-Vicencio to speak of economic management, theologically means “ensuring the best possible livelihood for everyone. It is about liberating economic structures to ensure that no one suffers exploitation or is as strangers or aliens” (1992:128). In trying to find a theoretical framework for justice in an unjust world, he turns to Engels, Marx and Rawls to hold in tension the nexus between theology and economic justice. He sees this as the focal point of a “Theology of Reconstruction” (1992:128), the same must go for theology (or a Theo-centric interpretation of the Church's relationship to the working class) of labour.

Marx's Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach has much relevance for this section on labour: ‘The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it’ (Marx 1975:423). The central point of departure for Liberation Theology over other Western political theologies is unity of theory and praxis. This unity is a distinct Marxian contribution to theology.

A leading political theologian of the 1980's, Charles Davis captures the challenge of contemporary theology to hold in balance scholastic thought, interpretation of reality and an ability to work for the transformation of society. In his work, *Theology and Political Society*, Davis makes the distinction between the political and technocratic ends of politics as dating back to the Aristotelian distinction between ‘praxis and *poiesis*’ between doing and making” (1980:2). He goes on to distinguish between *poiesis*—as a sense of designing and shaping an artefact—and praxis concerned with moral, social and political action that has meaning and *telos* in and of themselves.

In many situations of social and political conflict, similar understandings have led to a paradigm shift in praxis. Through the quest for meaningful work and freedom, many had a

“God experience” (Aquino 1993:1; Gutierrez 1976: 4-5). One such example, in the nexus of theology and labour, is “The Peoples’ Budget Campaign” (PBC).¹⁷

The PBC is a fusion of labour, political, social and theological analyses of a civil society coalition. Labour groups, faith communities and civil society organizations held government accountable for a progressive budget, amongst many other pieces of legislation, to ensure its most vulnerable citizens were guaranteed the constitutional promise of social security.

Albert Nolan points out that it is when forming alliances with members of the black working class that one can transcend theological captivity, and develop an authentic theology of labour (1991:160). Social and economic location often influences how one understands society. This position still holds today as it did back in 1995 when the GINI Coefficient has remained at a disparate 7.5 out of 10, where 0 is the most equal society and 10 the most unequal society. Several studies by Studies in Poverty and Inequality Institute indicate that black students are least likely to progress to tertiary education when compared to their white counterparts.¹⁸ For Jose Miguez Bonino theology has no vantage point for all times and places rather it has to reflect on a particular social location (1979:262). Accordingly in South Africa, it is only by standing with those who were the victims of apartheid oppression that one could begin to see more clearly what is happening in society—looking at the world from below.

Villa-Vicencio, calls practitioners of theology, not just to be in solidarity with the poor and oppressed but, “(to) seek to escape the repression of the iron cage, people who dare to think the unthinkable” (1989:13). In this way, an authentic theology of labour can be born which can speak of the living, powerful presence of God, the major actor in history. Despite bearing the brunt of oppression workers were able to see themselves and their organizations as important sources of power in South Africa.

It is when theology arises out of an interaction with a concrete situation that it can become a living and dynamic discipline. There is a need to move beyond reflection, rhetoric and theoretical debate about the liberation of workers. Rather, it is important to respond critically to the situation of misery, humiliation, suffering and injustice that workers experience under

¹⁷ <<http://www.sacc.org.za/campaigns/>>, [Accessed 27 November 2015].

¹⁸ <<http://www.spuii.org.za/index.php/about-spuii/>>, [Accessed 22 September 2015].

largely neo-liberal and feudal slavery to transform and renew society. One needs to take COSATU estimation seriously that denies the “privileged” workers and the poor. On average, COSATU estimates indicate that one employed worker provides for about five persons in the home community. The myth that there is a gulf between worker and the poor—and that the worker is privileged—needs to be dispelled.

Jose Porfirio Miranda argues that Marxism needs to be taken seriously not just to understand better how social change occurs but to become agents of transformation. He contends “only intellectual blindness could lead one to assert that the working class masses accept the wage system with true freedom” (Miranda 1974:24). In Marx’s famous adage, he claims:

Religious distress is at the same time the expression of the real distress and the protest against the real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of the heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people (Marx 1994:57).

In Marx’s sense, the abolishing of religion is the illusory happiness of the people that is the real demand for happiness. Christianity was used by the dominant culture to perpetuate and justify their dominance even while providing consolation it enforces alienation and a sense of “false consciousness.” But this is a misreading of Marx ascribed to a selected portion of this quotation. If Christianity was a problem to Marx he would not have devoted so much attention to it. As Marx continues:

It is therefore the task of history, once the other-world of truth has vanished, to establish the truth of the world. It is the immediate task of philosophy, which is in the service of history, to unmask self-estrangement in its unholy forms once the holy form of human self-estrangement has been unmasked.¹⁹

Miranda holds the basic thesis that Marx and the Bible subvert “a philosophy of oppression” (Miranda 1974:xi) in that it shares the same views about oppression and injustice. Both Marxism and Christianity claim to be moving towards a new society. The Christian tradition holds before its adherents the hope of the kingdom of God—a time of divine perfection. Marxists proclaim salvation through “the class that is no class”—a utopian workers’ paradise. Marx portrays humanity as concrete beings, both spiritual and material living in a free world and open society that they can redeem.

¹⁹ <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique.../intro.htm/>>, [Accessed 20 October 2015].

A theology from below will use Marxists tools of analysis to help read the signs of the time. It can inspire a more authentic practice of faith and lead to orthopraxis. It is not enough to understand the world, but to change it. Just as the eschatological passages of the New Testament have time and again brought regeneration to Christian theology similarly, the Marxist critique challenges the ESC to take humanity rooted in history seriously. The Marxist critique also poses a very critical question to the Churches, namely in whose interest does the church serve? It calls the Church to recognize its class position and choose either the side of the oppressed or the oppressor. As Marx puts it, his thesis is not about the abolition of religion but the abolition of injustice and misperceptions that allow religion to be used to spread false ideologies and keep its adherents in a state of misperception about ideologies such as love, forgiveness and reconciliation. It is the task of philosophy, says Marx in a critique on Hegel's concept of the rightness of law in Germany, to challenge philosophy and use its concepts to create the conditions of meaningful social change rather than to create a chimera or illusion without unhinging the *status quo*.

The following sections need to be read with Marx's critique of Hegel's philosophy in mind. What, one might ask, is the equilibrium in determining the Church's relation to the businessperson and entrepreneur? Surely the Marxian position does not contradict the just use and distribution of resources in the Christian community? All things being equal, there is little indication of this in South Africa, Africa and the rest of the world—historical relations of distribution of wealth support overwhelmingly those who have a surfeit of possession. This is the reality—certainly in South Africa—where the “Prosperity Gospel” pundits fall under the negative side of Marx's thesis. It is where injustice poses as justice—certainly where the historical reality of accumulation, the inequitable access and distribution of resources creates an unjust labour scenario—be it the unfair accumulation of resources or unfair distribution to the worker that Marx's critique of religion must apply.

5.2.2. Affirming human dignity and participating in God's liberating activity

People are the signet of God's creation and are endowed with the greatest gift and responsibility to care for creation (Gen. 1:28). This responsibility offers an opportunity to build a new world.

From a careful reading of Genesis “domination” does not necessary mean absolute supremacy but is rather “responsible stewardship” of the earth and having compassion for fellow humans. The current ecological crisis is evidence enough to show how people have misused the theme of domination in Genesis to justify particular economic growth policies with little consideration for nature. Through work, human beings participate in God’s continuing work of creation also referred to as *creation continua*. Human beings are the crown of God’s creation and the primary subjects of work. Work should and could liberate by serving and protecting the interest of humanity and nature.

God never destined humans to be enslaved by work. It is clear from God’s liberating acts in the history of Israel when they were slaves in Egypt (Deut. 5). People were created to be in control of work and not slaves to it. It is in and through work that the human family should care for each other and the environment. With advanced technology, humans can so often be reduced to statistics; the producers, the demand of the market or the consumers. Yet, it is necessary to give technology “a human face” in order to consider norms and principles that serve the human person above that which enslaves. Work—as given by God—is a way of expressing true humanity. Racial capitalism was abhorrent because it was a system built to exclude black workers from economic policymaking and to confine them to performing designed roles decided by those who controlled capital. The system was geared to exploit and keep black people at the bottom of the economic ladder. It did not take seriously that all human beings are image bearers of God but reduced black humanity to units of labour to serve their white masters. In 1982, the General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in Ottawa, Canada took the brave step of declaring apartheid a heresy. Many other churches soon followed suit with similar resolutions. If apartheid was declared a heresy, then surely the apartheid means of labour and production—based on capitalism—is a heresy too. It is a relevant comparison to note that attempts to declare capitalism and neo-liberalism a heresy have failed dismally.

Christian praxis demands critical analysis of society, exploring ways to deal with the contradictions within to transform reality to make it more human. It is for this reason that churches should support organizations that help workers gain control of their lives to become meaningful and responsible participants in God’s liberating activity. The primary emphasis of the works of all the contemporary theologians reviewed in this dissertation point to the fact that human beings in some way or another participate in God’s work of building the future. The

theme of God as a worker has already been explored.²⁰ God, as Worker and Creator (Gen. 14:19-22, Isa. 40:28, 45:18), affirms the call for humans to work. People are the summit of God's creation, and work is an ontological expression of people made in God's image (Gen. 1:26-27). Every human being has inalienable dignity and in that way is a co-creator with God. For this reason, the way we use technology—whether to enhance the welfare of all on the planet or to destroy through means of weapons, indicates whether or not human beings are covenant partners in God's continuous process of creation. Both Miroslav Volf (1991) and Darrell Cosden (2006) contend that work has eternal value and meaning in God's sight for building a new creation.

Work as a human activity is not for the individual but for the benefit of the entire human family, the generations to come and God's created order. People are co-creators with God. They have the choice to work co-operatively and for harmonious relationships, or to alienate themselves from God's Creation, the world and nature. This relationship between humans, nature and God's created order, provides an understanding of work that goes beyond the satisfaction of biological survival. This relationship allows people to find their true identity in the service of their fellow human beings, nature, Creation and even Godself. Human life is sacred and not expendable; therefore, people can never be considered as objects of history (Gen. 4). They are always subjects that constitute the social world and will always shape it. Work is central to what it means to be human and through work people become responsible political and historical agents actualizing themselves as beings of praxis. For this reason, labour organizations, trade unions and churches have an obligation to work towards correcting the moral and physical destruction that capitalism in every form has caused. Cosden emphasizes that labour and creation are all part of God's salvation plan (2006:53).

With unemployment so high in South Africa, it is important to consider the right to work within the framework of a contextual theology of labour. On the eve of the dawn of democracy, Buti Tlhaagale (1993:5) warned that every person has the right to work, and human rights and liberation must address the plight of the seven million unemployed at that time. Tlhaagale argued that a theology of labour should be at the service of the poor and not just focus on worker rights. For him, simple justice demands that people work to fulfil their basic needs for food, clothing shelter and medicine. Employment offers human beings the opportunity to use their gifts and

²⁰ See chapter three above.

skills in co-operation with the God of creation. Tlhagale (1993:5) proposed that the millions of jobless have a duty or moral responsibility to do whatever they can to create jobs in the informal economy. He also raised the issue of a mass action campaign by the unemployed to demand their right to work.

Work is the means through which people obtain a sense of self-respect, dignity and security. Society is under obligation to provide all its members with the opportunity to work, find fulfilment and meaning as creatures God created for work. The right to work is fundamental to the doctrine of creation (Gen. 1:28, 2:15, 3:17) as it is to human socio-economic rights. Corresponding to this right is a duty on the part of society to ensure that the right is protected. Unemployment and underemployment are, therefore, an indictment of the values of society. No amounts of welfare grants can substitute for work and a sense of dignity it offers individuals. Having said that, there is moral credit to the constitutional right to a living wage for those who are unable—through no fault of their own—to be provided a basic subsistence social security grant.

With the right to full employment also comes the right to a living wage and other minimum guarantees. Guarding against the violation of a worker's dignity, will include amongst other things; adequate health care, security for old age, leisure, and reasonable security against arbitrary dismissal and a grant for the older person whose income falls below the stipulated level. These guarantees are necessary not because they are charitable but rather because it is what justice demands, and is consistent with the teaching of the Christian tradition. Any pattern of economic activity which exploits the weak is an affront to the gospel hence it is important always to question whether the economic system allows for the life of the other. One cannot have security at the expense of others who are image bearers of the God of Creation.

Worker organizations and trade unions in South Africa have regularly called for a living wage and minimum guarantees to protect workers. Sithembiso Zwane reflecting on the contemporary plight of casual workers in the Ethiopian Catholic Church in Zion contends that, "The God of the Bible is extremely protective of those vulnerable to the exploitation in the workplace of their position or condition" (2012:71). He advocates a theology of decent work and argues that it be critical to protecting vulnerable workers against all types of exploitation.

Life is given new meaning through the interpretation of work as affirming human dignity and participating in God's liberating activity. Everyone should be involved in building a new world of justice and peace in anticipation of the kingdom of God.

5.2.3. Work as service in God's ultimate purpose, the new creation

Doing theology in the context of oppression and exploitation demands an element of partisanship and bias through taking a "preferential option for the poor." Gutierrez warns that taking the option for the poor is not a call to generous relief action, but building a social order that will reflect the values of the kingdom. He claims that this will only become reality when theory and praxis connect that the gospel become a reality. As with all other liberation theologians, he stresses that theology only comes after involvement. Faith in God is not to assert God's existence but to act for God (Gutierrez 1979:200).

When reading reality through the eyes of workers during the period reviewed in this study, there was no way one could have accepted the *status quo* in South Africa. In the midst of the worker's struggle, God is encountered because workers are the bearers of the Good News through any choice of their own and because of God's preferential option. This is not to paint a glossy picture of workers who may also circumvent the laws that make for good labour relations. The reality in South Africa is—mainly—that the greater majority of workers work within the parameters of laws that provide the employer with the right to dismiss the worker; the many attempts to declare strikes unprotected; and prolong negotiations raising the cause and effect of worker action sometimes disproportionate to the end result of wages. Certainly workers are not saints but employers are frequently not far from devils using every financial, resource and even policy leverage on governments. It is within this context that the call is to remember the adage that workers and their representative organizations are harbingers of hope for a future that belongs to the people of God.

A theology of labour is an attempt to articulate a reading of reality from the perspective of workers in their quest for true liberation. Faith reflection on the contemporary labour situation will demand changes to the social, economic and political order. John Raines claims that action is essential because, "humans make the given social and natural order an object of their

reflection, and so are not limited to reproducing that world but can transcend and transform it” (Raines 1985:376-377).

The commitment to action—the historical praxis of liberation is the first step towards and theology of work and labour. Theology is always a second act; it always comes after involvement (Gutierrez 1974:5). As Gutierrez (1974:153) affirms:

There is only one human destiny, irreversibly assumed by Christ...His [*sic*] redemptive work embraces all the dimensions of existence and brings them to their fullness...the salvific action of God underlies all human existence.

As workers become the historical protagonists confronting and changing the situation of misery in the world that they become active participants with God in the historical process.

J. C. Davies asserts that belief in God as incarnate should result in political involvement to promote the proper and just recognition of the material aspect of human life and also summons people to change the world (1976:38). The incarnation is significant because God confirmed the goodness and importance of the material creation when God came to dwell with us in human flesh (John 1:14). It is the incarnation, the truth of the Word made flesh, which should drive all Christians to seek and serve Christ in the poor and oppressed. This robust understanding of the incarnation gives daily human work new meaning and teaches us about the role of human activity in transforming the world into the likeness and to the order of Christ. Juan Luis Segundo (1974:7) contends that the power of God is always “humanizing power.” It is in the struggle for socio-economic and political liberation that human wholeness is experienced.

In the 1980’s, Tlhaqale challenged the black working class to become agents of their liberation (1985:127). He argued that power would never be given to people unless they struggle to achieve it. In the same way today, workers know why they are poor and oppressed and once committed to change, can move history forward through their work. It is in and through work that the people of Israel were able to realize their humanity and transform nature (Genesis story) as well as break the shackles of slavery (Exodus). Through work, human beings can express their full humanity and usher in a new age of justice and peace.

As Christians commit themselves to the struggle for justice and identify with the hopes and aspirations of the poor, they will begin to question and challenge the dominant theology of the

churches. Many workers have discovered that Jesus identified with those who are marginalized and declared that the kingdom of God belongs to them. It is this powerful symbol and vision of the kingdom that belongs to the poor which can become the driving force and motivation for action.

Workers are often most sensitive to suffering around them and often deal creatively with injustice. It is only when their needs, insights and perceptions are taken seriously, that a new social order becomes possible. Christian witness and theology will only become authentic and contextual when it shares in the dreams and aspirations of workers as well as find concrete expression in the worker's quest for liberation.

To build a world of justice and peace is often the major driving force in the lives of many workers. From the Latin American context Jose Miranda (1981:43), writes:

The fact that Christians have not set out to conquer the world for love of neighbour shows that they do not believe that the messianic *eschaton* has arrived...by this very fact, they deny that Jesus is Messiah. They have withdrawn from others of millions of hungry, tormented human beings, and they worship a mental idol invented by civilization itself.

A theology of labour must unequivocally promote peace and justice of the kingdom of God. Jim Wallis notes that by failing to make the kingdom of God the centre of theology and preaching "saved individuals comfortably fit into the old social order, while the new goes unannounced. The social meaning of conversion is lost, and a privatized gospel supports the status quo" (1981:34). If the kingdom of God is the key to a theology of labour, then there will be no place for an otherworldly faith or acquiescence to evil. Christians should constantly be wrestling to understand more fully the working of God's Spirit in our day and age. They need reminding that the kingdom of God is more than a transformation of the social order, it is also a need to know that it can be nothing less.

A contextual theology of labour requires a deep spirituality. Prayer and contemplation are not an escape from reality but rather tapping into the source of eternal power, a search for clarified vision and above all a striving for the kingdom of God.

A theology of labour is not exclusive to Christians but of necessity must concern itself with all creation. While Christians will analyse the situation through the lenses of the Judeo-Christian

tradition, it is necessary to recognise that it is not only Christians who are workers and who suffer injustices. Christians should at all times be open to forming alliances with groups and organisations that share the same goals and objectives to change the present social order towards a more just dispensation. It is clear that the current status of labour movement in South Africa consists of, amongst others, Christians, Hindus, Muslims and Jews. It is through the quest for liberation that God is experienced and becomes a common mandate. Wolfram Kistner (1985:74-82) stresses that it was in the “pilgrimage of pain” especially amongst workers and their families that God was encountered in South Africa.

Through analysis and faith reflection, it is important to identify signs and symbols of the kingdom in the contemporary situation. Put in the form of a question it is important to ask how is the divine dimension manifest in the historical reality? Boff claims that this can be determined by simply enquiring if God is affirmed or denied, whether justice is maintained or denied or by determining whether a communion of brothers and sisters is realized or not (Boff 1984:10).

Using Boff’s criteria to determine whether God’s grace is present in reality, there can be little doubt that the Trade Union Movement was a witness to the presence of God amongst workers. In the Trade Union Movement, one had a glimpse of the kingdom because there human dignity was affirmed, and solidarity became a vehicle and channel of God’s grace for people to become subjects of history. It is through acts of solidarity that workers discovered they are one family who had to work together for the common good. Buti Tlhagale makes the point that solidarity amongst workers will eliminate all cosmetic barriers between them such as, “ethnic divisions, divisions between company unions and the labour unions, or even ideological divisions” (1985:133). Workers transcended barriers and created the possibility of shaping their destinies through solidarity. It is through solidarity that workers experienced what it meant to be fully human as they collectively took responsibility and participated in the decisions that affected their lives.

Trade unions and worker organizations continually expose and confront sin in all forms of abuse and exploitation that mars the image of God. It is, therefore, sacrilegious to bless God and curse one’s brothers and sisters who created in the image and likeness of God. Through the Labour Movement, God is at work enabling and actualizing humanity to build the world free from exploitation and want. While it is necessary to recognize and appreciate the relativity

of all human schemes and achievements, there can be no denying that God is present in the struggle for justice. Furthermore, it is important to note that while economic transformation and self-actualization are possible in the contemporary situation, the kingdom of God, absolute actualization to which all humanity should strive belongs to God.

5.2.4. A theology of labour as a call to revolutionary hope

People will simply be stuck in the present if there is no hope, vision and dream for the future. It is for this reason that a theology of labour must essentially be a theology of hope. This hope for the future is not a sedative for the pain and misery encountered in the work situation because an authentic theology of labour can never legitimate a praxis that represents a flight from daily reality. It is a hope derived from the struggle for justice and equality. It is authentic hope in the future that belongs to God. Allan Boesak (1976:154) sums it up well in a sermon when he says; “our dreams for the liberation of humankind are our dreams of justice, of human dignity, of peace. These are for this earth and this history.”

The whole of the Bible is a story of God’s self-revelation, breathing into and creating human history to make the impossible possible. God acts in the history of humankind and people are not just passive objects, but subjects in making history. People find hope through openness to the transcendent. While one cannot reduce this eschatological hope of the kingdom of God with human liberation, we cannot deny the relationship. A theology of labour will constantly seek to capture and emphasize the eschatological dimension of the Christian faith.

Jürgen Moltmann in his (1993) *Theology of Hope*, stresses the importance of eschatology. He makes it the centre of his theology and claims that the Bible reveals God as Lord of the cosmos as well as God’s promises (1993:82). For Moltmann, historical events are provisional, yet and not yet; “they intimate and point forward to something that does not yet exist in its fullness in them” (1993:116-117). It is the task of Christians to identify the contradictions in society, to embrace hope and to work towards the promising future that God holds out for all people. It is when people commit themselves to the historical praxis of liberation that they become actors in human history.

Leonardo Boff's words are encouraging to those in South Africa who have seen political liberation in their lifetime but still live in the hope of economic liberation. He claims that Christians incarnate the cross of Christ through their struggle for justice. He offers hope to those who have grown bone-weary and bruised in their endeavours, "the suffering implied in hope can generate awesome and unexpected forces of liberation" (1979:150).

There is little doubt that it is the witness of the dedicated, heroic and self-sacrificing women and men killed in the mining strikes, referred to in the introduction that will continue to inspire workers in their quest for liberation. Often, the vision of the kingdom of God is launched by a combination of revolt and hope. Christians should realize that history is the only place to build the kingdom of God. The kingdom is not a promise that to wait passively to materialise but rather a task to be accomplished. Christians are called to live a life of faith which bears testimony to hope in the future.

It is important for Christians to realize that they are not self-initiators of justice or revolution but are merely responding to God's revolution and justice. Human justice is only a pale reflection of God's justice.

The future of humanity is the future of God. Christians believe that all humankind is moving towards bringing about a new creation. It is only through cooperation with the God of justice and peace that a new society can be born. A theology of work and labour must, therefore, stress the positive concept of human nature and potential. All humanity is fundamentally sinful and wholly corrupted by the fall but through the work of Christ humanity, death and resurrection was restored full of hope and dignity. Such an emphasis in theology is revolutionary because it is open to the future and will encourage people to become co-partners with God in the divine mission of total human transformation. It is also revolutionary because it asserts that a new just and humane society is possible. The revolutionary hope lies in humanity's ability to change history in the direction of the kingdom of God.

A fundamental weakness of many theologies of hope and liberation is that it fails to analyse the social forces of the day that can achieve and sustain revolutionary hope or devise the necessary strategies to achieve it. Hope and strategy are important to birth a new society. Albert Nolan in assessing the theologies of the ESC claims that while there was a growing

denunciation of injustice there was no clear annunciation of hope for a future liberated society (1985:197).

A theology of labour must essentially be a theology of hope because it does not merely seek to understand injustice but bring it to an end and find meaning in a world full of contradictions. Such a theology will go beyond radical questions to enhancing a vision of a future liberated society. It will survive the Marxist critique of religion as an opiate. The litmus test for an authentic theology of labour will not be whether it exposes and makes us aware of the contradictions in the world, but whether it equips society to respond adequately to them.

5.3. Conclusion

Through engaging the third stage of Richard Osmer's hermeneutical circle, this chapter expanded on the four identified building blocks for a contextual theology of labour for Southern Africa:

- i. It was argued that a theology of labour needs to read the signs of the time. It clarified that a theology of labour must be a reflection of workers on their experience in the workplace but there must be a collaborative or dialogical process with theologians and others. Furthermore, an authentic theology of labour should use Marxist analysis and tools from the social sciences to better understand how people can become agents of transformation building a world free from exploitation and want.
- ii. It affirmed the inalienable dignity of humans, the crown of God's creation who are the primary subjects of work. People were never destined to be enslaved by work, rather work is central to what it means to be human. Through caring for all humanity and creation, people help to build a more just world.
- iii. It sought to clarify that a theology of labour should improve the lot of all humanity and move towards God's ultimate purpose, a new creation. The works of several liberation theologians were cited to point out that it is only when theory and praxis connect that reality is changed.

- iv. It stressed that a theology of labour must focus on hope and should not be stuck in the current reality. It argues that a theology of labour has to be open to the future and work towards the realisation of the kingdom of God.

The focus of the next chapter is to offer a pastoral response to a theology of labour. Practical ways to close the gap between theology and practice will be explored.

CHAPTER SIX

A PASTORAL RESPONSE TO A THEOLOGY OF LABOUR

6.1. Introduction

This chapter will seek to engage in the pragmatic task, the fourth stage of Osmer's hermeneutical circle. The question raised is: "How might we develop an action plan to adequately response to the challenges posed by a contextual theology of work and labour in South Africa?" (2005:134).

Practical ways are sought in which the Church can close the gap between theological understanding of work and historical practice. Furthermore, I will explore how the Church can transform itself through embracing a theology of labour.

6.2. English-speaking Churches and a theology of labour

During the period under review, the ESC were shaped and conditioned by the historical and social context—a context defined by the class, power and economic structures of the time. The sociologist of religion, Otto Maduro (1982:132-142) and the political scientist, Peter Walshe (1983:20) among others show that churches either serve as reinforcement (i.e., a strengthening force) for the ruling class by legitimating domination or in advocating revolutionary service in the interest of those dominated.

Chapter two revealed that the role of the ESC has been ambiguous and contradictory as it frequently identified with the ideology and interest of the dominant class.

The work of organisations like CUPC, YCW, ICT and the SACC bear witness that churches can escape from its bondage to the ruling classes and are not necessarily condemned to perform a conservative function. Maduro (1982), Borer (1998), Levine (1986), Villa-Vicencio (1990) among others, argue that the social function of religion and that of churches change, "according

to the historical, structural, and conjunctival mutation of either the society or the religious field” (Maduro 1982:120). In other words, there is an ambiguity about religion and the church. If allied with the dominant classes it serves a conservative role reinforcing the power of that group, but if allied with the oppressed it can play a revolutionary role in building a new society Boff (1981), Gutierrez (1973), Bonino (1975) and Atherton (2003) amongst others recognize the revolutionary potential of religion. They claim that only once the oppressed groups recapture and reinterpret the dimensions of the liberation of the Christian faith will the revolutionary process begin.

A theology of labour must take the role of the Church as an empirical manifestation in history seriously. The South African Kairos theologians went beyond abstract principles, dogmatic assertions and institutional analysis to understand how the Church implicates itself in the class, power and economic structures of South African society. Simply put, a theology of labour is a political theology as defined in the Kairos Documents as “prophetic witness.” This prophetic witness needs to be re-examined in terms of the moral and ethical standards of labour relations, far beyond the current Labour Relations Act. God’s people need to learn to listen and work together with people who do not necessarily speak religious language.

A theology of labour must seek to understand the location of its context and take reality seriously. Such a theology cannot be abstract or “other worldly.” As was already stated in the previous chapter, a theology of labour must be concerned about the kingdom of God. The Church is called to be a sign and symbol to the people of faith and the whole created order. These signs and symbols only take on meaning as people participate in the struggle for liberation. Through this process, new knowledge and a new view of reality will be gained. The new view of reality will in turn give rise to a new vision of the Church. As stated above, the dialogic process must be put into action, even if it means learning a “new” language with which church people are unfamiliar. This might mean collaborating with worker groups, organisations and trade unions or even convening study groups (e.g., SPROCAS in the 1970’s and 1980’s) to develop strategies to promote fairer labour practices and pursue economic justice.

6.2.1. The Church: A sign and instrument of liberation and hope

If we take the incarnation seriously then, the Church must become a visible presentation of God's grace a sign of God's liberating activity and an instrument of hope and liberation. Gutierrez claims that "as a sign of liberation of man [*sic*] and history, the Church itself in its concrete existence ought to be a place of liberation. A sign should be clear and understandable. If we conceive of the Church as a sacrament of the salvation of the world then, it has all the more obligation to manifest in its visible structures the message it bears" (1973:265). In other words, the authenticity of the Church's mission is tested by the manner in which its structures and programs identify with or support those who are marginalized and excluded in society. The reality is that the structures and organization of the ESC-aligned with those of power and privilege. They mirrored that of society that failed to expose the *Missio Dei* (God's mission) to the worker who often bore the brunt of exploitation and oppression. The time has come for a thoroughly revised the mind-set of "church and work" as the *Missio Dei* and where "mission" programmes reconsider the dialogics with workers and their representative movements. Churches should also consider appointing chaplains to provide pastoral support to workers.

It is fair to conclude that a contradiction exists between theological belief and what happens in practice. Church structures, practices, congregational life and all its activities need to reflect justice and greater solidarity with workers and their cause. Four principles are identified and developed to strengthen the link between theological belief and practice.

- i. **Principle One:** The Church that lives in closest identity with the poor and excluded is a symbol of liberation and hope. If the Church hopes to become a sign and symbol of liberation, it has to take the poor seriously by living in close identity with the marginalized and excluded. From the Latin American context, Boff (1987), Sobrino (1991), Bonino (1975), among others argue, if the Church does not break out of its captivity to the dominant classes, all its charitable endeavours will simply model an ideology of domination. These theologians claim that the existing church, however, good their intentions to those marginalized will never be a church of and for the poor. These contentions hold true for the Church in the Southern African context as well.

- ii. **Principle Two:** The poor and the marginalized as agents of “Good News.” The poor and marginalized have to become the historical protagonist within the Church for only they can evangelize the Church and wrest it out of its complacency.
- iii. **Principle Three:** Worship and liturgy must assist Christians in their daily struggles at the workplace. Liturgy and worship should help Christians to make sense of their lives and respond to the needs of the suffering world. The gap between worship and the world of work can be closed. The word “liturgy” means the work that worshippers perform in the act of worship.
- iv. **Principle Four:** Ministerial formation that focuses on a theology of work and labour brings the Church closer to the world of workers.

The connection between churches and the workplace can be closed if there is a commitment to theological education that seeks to understand the nature of work and organized labour. A cursory examination of the curricula at seminaries and other academic, religious faculties in South Africa reveals that the world of work is not an essential part of theological training.

6.2.2. The Church that identifies with the struggles of communities is a symbol of hope

In South Africa as elsewhere in the world, society is defined by the coexistence of a complex diversity of Not-for-Profit organisations sometimes representing civic organizations. Some of the stakeholders represent; children, older persons, gender groups, a host of research groups, academic, organized labour, business, including entrepreneurial ventures. There are also many mass-based grassroots organizations with their particular interest. In this situation, the Church cannot operate as a third force with its agenda outside of community ideals and desires. The Church needs to devise strategies in cooperating and identification with rather than in isolation from or in competing with these groups.

The basis of such cooperation is spelt out in the South African Constitution, which encourages civil society to build “an active citizenry” for the purpose of strengthening democracy. Social collaboration such as supporting, offering criticism and helping to build organs of people’s power may de-legitimize the domination of the ruling classes and contribute towards the

ongoing liberating, humanising and democratic processes. These processes have already begun;²¹ hence we have a “genesis” of a new church in South Africa. It must, however, go beyond merely raising its prophetic voice against injustice and identifying with the poor and oppressed to become the Church of the poor and oppressed. In this way, the gap between theory and practice will be narrowed, and the message will eventually become the medium. Through the Church’s organisational structures and prophetic practice, the gospel has to find concrete expression in the social, economic and political reality in word deed and sign.

It is only when the Church reads the signs of the times that it can understand what social and political role it plays and can fulfil its calling to witness to the kingdom. It is only through a deliberate and conscious partnership with the poor and the oppressed that the Church can create a more participatory society and give witness to the *Missio Dei* (God’s Mission). It must become a priority to network local communities into global solidarity. As stated times before, human liberation is only possible through the poor and the oppressed. They are the harbingers of hope for a new world. As they become actively engaged in the liberation process, they become co-workers with Christ creating a new society.

The Church needs to keep the subversive memory of Jesus of Nazareth alive through worship, feeling the heartbeat and pulse of the oppressed in reading the signs of the times, and a commitment to transformation. A good place to start the process is through liturgical reform.

6.2.3. The poor as agents of Good News

Leonardo Boff makes it clear that the function of the Church is to “make visible and historical the salvific efficiency of Jesus Christ and his mission. The Church is a “sacrament sign” and “sacrament instrument” of liberation” (1981:125). He contends that the Church should never reproduce the existing social order but must become a sign and symbol of what society can and should become.

It is only the oppressed that can breathe new life into the Church to become an instrument of liberation and hope. It is in and through the Church of the poor that people participate in their

²¹ See Chapter Two above.

liberation by work for the coming of the kingdom in history. The Church is called to be a sign bearer to humanity and is not an end in itself, but a means to humanized people. Orlando Costas argues that “humanization, understood in its biblical perspective, is not a merely indirect result of Christ’s saving action, it is the heart of Christ’s redemptive activity, for Christ came to save fallen humanity” (1974:195). Expressing faith in Christ it is not a step beyond humanity but rather towards full humanity, a sanctified people.

6.2.4. Liturgical Reform: Reinterpreting the symbols of the faith to respond to the needs of a suffering world

For many workers, there is a contradiction between worship and the reality of everyday life in South Africa. In the ICT Report of the Church and Labour Project Research Group, 80% of workers who participated regarded the Bible as significant yet their experience of church was alienating (Research Group 1991:268-272). In seeking to understand these phenomena Gerald West argues that all workers have a theology. Their faith helps them to get through their daily task at the workplace that is not articulated and often “not affirmed, nurtured and acted upon by the church” hence workers feel alienated from the Church (1999:34).

A theology of labour must seek to let liturgies become an authentic expression and reflection of the faith and experience of workers who constitute a significant sector of the ESC. Cochrane argues if this does not happen the “soul” of the Church will be at stake because it is through “liturgy, songs, rituals dreams and visions” that workers give expression to their struggles (1990:285). Albert Nolan, however, is confident that if Christians could relate worship and the sacraments to the reality of life, “What would be realized is South Africa would be something more than the power of religious symbols. It would realize the Almighty power of God” (1988:214).

Liturgy refers to our corporate worship. Translated it means “work of the people” and implies holy living in and through everyday working to give witness to the reign of God. Jensen points out that Christians cannot separate labour and worship (Jensen 2006:68). While there are diverse ways of celebrating the Eucharist in the denominational traditions, it is the focal point of Christian gatherings in which they celebrate God’s drama of the redemption of the world in Christ. Through the Eucharist, Christian inextricably related to how we understand work.

In the Eucharist, the church proclaims God's liberation in history won for us in Jesus Christ. Through the Eucharist, it celebrates God's enduring covenant. In situations of exploitation and institutional evil, it is hard to celebrate the sacrament with any degree of integrity. Serious contradiction often exists between the Eucharistic fellowship and meaningful community life beyond the celebration of the rite. Collaboration with the forces of evil negates Christ's work of liberation and contradicts the Eucharistic belief that Christ has given victory over sin and death. Rafael Avila claims that the celebration of Eucharist "should be a loud cry of alarm and protest, disquieting and awakening us to socio-political responsibilities" (Avila 1973:81). In this way, the Eucharist can be contextually applied to the experience of those who are poor and oppressed.

The Eucharist is a powerful paradigm of sharing life. In the African context sharing in a communal meal, is the most fundamental way of sharing life and cementing relationships. In the same way that the African meal strengthens unity and confirms a sense of belonging, sharing in the sacramental life of the Church one can call oneself Christian. The ritual stands at the very heart of the Christian faith and is meant to express and manifest the unity of the people of God. At the Eucharistic Table people are reminded that God invites and welcomes and for this reason, they are to welcome and serve in acts of reconciling hospitality. De Gruchy notes that "nowhere else is hope so central, the hope which refuses to accept the present disorder and which longs and works for the coming of God's justice and peace" as in the Eucharistic liturgy (1987:137).

Avila contends that the bread and wine used in the celebration are the "fruit of human labour." To share in the bread and wine is to share in the results of labour by the grace of God (Avila 1973:75). It can be argued that when Christians celebrate the Eucharist they commit ourselves to the struggle against anything that debases and exploits humanity. Avila further comments that "the Eucharist should be the socio-political reactivator and the occasion of confrontation in which the Church judges its commitment to the interest of the socially exploited class" (1973:100). In the Eucharist, the participants become one with those who are physically and spiritually hungry throughout the world. The fellowship of the table should, in fact, strengthen and encourage all who partake, to challenge and overcome injustice wherever encountered. In his (1993), *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, Moltmann sees the Eucharist as "a Shalom meal," a token of the future. He states, "Christ's Supper demonstrates the community's mission

to the world. As a feast to the future, it demonstrates the community's universal hope" (1993:260).

Avila asserts that the Eucharist asks the community of faith to wrestle with many tough questions amongst other things:

Can anyone celebrate the Eucharist with a clean conscience who monopolizes the fruits of labour? Can the Church consecrate the fruit of labour without 'consecrating' the social relationships of production that make work possible? (1973:103).

It was because Camilo Torres grappled with these "tough questions" in a context where worship coexisted peacefully with the injustice that he ceased his priestly functions and took up arms with the freedom fighters in Columbia. He argued that the sacraments in no way change the relationship between oppressed and oppressor. For Torres (1995) and the many workers in South Africa who claims they feel alienated from the Church, the sacrament is a meaningless rite for which did not promote the creation of a more humane and just community.

The gap between ritual and practice needs to be closed. The Eucharistic sharing should extend into every part of daily life, after all, the whole of creation is a place of holiness in which there is no dualism or distinction between the secular and sacred. *The Nonviolent Eucharistic Jesus: A Pastoral Approach*²² is just one example of liturgical reform that embodies and informs Christian witness for the challenges of our day and age.

Worship is central to the life and witness of the Church. Liturgical symbols and expressions authenticate the action in the world. For this reason, it should never legitimize the *status quo* but rather enable church members to reflect on their context and help them to become agents of transformation. To this end, a theology of labour must of necessity find focus in worship to facilitate the experiences of workers.

6.2.5. Theological training

The fact that there is still a paucity of theological statements, resolutions and policy related to a theology of work and labour is an indicator of the captivity of the ESC to the ruling class.

²² <<https://kairossouthernafrica.wordpress.com/category/non-violence/>>, [Accessed 14 June 2014].

It would be interesting to research what percentage of current clergy in the ESC has any family experience of union solidarity. To what degree can clergy, many who are products from the working class, still identify with the aspirations and hopes of workers after their theological education? This question is raised because of the lack of attention, non-support for unions and the demise of organizations such as CUPS and ICT as highlighted in Chapter four.

On the other hand, one needs to question whether the institutional Church protects its clergy so that the historical veneer for accumulation of capital may be used for the suppression of clergy's worker rights. Moreover, why does a theological of work have no or little place in theological formation? It is a fact that the vast majority of South African Christians belong to working class communities. According to COSATU, one worker supports approximately four to five persons in a family, extended family and/or community, hence the term "working poor."²³ This fact in itself should be sufficient rationale for an in-depth study to understand the disjuncture between theological belief and practice.

The problem identified is not unique to South Africa. Armand Larive, an Episcopal priest in the United States, claims that there is "a lack of commitment towards instruction in theology and work at the level where pastoral church leaders get their training." He states further that, "there is also an inherent difficulty in spanning the chasm between theologically articulate and academically credentialed church people, on the one side, and, on the other side, those who have jobs in the "secular" world where the church has no credentials and little expertise" (Larive 2004:3).

Only recently the subject of decent work found its way to the World Council of Churches agenda and collaboration between International Labour Organization and WCC. The last time the issue of work and labour received serious consideration was in the Report of the Advisory Group on Economic Matters, entitled: *Labour, Employment and Unemployment: An Ecumenical Reappraisal*, Geneva, 1987. It, therefore, came as no surprise to find little archival evidence of a meaningful relationship between the Trade Union Movement Secretariat and the SACC besides appeals for funding.

²³ COSATU Statement on Government Growth Path Policy, <<http://www.cosatu.org.za/show.php?ID=4147/>>, [Accessed 14 June 2014].

6.3. Conclusion

In an attempt to answer the question; “What must be done?” Four principle areas were identified through which the Church can give concrete expression to an authentic theology of labour:

- i. The Church needs to become an instrument of liberation and hope.
- ii. The poor must become the agents of Good News and network with all groups working towards human emancipation and the care of creation.
- iii. Liturgical traditions and symbols of the faith must be reinterpreted.
- iv. Theology and labour must form part of Christian education and the theological formation of clergy in seminaries.

With globalization and the technical revolution, the whole concept of labour and work itself might need to be rethought. It is only when there is more comprehensive attention given to a theology of labour that the full potential of the Church as a significant social force in building a just and better future for all in Southern Africa will be realized.

The next chapter will conclude the study and present the main findings and recommend future research in this area.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1. Introduction

The chapter summarises the study, discusses the main findings and makes recommendations for future research.

7.2. Overview of the Study

The research was a descriptive and contextual qualitative study examining the relationship of the ESC to labour during the decade 1985-1995. Semi-structured interviews, as well as archival research, were conducted, and themes that emerged from the data augmented with secondary literature. With regards a brief overview of the present study:

- i. **Chapter One:** A brief motivation was given, as well discussion of the background, limitations and objectives of the study. It further introduced the reader to the major works of South African theologians who have contributed to the debate of church and labour.
- ii. **Chapter Two:** Richard Osmer's model of practical theological interpretation was utilized by sketching the South African historical background critically assessing the role of the ESC and their relationship to labour.
- iii. **Chapter Three:** This chapter examined the Bible and other sources to show how the Church always understood issues of labour. This chapter also discussed the central arguments of four contemporary theologians in order to draw on their works as building blocks for a theology of labour in South Africa.

- iv. **Chapter Four:** This chapter focused on the primary research question, namely what was the relationship of the ESC to labour during the period 1985-1995 using interviews, archival research, secondary literary resources, publications and case studies.
- v. **Chapter Five:** This chapter identified building blocks for a contextual theology of work to close the gap between theory and praxis.
- vi. **Chapter Six:** This chapter engaged the fourth stage of Osmer's hermeneutical circle, exploring practical ways to bridge the gap between theological understanding of work and historical practice.

7.3. Aims and objectives

The main purpose of the study was to examine critically the attitude of the ESC towards the Labour Movements from 1985 to 1995 and assess what lessons can be learnt to develop a contextual theology for South Africa today.

The study answered the following four major questions:

- i. What was the attitude of the ESC towards labour injustices in South Africa between 1985 and 1995?
- ii. What was the contribution of the ESC, if any towards labour rights in South Africa between 1985 and 1995?
- iii. How did the ESC relate to organizations of the labour movement in South Africa between 1985 and 1995?
- iv. What does the history of church-labour relations mean for the Church in contemporary society?

By answering these four major questions, the research achieved the following:

- i. Affirmed that most of the leadership in the ESC was in the hands of whites who lacked the political will and ability to support workers or challenge the oppressive forces in society. While they spoke about opposing apartheid, they failed to translate resolutions in action.
- ii. Established that there was no institutional relationship or coherent programme between the ESC and organised labour. While they were both committed toward the demise of apartheid and worked together towards that end, churches failed to support workers and take up their issues or translate their resolutions into action.
- iii. Revealed that committed individuals and agencies on the margins of the Church like CUPS, ICT and YCW rather than the ESC leadership engaged with workers.
- iv. Recognised that there was no clear articulation of a theology of labour by the ESC during the period under review.
- v. Explored how contextual theology for contemporary South Africa can be developed to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

7.4. Recommendations

Christian theology should have something meaningful to say about human work since it occupies most of our time. Theology should provide answers to the meaning and purpose of work. Does it have value in itself? Does human work have a divine purpose?

- i. **Recommendation One:** there is an urgent need for more theological reflection on a theology of work.

As argued in the introduction of this study, there has been little serious academic work devoted to the relationship to between church and labour. Besides the work of Cochrane (1997), Cochrane and West (1991), Balia (1989) Kumalo (2002), Sibusiso Gwala (2007) and Sithembiso Zwane (2012).

- ii. **Recommendation Two:** There is a general need for more academic writings on “theology and labour” in South Africa.

There are valuable lessons learnt about theological methods to understand the world of work. The Kairos Document is a good example of collaboration with others across the ecumenical spectrum. Another model is that of the Institute for the Study of the Bible (now House of Studies for Worker Ministry, part of the Ujamaa Centre at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal). Here interfacing the socio-economic realities in South Africa with biblical texts is a method of doing theology.

- iii. **Recommendation Three:** The methodologies of these groups should be pursued as a way to engage a theology of labour.

Albert Nolan (1988), James Cochrane (1990) and Steve de Gruchy (1991) have all argued that liturgies must become an authentic expression and reflection of the faith and experience of workers.

- iv. **Recommendation Four:** New liturgies, songs and rituals that express the hopes and dreams of workers and is part of God’s dream for the world needs to be developed to capture the heart and soul of the Church.
- v. **Recommendation Five:** Future research in theology and labour has to give particular attention to issues such as large-scale unemployment, the care for creation, HIV and AIDS, gender violence and the area of theological education and labour.

7.5. Conclusion

This chapter concludes this study that is a direct result of my struggle to understand the relationship between the ESC and labour from 1985-1995. While the objectives of the study were achieved, it is also a humble attempt to contribute to the debate on theology and labour in South Africa with the hope that it may stimulate discussion and lead to further research.

The subject of labour has long been neglected as a major discussion under “Church and Society” or “Church and Social Co-existence.” The issue of dialogics, for instance, could be covered under thematic discussion of “Understanding the Challenges and Opportunities for Church Workers to engage the world of work by understanding its legislation and organisation from within”; another might be “Developing strategies to engage the worker within his or her work context”; “How successful is the worker on the factory floor able to access his/her labour rights?—Why?. Why Not?” The development of a Christian Education programme geared toward Labour Day (First Sunday in May) enabling children and young members to understand the world of work as God’s will to have people participate in recreation/co-creation as a joyous activity. More importantly, though, the discussion/dialogics on the worker in the secular world and the worker in the Church. What are the similarities and differences between the rights and responsibilities for the two?

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Appendix 1

Press Release from the Revd. Peter Storey, President of the Methodist Church, and the Anglican Archbishop

Neither the Church of the Province of Southern Africa nor the Methodist Church of South Africa has been approached nor has either given its support to prayers on June 16 for the "removal of the present rulers in our country".

To our knowledge and contrary to the impression given by the Western Province Council of Churches, neither was such a suggestion adopted at any time by the South African Council of Churches' Executive or its National Conference.

Our concern is that on June 16 all our people will pray for an end to oppression and violence in our land and for the establishment of justice and true peace. This is the plea we will offer to God, and this is the goal that must challenge us all.

Johannesburg
30 May 1985.

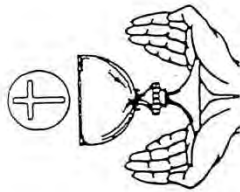
The Revd. Peter Storey
President of Conference
The Methodist Church of SA
+ Philip, Cape Town

Resolution of the Cape of Good Hope District of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, 6 June 1985

The Synod of the Cape of Good Hope District of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa today adopted the statement entitled "A Theological Rationale and a Call to Prayer for the end to Unjust Rule". In so doing we categorically reject any interpretation of the statement as implying support for the violent removal of government, and reaffirm our total rejection of violence in any form. We draw peoples' attention to the fact that we are praying for a government that is just and obedient to God, and reiterate that the statement specifically calls for the removal from office of "those who persist in defying His laws". We recognize that this could lead to a change of government.

COMMANDMENTS for WORKERS

CHRIST, THE CARPENTER OF NAZARETH, WORKED FOR THE BENEFIT OF HUMANITY AND TO THE GLORY OF HIS FATHER. THROUGH THE SWEAT AND TOIL OF WORK, THE FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST SHARE IN THE WORK THAT CHRIST CAME TO DO - TO GIVE US LIFE IN ALL ITS ABUNDANCE.



AS WORKERS WE BELIEVE :

That we, made in the image of God, have a mandate to "fill the earth and subdue it". The right to work is ours, so that the name of God, Lord and Creator of all, would be wonderful in all the earth.

That the dignity of work must be upheld, and so we will strive for a system of just wages for all irrespective of race, colour or creed.

That in the Holy Eucharist we are shown the right use of earthly things. The products of God's earth and our work, bread and wine are offered and shared. The act of sharing in this great sacrament must lead to a similar sharing in the daily circumstances of our lives and work.

That we are more important than things, and so our dignity and well-being must never be sacrificed to the gods of profit and production.

That we should live each for the other and all for God, and not be ruled by selfish ambition.

That we should co-operate with our fellow workers to achieve the aims of these commitments, especially by meeting together for discussions, planning and action.

We pledge before God to place our lives in His cause for we take strength from the words of our brother Jesus, "Stand erect, hold your heads high because your freedom is near at hand" (Luke 21.28).



Appendix 2

A CODE OF CHRISTIAN COMMITMENT

CHURCH AND WORKERS : A CHRISTIAN CHALLENGE

CUPC AGM CONFERENCE : 19 FEBRUARY 1985

WE AFFIRM THAT ALL WORKERS HAVE THE FOLLOWING RIGHTS:

EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS

- * To employment of their own choice.
- * To dignified and creative work.
- * To security and continuity of employment.

WORK CONDITIONS

- * To safe, healthy and humane working conditions.
- * To democratic representation in decision-making.
- * To form trade unions of their own choice.
- * To bargain, and if necessary, to strike and picket.
- * To reasonable working hours.

WAGES

- * To a wage which allows a standard of living in keeping with human dignity within an economic framework free from greed.
- * To adequate paid annual, sick and maternity leave.

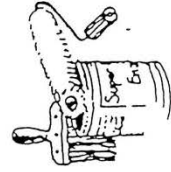
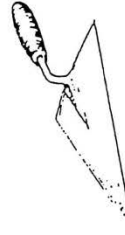
IN THE COMMUNITY

- * To live together with their families near their places of work.
- * To freedom of movement, speech and assembly.
- * To adequate housing and transport.
- * To adequate social security benefits for workers and unemployed workers and their families.

We realise that this Code is not at length expressing the complete crisis workers face under the present unjust economic and political order, but it is our desire that workers will see this as a point of departure by the Churches to move closer toward them.

As we publish the Church and Workers Code, we are very aware that a document by itself cannot achieve very much. It will need to be followed by a vigorous campaign of education so that the "commitments" made in the final section can become a reality in the life of the church.

Churches Urban Planning Commission
Industrial Mission Project
May 1986



Appendix 3

To all employers of faith and goodwill in the Clothing Industry of the Western Cape. We, a group of concerned religious leaders respectfully address this letter to you regarding conditions in the clothing industry.

As you all know, we live in a time of great change, where the people of our land have begun to demonstrate more and more forcefully their desires for full participation in the governing of South Africa. They are striving for full South African citizenship for all South Africans, regardless of race or ethnic group, which includes the right to vote, freedom of movement, and freedom of association.

With this in mind, enlightened employers are beginning to realise that new social structures are needed. It is not possible to return to past methods of control, for to survive and thrive together we have to accept meaningful change appropriate to God's law.

The book of Leviticus, chapter 19 verses 12 & 13, tell us:

' You must not exploit your neighbour.
You must not keep back the labourer's
wage until the next morning.'

The letter of James, Chapter 2 verses 1,8,9 & 10, tells us:

' My brothers(and sisters) do not try to
combine Faith in Jesus Christ our
Glorified Lord, with the making of
distinctions between classes of people...
you must love your neighbour as yourself
but as soon as you make distinctions
between classes of people, you are
committing sin, and under condemnation
for breaking the Law '.

And the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) says in the Hadith:

' Do not hold from the workers the things
that are their due'.

As religious leaders, we believe because mankind has been created by God, we all have a great dignity, and have been placed above all other creatures on the face of the earth. This dignity must be upheld. Account must be taken of every person in society, religiously and socially, economically and politically.

The fundamental rights/Page 2

The fundamental rights of the individual include the rights of workers to form themselves into associations which truly represent them, and the right to play their part in the activities of such associations without the risk of reprisal.

We affirm that all workers have the following rights before God.

- * To employment of their own choice
- * To dignified and creative work
- * To security and continuity of employment
- * To safe, healthy and humane working conditions
- * To democratic representation in decision making
- * To form trade unions of their own choice
- * To bargain, and if necessary, to strike and picket
- * To reasonable working hours
- * To a wage which allows a standard of living in keeping with human dignity within an economic framework free from greed
- * To adequate, paid, annual sick and maternity leave
- * To live together with their families near their places of work
- * To freedom of movement, speech and assembly
- * To adequate housing and transport
- * To adequate social security benefits for workers and for unemployed workers and their families.

As we are all aware, South Africa is presently undergoing one of the gravest ~~economic recessions in the history~~ of the country. Hundreds of thousands have lost their jobs through scores of businesses either going bankrupt, or retrenching workers.

In the manufacturing sector in the Western Cape, the Clothing Industry has been hard hit, and ~~thousands of workers and members of our congregations have lost their jobs.~~ The workers in these factories have suffered for many years under conditions of very low wages, and working conditions leading to health and social problems. As religious leaders who frequently come into contact with these problems, we feel a deep concern for our suffering people.

On 19 August 1985/Page 3

On 19 August 1985, the Chairperson of the Clothing Workers Union, Mrs Carevia Davis, was dismissed from Cape Underwear after 16 years service. The union brought this to the attention of the Western Province Council of Churches. At the executive meeting of the W.P.C.C. on 23 August, it was decided that the Churches' Urban Planning Commission (CUPC) Industrial Mission Project be asked to investigate conditions in the Clothing Industry. The Industrial Mission Project has conducted an investigation into the Clothing Industry, which we submit.

We the undersigned, as representatives of our faith, believe that urgent consideration is called for, so that improved conditions for workers are brought into being. In particular wage levels, health and safety regulations, and retrenchment procedures need to be given attention.

We look forward to your comments and further discussion on this matter.

ET Achon