

**WORKING TOWARD CHURCH UNITY? POLITICS, LEADERSHIP AND
INSTITUTIONAL DIFFERENCES AMONG THE THREE LUTHERAN
CHURCHES IN NAMIBIA 1972- 1993**

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**In partial fulfilment for the degree of Master of Arts in History in the School of Human
and Social Studies, Faculty of Human and Management Sciences at the University of Natal,
Pietermaritzburg**

As the candidate's supervisor I have/~~have not~~ approved this thesis/dissertation for submission

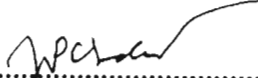
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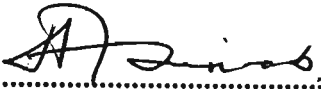
Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere thanks to the following people and institutions who have helped me in various ways in the production of this dissertation.

- My supervisor, Prof. J. Laband, for his invaluable support and guidance, firm supervision and the great interest he has shown in this dissertation;
- The ELCRN-Archives and particularly Rev. P. Pauly, the ELCIN-Archives and ELCIN (GELC)-Archives and the staff of the University of Natal Library and Luthos Library;
- My sister, Monika Gaweses, for making it possible that I got high school education after the death of my father in 1975;
- My wife, Rev. Pauline Guriras, and our children, for their inspiration, support and understanding;
- The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, for sponsoring our studies;
- God Almighty, for giving me strength and understanding to study this highly controversial issue of unity of His people.

Declaration

Unless specifically indicated in the text, this dissertation is the original work of the author

 03 May 2002
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Rev. Gerhardt Gurirab

Abbreviations

AMEC	-----	African Methodist Episcopal Church
ANC	-----	African National Congress
CCN	-----	Council of Churches in Namibia
CCLF	-----	Council of Churches on Lutheran Foundation
DELKSWA	-----	Deutsche Evangelische Lutherische Kirche in Südwest Africa
DTA	-----	Democratic Turnhalle Alliance
ELCIN	-----	Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia
ELCIN (GELC)	---	Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (German Evangelical Lutheran Church)
ELCRN	-----	Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia
ELCSA	-----	Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa
ELCSA (N-T)	-----	Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa Natal - Transvaal
ELCSWA	-----	Evangelical Lutheran Church in South West Africa
ELOC	-----	Evangelical Lutheran Owambo -Kavango Church
EKD	-----	Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland
FELCSA	-----	Federation of Evangelical Lutheran Churches in Southern Africa
FMS	-----	Finnish Evangelical Mission Society
GELCSWA	-----	German Evangelical Lutheran Church in South West Africa
ICJ	-----	International Court of Justice
LUCSA	-----	Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa
Luthos	-----	Lutheran House of Studies
LWF	-----	Lutheran World Federation
LWF-NNC	-----	Lutheran World Federation -Namibia National Committee
RMS	-----	Rhenish Mission Society
RSA	-----	Republic of South Africa
Swapo	-----	South West Africa People's Organisation
UELCSA	-----	United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa
UELCSWA	-----	United Evangelical Lutheran Church in South West Africa
UEM	-----	United in Mission
VELK	-----	Verenigte Evangelische Lutherische Kirche
WCC	-----	World Council of Churches
WMS	-----	Wesleyan Methodists Mission Society

Chronology

1842-----	RMS in southern Namibia
1866-----	Ausbildung Schule in Otjimbingwe by RMS
1870-----	FMS in northern Namibia
1884-----	Berlin Conference; German Imperial forces annex Namibia
1896-----	Establishment of German Church in Windhoek
1903-1907-----	Genocide of indigenous people by the German Imperial forces
1925-----	FMS ordained first indigenous clergy in Namibia
1946-----	Schism in RMS and Nama speaking people join AMEC
1947-----	Formation of LWF in Lund. Establishment of Driehoek agreement between DRC, FMS and RMS in Namibia
1949-----	RMS ordained its first indigenous clergy
1953-----	Establishment of CCLF for Lutheran unity in Southern Africa
1954-----	Formation of ELOC
1955-----	Schism in RMS and formation of Oruano Church
1957-----	Formation ELCSWA(Rhenish Mission)
1961-----	Unity talks between ELOC, ELCSWA and DELCSWA
1970-----	DRC withdraw from 'Driehoek agreement'
1971-----	Open Letter by ELOC and ELCSWA to SA government
1972-----	Formation of UELCSWA by ELOC and ELCSWA
1975-----	Swakopmund Appeal, Black Lutheran Churches in RSA form ELCSA
1977-----	LWF Assembly in Dar Es Zalaam and DELCSWA joins UELCSWA
1978-----	Formation of CCN
1984-----	LWF Assembly in Budapest, Hungary and suspension of German-speaking Lutheran Churches in Southern Africa from LWF on account of supporting apartheid policy of South Africa
1987-----	.DELCSWA withdraws from CCN
1989-----	ELCSWA suspends its membership to UELCSWA
1990-----	End of colonialism and independence of Namibia
1992-----	Targeted deadline for Unified Lutheran Church in Namibia
1992-----	Gross Barmen Consultation of the three Lutheran Churches in Namibia.
1993-----	Suspension of all UELCSWA activities. Beginning of the second phase of the Unity process under LWF-NNC.

Abstract

This thesis examines the historical and theological development, and ultimate failure, of the unity process between the three Lutheran Churches in Namibia, and places it in the socio-political and economic context of the turbulent history of the country.

The focus is particularly on the period between 1972 and 1993 which witnessed a crucial phase in the struggle for a United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia. This took place against the background of heightened anti-apartheid political activity and international mediation for Namibian independence, which was achieved in 1990. The increasing involvement of the two Black Lutheran Churches in the liberation struggle was matched by the growing alienation and isolation of the White Lutheran Church.

The three Lutheran Churches eventually failed in their deliberations between 1972 and 1993 either to unite or even to form a federation, and managed only to achieve a superficial working relationship. The failure of the process was shaped by various factors. These included issues of political and ethnic differences between the three Churches, concerns over the future common ownership of each Church's property, differentials in salaries, the external influence of Lutheran Churches elsewhere in the world (not least through their funding), and the question of what form the leadership structure should take in a unified Church. The leaders of the three Lutheran Churches lived and operated as theologians in somewhat different religious cultures that were the product of the several Lutheran missionary societies that had originally founded the three Lutheran Churches in Namibia.

The abnormal socio-political and economic context of Namibia during colonialism (1884-1990), and the new challenges after independence, created a situation where religious and secular activities became inseparable. Inevitably, the priorities and questions confronting Lutheran Church leaders and people were concerned more with issues such as social justice, freedom, self-determination, political participation and sheer survival than with the question of church unity. The challenge for the Lutheran Churches of Namibia still remains for them to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ holistically and to spread the message of unity for all Namibians irrespective of differences of race, colour, gender and geographical region.

Preface

1. Introduction

This thesis examines the historical development of the unity process of the three Lutheran Churches and their struggles for a united Lutheran Church amidst socio-political and economic problems in the turbulent history of Namibia. The focus is particularly on the period between 1972 and 1993. Most of these twenty-one years were characterized by heightened anti-apartheid political activity and international mediation for Namibian independence, the involvement of the Black Lutheran Churches in the liberation struggle and Lutheran Church unity process and ultimately national independence in 1990. Against this background the thesis explores the roles of Church leaders, apartheid and ethnicity in the deliberations for church unity.

The three Lutheran Churches involved in the unity process which will be investigated are the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia (ELCRN) and the German-speaking Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN -GELC). These three churches represent 90% of Christians in Namibia in several different geographical areas and their congregations encompass diverse ethnic groups, cultures, languages, ideologies and political affiliations. Therefore the unity process of the three Lutheran Churches can be explained by examining the history of the churches and their relation to socio-political and economic struggles in Namibian society.

1.1. Background to the problem

The problem in this thesis is to establish why the Lutheran churches in Namibia failed to unite between 1972 and 1993. The impact of socio-political and economic issues damaged the image of the three Lutheran Churches. Although the focus is on the three Lutheran Churches, it is not in any way intended to create an impression that other churches like the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) acted better than Lutherans in matters of Black and White members because of the apartheid policy of the RSA.

1.2. Motivation for the study

The author has chosen to investigate the history of the failure of the Lutheran unity process in Namibia because the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in South West Africa (UELCSWA) has been unsuccessfully trying to establish one Lutheran Church in Namibia since its establishment in 1972. The deliberations on Lutheran unity in Namibia have had two phases, namely one which can be called a local initiative from 1972 -1993 (UELCSWA) and the internationally supported phase from 1993 onwards under the Lutheran World Federation-Namibia National Committee (LWF-NNC).¹ The first phase failed because of different approaches of the churches to politics, to organizational and institutional problems and external influences. The second phase is still in process and according to the latest developments the churches will unite before 2005.²

Some Namibian and foreign academics is working on various aspects of the history of the church and the liberation struggle in Namibia, but none are exclusively investigating the important initiative by the Lutherans to achieve a unified church. Unfortunately, ignorance, doubt and animosity towards change in general are militating against the formation of a unified Lutheran Church. The enthusiasm evident in the 1970s has dissipated. The disappointment, even bitterness causing the breakdown of all communication between the three churches in the late 1980s is still deep-seated and the congregations are currently involved in coming to terms with the challenges and changes that are evolving following the independence of Namibia in 1990. For the past nine years the researcher has been a pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia (ELCRN) and therefore has a personal interest in this study.

¹ LWF-NNC was born when the Lutheran Churches in Namibia realised that they were not able to meet their deadline of unity in 1992. At their consultation from 25-27 June 1992 at Gross Barmen near Okahandja the three Lutheran Churches decided to make a new start towards attaining the goal of a united church. In their resolution the churches formulated their basis for unity and suggested working at grass-roots and church leadership levels. For the structures, problems, vision and perspectives of LWF-NNC see A. Veii, 'Lutheran unity in Namibia' in P.J.Isaak (ed.), *The Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia in the 21st Century*, Windhoek: Gamsberg Macmillan Publishers, 2000, pp. 80-2.

² See the paper delivered by P.J.Isaak 'Why and how do we go for Lutheran unity? The road ahead' Biennial Conference of Phillipine-Lutheran Women of Namibia, Okahandja: 24-27 May 2001, p. 1.

1.3. Objectives of the study

The motives for this study are historical and theological. The research has grown out of a concern to revive interest among the present generation of Namibians in the history of the Lutheran Church. The objective of the research is to promote historical understanding, especially among the Namibian people, and to provide Namibian historians with a historical tool to analyse and interpret Namibia's past in order to understand the unity process and nation-building in the country.

The Lutheran Churches have played an important and vital role in the liberation struggle of the country, but their role in fostering unity among the Namibian people and in achieving their own Lutheran unity has been a problem until now. The present author believes that this study will help Namibians not to lose their past and to learn from their mistakes for the future.

Therefore, the study is aimed at a thematic chronological analysis of the history of the Lutheran unity process and particularly at the activities of the Lutheran clergy involved. Moreover, the study involves international perspectives, for it has had to look at the influence and impact of outside forces such as the Finnish Evangelical Mission Society (FEMS), the United Evangelical Mission (UEM), the Evangelical Church of Germany (EKD) and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) on the unification process of the Lutheran Churches in Namibia.

This study intends not only to improve knowledge about the role of Lutheran clergy in a difficult and racially divided situation, but also about the political and social dimensions of the unity process. Furthermore, the study is intended to provide social insights, vision and perspectives on the crucial issue of Lutheran unity. It is a challenge to Namibian Lutherans to seek a solution. It is also an invitation to the Lutherans to join the ongoing debate on Lutheran unity in southern Africa.

1.4. Hypothesis

The Lutheran Churches in Namibia failed to unite or to form a federation between 1972 and 1993. To this day the churches have only a superficial working relationship. The failure of the process was shaped by various factors, which include issues of political and ethnic differences among the three churches, concerns over the ownership of property, differentials in salaries, the external influence of Lutheran Churches elsewhere in the world and their funding, and the question of leadership in a united church. The leaders of the three Lutheran Churches lived and operated as theologians in a religious culture of different missionary backgrounds. In a context such as that of Namibia under colonialism (1884-1990) and then after independence, religious activities are inseparable from secular activities, e.g. political, economic and socio-cultural concerns. Inevitably, therefore, the priorities and questions confronting Lutheran Church leaders and people were with social justice, freedom, self-determination, political participation and survival.

This research, therefore, has embarked on the hypothesis that the nature of the deliberations undertaken between 1972 and today by the Lutheran Churches has consigned the unity process to failure. It sees the political situation in the country, the leadership of the three Lutheran Churches, and external forces from Germany and Finland, as the main factors contributing to the failure of the first phase (1972-1993) and to the slow progress of the second phase since 1993. Consequently, though the churches are considered to be institutions working for change in Namibia, they are nevertheless still under scrutiny on account of their failure to form one Lutheran Church.

1.5. Research Methodology

The research methodology adopted has been qualitative, interpretive and contextualised.

1.5.1. The nature of the sources

The study has relied mainly on the records of the three Lutheran Churches in Namibia under investigation, as well as the minutes of UELCSWA Executive Committees and Church Councils

between 1972-1993 and of LWF-NNC from 1993 - 2000. These sources can be found in the ELCRN Archives in Windhoek, the ELCIN Archives in Oniipa and the ELCIN (GELC) Archives in Windhoek.

1.5.2. Comparative methodology

The inevitable consequence of this archival source base is a bias towards the official Church interpretation of events. This is countered by reading the archival sources in conjunction with contemporary newspaper reports and relevant theses, journal articles and books. These not only provide a wider perspective on the unity process, but place it in the necessary political, social and economic context of southern Africa.

1.5.3. Interviews

To obtain a balanced impression of the unity process it is essential to augment the official records and published comment with the testimony of those involved. And since the search for Lutheran Church unity in Namibia has been an essentially top-down process, it is vital not to confine this to the testimony of the bishops of the three Lutheran Churches who have been interviewed, nor to that of the former General Secretaries of UELCSWA, ELCRN, ELCIN, ELCIN (GELC) and co-ordinator for LWF-NNC. Thus a number of individuals among the pastors and laity of the churches were interviewed to gain an insight into the response at grass-roots level.

1.5.4. Objectives of the research methodology

Cross-checking and comparing the archival sources, published works, theses and interviews allow for a balanced and comprehensive understanding of the dynamics and politics of the Lutheran Churches at all levels in the unity deliberations. This is selective, because it leaves out government archives, libraries and documentation and overlooks some of the people involved in the process. This action has no impact on the study because the church archives, interviews and other scholarly works have relevant information for qualitative, interpretative and contextual research.

The primary and secondary sources have been prepared and interpreted in a format commensurate with the needs of the present researcher. It is participatory research that is relevant, which demands collective investigation, understanding, analysis of the research results and the collective acting upon the outcome of the research by the present author.

The nature of the evidence collected has shaped the researcher's approach. Much of the study was based on accessible archival material in the three Lutheran Church archives and on interviews. Most of the material in the ELCRN Archives was written in Afrikaans and in the ELCIN Archives in the Owambo-language and that of ELCIN (GELC) in German. At the time of the researcher's visit to these archives in 2000 and 2001 they were being reorganised. However, the archivists helped the researcher extensively and gave access to files which had not been catalogued.

The present author's analysis concentrates on the ideologies, strategies and tactics of the Lutheran Church leaders. The motives and consciousness of their followers have been far more difficult to grasp, although on occasion this *has* been possible. It would be insufficient merely to examine the internal dynamics of organized politics in Namibia between the 1970s and the 1990s. Lutheran Church politics need to be situated in the context of the socio-political and economic transformation of Namibia for the understanding of the unity process.

The thesis reflects the influence of Lutheran historiography which, in turn, has been shaped by the racial structures of Namibian society. The history of Lutheran Churches has been a long way from a holistic portrayal of Lutherans integrated in a single Lutheran Church structure. This thesis, drawing on work already done, hopes to move Lutherans' historiography nearer to that goal. Black Namibians had a distinctive past of exploitation and oppression, but they were not a watertight racial group. The present study highlighted the complex interaction of Lutherans in Namibia to illustrate that it was not easy to achieve unity, even in churches with the same confessions and doctrines. The main feature of the unity process was scenes of Synods, declarations, suspensions and withdrawals. These issues showed that the churches featured in both the political and ecclesiastical areas of the unity process.

1.6. Outline of chapters

The first chapter sets the thesis in the history of Lutheran missions in southern Africa and the socio-historical context of the three Lutheran Churches in Namibia. The second chapter deals with the historic-theological background to the Lutheran Churches and the activities of UELCSWA between 1972 and 1993. The third chapter deals with church polity and the fourth with the impact of socio-political and economic and the role of ethnicity and regionalism on the unity of the Lutheran Churches. The final chapter covers the general conclusion of the thesis.

The limited nature of a Master's thesis imposed a severe constraint on giving necessary information and background and also on following up all queries emerging in the relatively long period under consideration.

The proposed dioceses map of the Lutheran Churches and the Open Letter to the South African Prime Minister in 1971, letters to congregations and other informative appendixes have been placed in the thesis to give guidance to the readers, but since they are also relevant throughout the thesis, they are specifically referred to in footnotes.

Chapter One

The history of the Lutheran missions in southern Africa and the socio-historical context of the three Lutheran Churches in Namibia

1.1. Introduction

The process of Lutheran unity in southern Africa occurred in a situation when there were many possibilities of conflicting interest on all levels of the unity endeavour. In dealing with this process one must consider the whole of southern Africa, especially South Africa and Namibia, in the wider historical perspective. It is no secret that the theological, ideological and political concepts of apartheid policy were of decisive importance for the development of the Lutheran unity process in Namibia.

The Lutheran unity process in Namibia started in a period dominated by colonialism, exploitation, suppression, war and the liberation struggle. Namibia has a violent history under the colonial rule of the German Imperial forces, who were responsible for the near genocide of 80% of the Herero people and 60% of the indigenous people in the police zone at the turn of the last century (1904-1907).¹ The South African occupation of Namibia from 1915-1990 was marked by the brutal implementation of apartheid policies and the rule of terror through military and security forces instrumental for the dehumanization and violation of the indigenous people. It is not in the scope of this research to write extensively about the history of this period. However, certain important historical events, which seem to have relevance to the Lutheran unity initiative, shall be outlined.

Namibia had indeed a tragic history of colonialism and apartheid, but the Lutheran churches in the country tried to break away from being the agents of colonialism and apartheid to become the 'voice of the voiceless' through a united response to evils in the country. Therefore this chapter will deal

¹ C.J Hellweg, *Voice of the Voiceless: The Involvement of the Lutheran World Federation in Southern Africa*, Lund: Skeab Verbum, 1979, p. 20. See also *Standard Encyclopedia of Southern Africa*, New York: Nassau, 1961, p. 224.

with the contextual clarification of the history of the Lutheran Churches in southern Africa and, more specifically, with the structures and membership of the three Lutheran Churches in Namibia.

1.2. Brief historical background of the Lutheran Churches in Southern Africa

The history of Lutherans in southern Africa is one of different missionary societies, each with its own culture and liturgical and confessional interpretations. These mission societies came at different times to southern Africa and worked independently in different parts of the region. For example, the RMS started work in South Africa in Cape in 1829 and in Namibia in 1842², the Finnish Mission Society in northern Namibia in 1870, the Berlin Mission Society in the Cape and Orange Free State in 1834, in Natal in 1847 and in the Transvaal in 1860. The Hermannsburg Mission Society started work in Natal in 1854, the Norwegian Mission Society in Natal in 1844, the Church of Sweden in Natal in 1876 and in Southern Rhodesia in 1903 and the American Lutheran Mission in Natal in 1873.³ Missionaries from a German background came primarily to convert the indigenous people to Christianity, but they served also German-speaking settler congregations.

As time passed, Lutheran mission societies created independent regional churches based on racial, ethnic and language differences. The social and political context of the region changed in 1948, when the National Party won the elections in South Africa and promoted Afrikaner Nationalism and apartheid.⁴ These changes were based on the oppression and exploitation of the indigenous people on account of their skin colour and the Lutheran churches encountered enormous problems because of their racially divided churches. A South Africa researcher, H.E. Winkler, rightly stated that Lutheran missionaries placed a particularly strong emphasis on orderliness, discipline and obedience

² For RMS in South Africa, see the work of Elfriede Strassberger, *The Rhenish Mission Society in South Africa*, Cape Town: C. Struik, 1969, *passim*.

³ See Luthos Archives: G. Scriba, 'Einheit Lutherischer Missionen und Kirchen in Südafrika', Rustenberg: unpublished graphic representation of the historical development of the Lutheran missions and churches, 1983; see also the structure drawn by J. Müller-Nedebeck, 'Family of Lutheran Churches in Southern Africa', unpublished graphic representation of Lutheran family in southern Africa, 16 March 1987.

⁴ For the significance of 1948 and the development of apartheid policies in South Africa, see T. Nuttall, *From Apartheid to Democracy South Africa 1948-1994*, Pietermaritzburg: Shuter & Shooter, 1998, pp. 9- 60, *passim*.

to authority.⁵ Therefore the Lutheran missionaries and churches tended to support and accept the secular *status quo* at the expense of black Lutherans. Dr. Wolfram Kistner, a well-known Lutheran theologian, 'points out that most Lutheran missionaries were not critical of the state because of their emphasis upon separation of religion and politics which they saw as an important contribution of Lutheran theology'.⁶

The Lutheran doctrine of Two Kingdoms⁷ was the focus of the responses of the various mission societies to socio-political and economic aspects of the region.

1.2.1.The Lutheran doctrine of Two Kingdoms

The Lutheran doctrine of Two Kingdoms was based on the teachings of a German priest, Martin Luther (1483-1546), who sparked the Reformation in the sixteenth century.⁸ In 1523, Martin Luther wrote his work *Temporal Authority: To what Extent It Should Be Obeyed*. He distinguished between spiritual governance and temporal government. For him, the church is the spiritual authority and has a duty in the world, but not to rule the world. The temporal government has a duty in the world, but not to rule the church. Martin Luther in his teachings and writings never used the concept of Two Kingdoms. However, according to Johannes Richter, the doctrine was popularised by German

⁵ H.E. Winkler, 'The divided roots of Lutheranism in South Africa' (unpublished M.A. thesis in the Department of Religious Studies, University of Cape Town, 1989), pp. 28-9.

⁸ *Challenge*, 16 (June/July 1993), p.4.

⁹ The Lutheran doctrine of Two Kingdoms was examined by the Lutheran mission societies and churches in the 1960s to understand the social responsibilities of the churches. Almost all academic work dealing with Lutheran Churches has to mention it because it is the core of Lutheran misunderstanding on the responses to activities in the lives of the churches.

¹⁰ On Luther see R. H. Bainton, *Here I Stand*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1978, *passim*. And also W. I. Brandt (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 45, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1962, *passim*.

theologians in the Nazi era between 1932 and 1938 during *Der Deutsche Kirchenkampf* (the German Church Struggle).⁹

The understanding of the doctrine became popular during the Lutheran missionary period in southern Africa, but was confused by the missionaries with the idea that the church had to deal exclusively with spiritual matters and civil rulers with temporal matters.¹⁰ Another misunderstanding of the missionaries was based on the belief that although the doctrine concerned the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world, but the dualism is actually between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the Devil, both seeking control of the world.¹¹ The danger here was that the missionaries equated the world, especially Africa, with the kingdom of the Devil.¹²

According to K.H. Hertz, in his book *Two Kingdoms and One World*, there are 'three major institutional complexes, namely *ecclesia*, the church, *politia*, political institutions and *economia*, the domestic economy' which are in constant conflict in this world.¹³ In all these institutions God and Satan wage a struggle to control the world. God uses the spiritual and the temporal authority to wage the struggle against Satan and all Christians are subject to both authorities.

H.E. Winkler believed that 'the distinction between God's way of governing different spheres of life was separated in dualistic fashion in liberal German Lutheranism in the nineteenth century'.¹⁴ The different spheres of life in secular society were understood as autonomous. The end result was that

⁹ J. Richter, 'The influence of the Two Kingdoms Doctrine in South Africa' (unpublished B.Th. Honours thesis in the School of Theology, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1997), pp. 1-2.

¹⁰ For the interpretation and meaning of the doctrine for RMS see J.L. de Vries, *Mission and Colonialism in Namibia*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1978, pp. 52-8.

¹¹ H.W. Florin, *Lutherans in South Africa*, Durban: Lutheran Publishing, 1967, p. 74.

¹² This is the view of the author based on the assumptions made by the missionaries during conversion in the nineteenth century that the indigenous people were without religion or civilisation.

¹³ K.H. Herz, *Two Kingdoms and One World: A Sourcebook in Christian Social Ethics*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1976, p.16.

¹⁴ Winkler, 'The divided roots of Lutheranism in South Africa', p. 102.

‘the division between public and private, between economic, political and spiritual spheres was explained by misapplication of Luther’s doctrine’.¹⁵ For the missionaries the intended dualism between good and evil became separation between religion and politics. This false understanding was duplicated in the mission fields in southern Africa and became incorporated into the theology of the churches. This misunderstanding provided for the missionaries and the German-speaking Lutheran Churches the theological basis for an apolitical stance.¹⁶ This misunderstanding of the doctrine of the Two Kingdoms was thus responsible for the non-involvement of Lutheran Churches in political issues of the southern Africa and was one of the main issues of disunity among the Lutheran churches.

1.3. Co-operation between the Lutheran Churches in South Africa and Namibia

The fact that the Lutheran Churches in southern Africa arose from the work of mission societies from Germany, Finland, Norway, Sweden and the United States of America created, in itself, a problem for any unity. These mission societies were divided by nationality, form of church governance, liturgical traditions, degree of emphasis on the Lutheran confessions and differing levels of willingness to co-operate with other Lutherans and other churches. The major theological difference was on the ‘Full Lutheran Confession’.¹⁷ The German missions, in particular the RMS and the Hermansburg Mission Society, ‘aimed to plant national churches (or in German, *Volkskirchen*) in which Christianity would be expressed in the language and culture of individual African and immigrant peoples’.¹⁸ Because of this notion of division, various Lutheran Churches, divided on race, language and by region, can be seen throughout southern Africa.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp.102-3.

¹⁶ See Hellweg, *A Voice of the Voiceless*, pp. 20-1.

¹⁷ The ‘Full Lutheran Confession’ was stated in the *Book of Concord* in 1580 and had the following contents: Three Creeds of the Ancient Church; The Augsburg Confession; The Apology of the Augsburg Confession; The Smalcald Articles; The Treatise on the Power of the Pope; Luther’s Small and Large Catechisms; The Formula of Concord.

¹⁸ G.Scriba, *The Growth of Lutheran Churches in Southern Africa*, Pietermaritzburg: Luthos Publications, 1997, p. 1.

The idea of co-operation and unity between different Lutheran Churches was, however, seen as a missionary goal in 1890 by the Hermannsburg Mission Society of Natal.¹⁹ Therefore, in 1904 the General Mission Conference was founded, in which different Lutheran mission societies worked together. This conference evolved in 1936 as the Christian Council of South Africa. This body was renamed as the South African Council of Churches in 1968. For the Lutheran Churches in southern Africa the Council of Churches on Lutheran Foundation (CCLF) was founded in 1953.²⁰ For closer cooperation between the Lutherans in Southern Africa, in 1966, the Federation of Evangelical Lutheran Churches in Southern Africa (FELCSA) was established out of CCLF.²¹ FELCSA was seen as a primary body leading towards Lutheran unity. An important conference was held by FELCSA, in 1967, at Umphumulo, Natal, under the theme Lutheran teaching on the 'Two Kingdoms'.²² Another important development was the 'Swakopmund Appeal'²³ in 1975, accepted by all members of FELCSA which spoke out against the policy of apartheid influencing the lives of peoples in southern African countries. In total disillusionment at the slow progress and political apathy of the White Lutheran Churches, the Black Lutheran Churches of the four regions in the RSA merged and constituted the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa in 1975.²⁴

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Florin, *Lutherans in South Africa*, p. 67.

²¹ G. Scriba *A Historical Review of the United Lutheran Church in Southern Africa Church and Culture*, Kroondal: Luthos Publications, 1989, p. 9.

²² G. Lislrud (ed.) *The Lutheran Teaching on the Two Kingdoms and its Implications and Possibilities for the Witness of the Church in the South African Society*, Umphumulo: Lutheran Theological College, 1968, *passim*. W. Albers, 'Evangelische-Lutherische Kirche im Südlichen Africa: ELCSA (SER) ELCSA (Tswan Region)', *Magisterschrift*, Universität Hamburg, 1970, pp.153-5. See also U. Duchrow (ed.), *Lutheran Churches-Salt or Mirror of Society? Case Studies on the Theory and Practice of the Two Kingdoms Doctrine*, Geneva: LWF, 1977, *passim*.

²³ In the beginning the document was named the 'Appeal to Lutherans in Southern Africa' but later changed to 'The Swakopmund Appeal' because the conference was held from 11 to 13 February 1975 in Swakopmund, Namibia: *Swakopmund Appeal, 1975* [henceforth, *Swakopmund Appeal*]

²⁴ R.P. Ntsimane, 'The Lutheran Church's response to the forced removals in the Western Transvaal and Bophuthatswana 1968-1984 (unpublished M.Th. thesis, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1994), pp. 23-4.

1.4.Lutheran Mission Societies in Namibia

1.4.1.RMS²⁵: its origins and activities and of Black and White Lutheran Churches in Namibia

The RMS was established in 1799 by twelve pious layman in Elberfeld, Germany. These people had devoted themselves to pray for the extension of the Kingdom of God on earth.²⁶ There was, however, a marked interest in people as individuals. The RMS strove to improve the financial situation of the people, but they did not turn a blind eye or deaf ear to the needs of the colonists. RMS mission work was directly motivated by the commission in Matt. 28: 19, 20 which says 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age'.²⁷ The educational, economic and social activities of RMS were aimed at the central purpose of the extension of the Kingdom of God, of which it was mindful. But in later dealings with the mission, the RMS became the main force behind the oppression of the indigenous people with the establishment of a colonial regime in Namibia.²⁸

The RMS was, without doubt, the most successful mission in Namibia. The RMS was formed out of the Lutheran and Reformed traditions. The RMS committed itself to the training and sending of missionaries to the non-Christian world, for example to southern Africa and Namibia. The Society was confirmed in 1829 and its centre was at Barmen in Germany.²⁹ In 1842 the RMS missionary Hans Christian Knudson came to Bethanie in Namibia. At this time Bethanie had been without a

²⁵ For the history of RMS see of G. Menzel, *Die Rheinische Mission - Aus 150 Jahren Missionsgeschichte*, Wuppertal: Verlag der Vereinigten Evangelischen Mission, 1978, *passim*; J. Baumann, *Van Sending tot Kerk*, Karibib: Evangeliese Lutherse Kerk in SWA, Rynse Sendingkerk-Boekdepot, 1967, *passim*; J.L.de Vries, *Mission and Colonialism in Namibia*, Johannesburg: Raven Press, 1978, *passim*.

²⁶ J. Du Plessis, *The History of Christians Missions in South Africa*, London: Longman, 1965, p. 200.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ P.H. Katjavivi, *Church and Liberation in Namibia*, London: Pluto Press, 1989, p. 5.

²⁹ Nambala, *History of The Church in Namibia*, p. 69.

missionary for eighteen years since LMS missionary Heinrich Schmelen (1777-1848) had left. When Hans Christian Knudson came to the Bethanie, natural disasters struck the area. These hampered the work of the missionary. In the absence in Norway of Hans Christian Knudson from Bethanie, missionary Samuel Hahn took care of Bethanie mission station. After the return of Hans Christian Knudson, missionary Samuel Hahn moved to establish another mission station at Berseba, among the people of Paul Goliath. Hahn had a Namibian assistant called Christoph Tibot.³⁰

The RMS's missionary Heinrich Kleinschmidt and his catechist Jan Bam reached Windhoek in 1842, but did not at first work among the Nama people of Chief Jonker Afrikaner.³¹ Since the WMS were already working there Chief Jonker Afrikaner subsequently allowed Kleinschmidt to work among his people. Missionary Heinrich Kleinschmidt came back to Windhoek for the second time on 9 December 1842, with another RMS missionary, Hugo Hahn (1818 - 1895).³² In January 1843 the Herero chiefs Tjamuaha and Kahitjene proclaimed a peace accord with Jonker Afrikaner in Windhoek. This event was favourable for the missionaries to visit other parts of the country without any hostility from the indigenous people. Many chiefs to the south of Windhoek were willing to accept missionaries to work among the indigenous people.³³ However, the peace between the Herero and the Nama was broken when Wesleyan missionaries came to Windhoek. A noted Namibian Church historian, Dr. S.V. Nambala, states in his book *History of the Church in Namibia*, that Jonker Afrikaner wanted to keep all the missionaries, namely, the two from RMS and the two from WMS to himself. In fact, Jonker wanted to be at peace with the Bondelswarts³⁴ in Warmbad and Nama tribes on the banks of the Orange river. The Bondelswarts and the Nama tribes wanted union with him, on condition that he allowed their missionaries, the Wesleyans of Warmbad, to work

³⁰ Baumann, *Van Sending tot Kerk*, p. 89.

³¹ Ibid., p. 23.

³² Nambala, *History of The Church in Namibia*, p. 71.

³³ Ibid., p. 25.

³⁴ The Bondelswarts resisted colonialism in Namibia, especially against the Union of South Africa in 1922. On Bondelswarts see F. Dewald (ed.), *Native Uprisings in South West Africa*, Salisbury: Documentary Publications, 1976, *passim*.

among his people. According to Nambala, for Jonker to break his promise was both a diplomatic action and political compromise for the sake of peace.³⁵ However, RMS missionaries refused to work with WMS missionaries because of theological and methodological differences. After these events, the RMS left Windhoek and established a mission station at Otjikango, to work among the Herero. The mission work was affected by the war between the Nama and the Herero. The important aspect of this period was the baptism for the first time among the Herero in July 25, 1858.³⁶

The RMS worked for more than one hundred and fifty years in Namibia and established many congregations, schools and institutions for ELCRN and ELCIN (GELC). But long before the imposition of apartheid in Namibia by the RSA government in 1900, the RMS chose to establish distinct congregations on the basis of race and language.³⁷ The RMS sent pastors for German-speaking congregations and missionaries for the indigenous people. Two missionaries were sent in 1903 to Namibia, namely Wilhelm Anz of the Evangelical Church of Germany to serve the Whites and Carl Wandras from RMS to serve the black population.³⁸ This was the beginning of the separate Lutheran churches in Namibia, one for the Germans and other for the indigenous people. This separation by RMS was highly influenced by the German Nationalism and colonial conquest after the Berlin Conference of 1884.³⁹ However, they did not consider their work among the Germans as mission work, in comparison to their work among the indigenous people.⁴⁰ They served the German garrison, farmers and business people. Thus, they were missionaries to the indigenous people and 'pastors' to the German speaking community. This division created tensions and struggles in the history of the Lutheran family in Namibia.

³⁵ Nambala, *History of The Church in Namibia*, p. 72.

³⁶ Baumann, *Van Sending tot Kerk*, p. 67.

³⁷ H. Vedder 'Weise Gemeinde Schwarze' in *Festschrift zum 25 jährigen Kirchenjubiläum*, Windhoek: Afrikanische Heimatkalender, 1935, passim.

³⁸ Baumann, *Van Sending tot Kerk*, p. 28.

³⁹ For the role of RMS in colonial conquest, see de Vries, *Mission and Colonialism in Namibia*, pp. 73-118

⁴⁰ Hertz, *Two Kingdoms and One World*, p. 252.

Despite positive events in mission history, the German missionaries and eventually the German Church were not prepared to accept other Lutherans as real Lutherans and as equals. For example, for many missionaries it was unthinkable that black Christians were capable of being in charge of their congregations, without any assistance from the missionaries. For this reason two independent churches seceded from the RMS. The African Methodist Episcopal Church (AMEC) (1946)⁴¹ and the Oruano Church (Unity Church in Herero language) (1955) revolted against dependence on RMS and its refusal to ordain indigenous clergy as pastors.⁴²

The missionaries refused to recognise that indigenous cultures had a contribution to make towards the enrichment of Christianity. Another problem was that the German missionaries wanted to treat the indigenous clergy as subordinates, to the extent that they refused ordination of the indigenous clergy, so that they could only work as evangelists or helpers of the German missionaries. Instead, the missionaries felt that the pure Gospel was the one that came from the West, while the gospel that came from the indigenous clergy was to be regarded as syncretist and heathen. That pressure from below contributed towards structural, fundamental and radical changes in any church was evident in Namibia. The power of the ordinary people was not to be underestimated.⁴³ Colonial rule was supported by RMS 1884 to its disbandment in 1957 as shown by its policy of establishment of separate ecclesiastical structures for Black and White Christians.⁴⁴ However, the greater problem today for Namibia's Lutherans is the lack of progress in unifying Black and White Lutheran churches.

⁴¹ Baumann, *Van Sending tot Kerk*, p. 113.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 132-3.

⁴³ The schism of Nama-speaking Namibians in 1946 was a clear indication that the people were not pleased with the way RMS treated them. See J.J. Kritzinger, *Sending en Kerk in Suidwes-Afrika*, Pretoria: Navorsingsverslag aan die Raad vir Geesteswetenskaplike Navorsing oor die Kerkemaatskaplike Situatie van die Nie-Blankes van Suidwes-Afrika, 1969, pp. 86-1.

⁴⁴ Vedder, 'Weisse und Schwarze Gemeinde', p.11.

The RMS, as the mother body of the church, faithfully maintained and supported the ideology of apartheid after 1948. For example, when the RCC and Anglican Church in Namibia resisted the efforts of the RSA government to take over their schools⁴⁵ the Lutherans found it difficult to confront the South African government policies because their leader Dr. Heinrich Vedder (1876-1972) became a member of the senate representing the indigenous people of Namibia in 1950.⁴⁶

1.4.2.FMS⁴⁷

The Finnish Mission Society (FMS) was founded in 1859 in Finland and supported mission work undertaken by the Swedish Mission Society and later started with its own independent mission work.⁴⁸ The FMS arrived on the invitation of RMS missionary Hugo Hahn to work in northern Namibia among the Owambo-speaking people. The first converts were baptized in 1883.⁴⁹

The following observations can be made of the FMS: the missionaries of FMS were not colonizers because Finland never colonised any African country. Thus, the problem of having to come to terms with a colonial government in Namibia did not exist for the FMS. During the German colonial period the question as to who deserved FMS's first loyalty, the colonial government or the people whom they wished to convert, was never put as clearly to the Finnish missionaries as it was to the RMS. However, as Europeans of the same cultural background, they sometimes exhibited the same superior attitudes towards the indigenous people as the German missionaries did. Nevertheless, the FMS was more geared to spreading the Christian faith through education and medical assistance than through commercial or political control of the indigenous people. The FMS worked hard, with what in retrospect seemed to have been a great love for the people of Owamboland. This does not mean that the RMS missionaries did not love their converts, but the FMS missionaries were more

⁴⁵ Kajavivi et al., *Church and Liberation in Namibia*, p.4.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 9.

⁴⁷ For the FMS in Namibia see Nambala, *History of the Church in Namibia*, pp. 78-9.

⁴⁸ Scriba, *The Growth of Lutheran Churches in Southern Africa*, p. 12.

⁴⁹ Nambala, *History of the Church in Namibia*, p. 82.

focussed on their mission among the indigenous people.

The FMS focussed on equal education and opportunities for the locals and, for them, preaching was open to all believers for the growth of the church. For purposes of comparison it could be observed that, while the RMS, with its mission among the Nama, Damara and the Herero people, ordained its first nineteen indigenous clergy of all ethnic groups in 1949, after 107 years of service among the indigenous people,⁵⁰ the FMS ordained its first indigenous clergy in Namibia on 27 September 1925, after 55 years service in Owamboland. Dr. S. Nambala, a well-known Namibian Church historian states that : ‘after the graduation of the first preachers, the number of Christians greatly increased from 7695 in 1920 to 19 309 in 1926.’⁵¹

The history of these mission societies and consequently mission-initiated churches indicated great differences, conditioned by the diverse theological backgrounds and origins of the missionaries.

1.5. A brief history of the structures and membership of the three Lutheran Churches

1.5.1.ELCRN

The ELCRN was constituted as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in South West Africa (Rhenish Mission) on 4 October 1957⁵², after a severe struggle for self-determination and for indigenous leadership by the Black clergy. This church became fully autonomous in 1972 when it elected its first indigenous leader Praeses (president) Dr Johannes Lukas de Vries (1939-2000). The church had a presidial structure and changed in 1986 to the present episcopal administrative system to be in line with the sister church ELCIN. The first elected Bishop was the Rev. Dr Hendrik Frederik (born 1935). The csecond leader of ELCRN was Bishop Petrus Diergaardt (born 1935). Recently, in

⁵⁰ Baumann, *Van Sending tot Kerk* , p. 184. See also G.Gurirab, ‘The failure of the Rhenisch Mission to ordain indigenous clergy in Namibia (1866-1949). A historical critical analysis’ (B.Th. Honours thesis in the School of Theology, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 2000), pp.30-2.

⁵¹ Nambala, *History of the Church in Namibia*, p. 86.

⁵² Baumann, *Van Sending tot Kerk*, p. 85.

September 2001, Rev. Dr Zephania Kameeta (born 1945) was elected as the third bishop of the church.

The headquarters of this Church are in Windhoek. The highest and decision-making structure of the ELCRN is the Synod. This organ meets once every two years and also in cases of an emergency when an extraordinary meeting is required. The Synod consists of all pastors as *ex officio* members and one or two representatives of the congregation, and directors of all the church institutions. The second body is the Church Board, which consists of eleven members, with the Bishop as the chairperson, three deans and six representatives of the six church circuits, and a non-voting general secretary. All these members are elected for six years. This is the executive organ of the church responsible for running the affairs of the church for example, the calling and transferring of pastors. The Administrative Board consists of the General Secretary as the chairperson, and Assistant General Secretary and a treasurer. This body is responsible for the day- to-day running of the administration of the church.⁵³

The church still maintains close links with the United in Mission (UEM) in Germany which has superseded the old RMS. Like most missionary-planted churches, more than half of the annual budget of the church is still supplied by the UEM. At present the Church has membership of the Council of Churches in Namibia (CCN), the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) (1970), the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Lutheran Community of Southern Africa (LUCSA).

One of the main characteristics of this Church is that it serves all the different ethnic groups of Namibia in the central, southern, north-western and western regions of the country. Its members are drawn from Owambos, Damaras, Namas, Hereros, Germans and 'Basters' and Coloureds (people of mixed blood). The fact that the Church consists of different ethnic groups is not a stumbling block in the way of the growth of the church at large. The internal development of this Church towards unity has been slow and sometimes painful, mainly because of the ethnic differences undergirded by the apartheid policy of South Africa. This painful history of 'divide and rule' has positively

⁵³ ELCRN Archives: See Organogram and the Constitution of the Church.

brought forth a concept of unity across ethnic and language barriers based on a Christian understanding of unity in faith and witness. Nevertheless, in the history of the Church, in the days of the RMS the Church experienced painful situations in schisms that occurred in 1946 when the Nama-speaking people broke away and joined AMEC; another happened in 1955 when the Herero-speaking people broke away and formed the Oruano Church. Again, in 1957, the Afrikaans-speaking people from Reheboth protested against being part of the newly independent Evangelical Lutheran Church in South West Africa (ELCSWA) in anticipation of getting property from RMS and formed the Rynse Sending Kerk. Although ELCRN went through such painful situations, it defended, and still defends as best it can, its internal unity against obstacles like apartheid and other dangers within and outside the Church.

ELCRN suffered considerable internal strain because of its heterogeneous nature. Therefore, as Steenkamp has suggested, 'the clear correspondence between ethnic diversity and dissimilar experiences of oppression, on the one hand, and different socio-economic opportunities and political expectations on the other, inevitably produced very different attitudes, and hence tensions, within the church'.⁵⁴

These centred around discriminatory practices in the Church, identification with the South West Africa People's Organisation (Swapo), the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA) or other political parties, differing responses to the state's constitutional initiatives, and the personalities and changing positions of its leaders like Dr J.L. de Vries, who joined the government in 1979, and others like Dr Z. Kameeta, who was co-opted as the Swapo Secretary for Health and Social Welfare in 1976 and became a member of the Swapo politburo in 1979.⁵⁵ Dr de Vries was one of the most outspoken critics of the regime and was closely identified with the struggle for liberation. But as the decade wore on, he redefined his position as one of the mediators between the warring factions in the Namibian conflict. Some supported this universalist position, others felt that it was a fatal

⁵⁴ P. Steenkamp, 'The Churches' in C. Leys & J. S. Saul (eds), *Namibia's Liberation Struggle: The Two-Edged Sword*, London: James Currey, 1995, pp. 97-8.

⁵⁵ C. Leys & J. S. Saul, 'Swapo Inside Namibia' in Leys & Saul (eds), *Namibia's Liberation Struggle*, p. 75.

compromise which, while not directly supportive of the *status quo*, opposed any church involvement in politics. As the struggle intensified, so did these tensions within the church.

The existing statistical information concerning ELCRN may be regarded as inaccurate due to lack of commitment towards the collecting of the required data by the responsible people. Therefore, available information will vary from insufficient to incorrect.⁵⁶ The estimated membership in 1986 was 193 000.⁵⁷ But total estimated membership of the church vary from 250 000 in 1990 to 300 000 in 1999.⁵⁸ The church has 52 independent congregations, 69 Pastors, 12 Diaconists, more than 50 staff in church offices all over the country, and 179 hostel and kindergarten workers (all women)⁵⁹. ELCRN is the largest cross-sectional, multiracial and multilingual church in Namibia.

1.5.2. ELCIN (GELC)

The history of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (GELC) is intimately connected to the work of the RMS and German colonization of the country (1884-1915). When the country became a protectorate of Imperial Germany in 1884, the number of evangelical Lutherans increased through the immigration of German-speaking settlers, traders, officials and soldiers. German governor Theodor Leutwein instructed the RMS Inspector, Dr Schreiber, to establish a mission station in Windhoek and appoint a pastor who would serve the settler community and establish a German-speaking congregation. The RMS agreed and appointed Pastor Heinrich Siebe to serve both the Germans and the indigenous people.⁶⁰ At the beginning of 1896 the German parish was founded and affiliated to the Evangelical Church of Prussia in Germany. German-speaking parishes were

⁵⁶ G. Gurirab, 'Statistics' in Isaak (ed.), *The Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia*, p. 35.

⁵⁷ Nambala, *History of the Church in Namibia*, p. 75.

⁵⁸ Gurirab, 'Statistics' in Isaak (ed.), *The Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia*, p. 36.

⁵⁹ This information is gathered from ELCRN, *Address and Term Calender*, Windhoek: ELCRN Printing Press, 1999.

⁶⁰ Baumann, *Van Sending tot Kerk*, p. 28.

established in Swakopmund, Tsumeb, Karibib, Luderitzbucht, Omaruru/Kalkfeld, Otjiwarongo, Grootfontein, Keetmanshoop, Otavi, Maltahöhe and Okahand.⁶¹

Leading Namibian Church historian, Dr S. Nambala, stated that the German community did not feel the equals of the Black community and preferred to stay as a White German church. Therefore, in 1926 the German community established a synod and in 1960 formally constituted the Deutsche Evangelische Lutherische Kirche in Südwest Afrika. (DELKSWA)⁶² Thus, the church became an exclusively identifiable German Church. The Black Christians from the RMS got their own Church, ELCSWA, in 1957. It was clearly evident from these events that the RMS missionaries never came to grips with the opinion in Lutheran theology that opposed colonialism, racism and apartheid. Instead they spread church doctrines based clearly and purely along racial lines. Dr de Vries, in his book *Mission and Colonialism*, noted that the RMS never preached a theology that opposed colonialism but spread the doctrines of colonialism and failed to spread the liberating word of God.⁶³ This assessment can be regarded as historically accurate and has some theological justifications, as the unity endeavour of the Lutheran Churches will show.

In 1992, the DELKSWA synod decided to change its name to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (German Evangelical Lutheran Church) ELCIN (GELC). It is understood that this name expressed the common ground shared with the other Lutheran Churches in the country and the parenthesis attached denotes a reference to the origin of the Church.⁶⁴ This Church always safeguarded its own interests and those of its sponsors and fellow German-speaking churches in the RSA. As a result, in the unity process its relationship to the Black Lutheran Churches remained a paternalistic one, especially to the ELCRN, because of their common RMS background. The

⁶¹ Lutheran Churches in Namibia, *A Brief Historical Survey of the Three Lutheran Churches in Namibia*, Oniipa: ELOC Printing Press, 1995, p. 17.

⁶² Nambala, *History of the Church in Namibia*, p. 76.

⁶³ De Vries *Mission and Colonialism in Namibia*, p. 75.

⁶⁴ Lutheran Churches in Namibia, *A Brief Historical Survey*, p. 18.

tendency of this Church to support apartheid or, at the very least, a racially divided church, has brought them into serious conflict with the Black Lutheran Churches and other Lutherans throughout the world.

One important point that must not be overlooked is that ELCIN (GELC) is a small but very powerful church. It is powerful in the sense that the church has considerable wealth and highly trained staff. Generally, church members were reluctant to become politically involved in liberation issues and they were therefore pushed very hard by Black Lutheran churches in UELCSWA and CCN. The leaders of the Church were theologically conservative and their political views were coloured by the Cold War concerns of that time.⁶⁵

The headquarters of the church are in Windhoek and the official language is German. The current leader of the Church is Bishop Reinhard Keding (born in 1948 in Germany). The church has a strong congregational structure and uses the 'call'⁶⁶ system to appoint their pastors.⁶⁷ This church has a structure without a circuit or diocese. ELCIN (GELC) has a contractual relationship with the foreign office of Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD), which comprises the Vereinigte Evangelische Lutherische Kirche (VELK) of Germany. ELCIN (GELC) joined Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in 1963 and is affiliated to the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (UELCSA)⁶⁸, Lutheran Community in Southern Africa (LUCSA) and Council of Churches in Namibia (CCN).

The statistics of the LWF for 1986 showed the membership of the church as 12 000.⁶⁹ This figure

⁶⁵ See P.G. Kauffenstein, *Kirche muss Kirche bleiben*, Stuttgart: Adalbert Hudak: Seewald, 1979, *passim*.

⁶⁶ In the 'call' system the congregation has the right to appoint or dismissed a pastor.

⁶⁷ See the *Constitution of ELCIN (GELC)*, Windhoek: ELCIN (GELC) Printing Press, 1993.

⁶⁸ UELCSA is the union of mainly German speaking churches in Southern Africa, comprising ELCSA (Cape Church), ELCSA (N-T) and ELCIN (GELC).

⁶⁹ Nambala, *History of the Church in Namibia*, p.77.

may have been wrong, or many Germans may have left the country after this estimation, for the statistics (1995) from the Church office show 7 000 members in its 16 congregations.⁷⁰

1. 5. 3. ELCIN

The Evangelical Lutheran Owambokavango Church (ELOC)⁷¹ was constituted as an independent indigenous church in 1954. In 1963 its first indigenous moderator, Rev. Dr Leonard Auala (1908-1983), was consecrated as the first indigenous Bishop in Namibia. The election of Dr L. Auala coincided with the rise of Namibian nationalism. By this time it was already clear that the demand for freedom was likely to ally the churches unequivocally alongside national liberation movements like Swapo.⁷² In 1961 ELOC became the first Namibian Lutheran Church to join LWF and is presently a member of CCN, LUCSA and WCC. The Church still has strong links with FEMS.

Located primarily in northern Namibia, the ELCIN serves more than half of the Namibian population. Its headquarters are based at Oniipa in the far north. The northern part of the country is the most densely populated region of Namibia. In the early 1970s more than half of the Namibian population lived in this region. In 1964 this region was turned into a 'homeland' by the RSA government. As all progressive forces in southern Africa were subjected to RSA aggression, this church suffered much during the occupation of Namibia by South Africa. Its church printing press was destroyed twice (1973 and 1979)⁷³, and many of its people fled to neighbouring Angola and Zambia. Therefore, in Namibia, the Church has a difficult task in rebuilding the Church and in guiding the people to unity, peace and national reconciliation. In order to succeed in this task the Church is now expanding, because its members are spread all over the country. This rapid expansion

⁷⁰ Lutheran Churches in Namibia, *A Brief Historical Survey*, p. 20.

⁷¹ ELOC was the first name of the church. This name was changed to ELCIN by the ELCIN Ordinary Synod in 1984.

⁷² D. Herbstein & J. Evenson, *The Devils are Among Us. The War for Namibia*, London: Zed Books, 1989, p. 20.

⁷³ P. H. Katjavivi et al., *Church and Liberation in Namibia*, London: Pluto Press, 1989, p. 19.

of the Church to other parts of the country, where other Lutheran Churches, namely ELCRN and ELCIN (GELC) are operating, was seen as factor for concern in the unity process. Some years ago ELCIN divided itself into two dioceses, each headed by a bishop.

As the largest church in Namibia, ELCIN had in 1989 a membership of 350 266⁷⁴ which had grown by 1995 to 500 000 and in 2000 to an estimated 600 000.⁷⁵ The Church has a 'top-down' church structure with presiding Bishop Appolus Kaulinge (born 1934) and Bishop Dr Thomas Shivute (born 1942) as its leaders. The Synod is the highest body of the Church and the Church Board is responsible for the transfer of pastors in the dioceses. The Administrative Boards of the two dioceses handle the day-to-day affairs of the dioceses.⁷⁶

Of the three Lutheran Churches, ELCIN and ELCIN(GELC) were least affected by the divisions in the churches. ELCIN was predominantly Owambo-speaking, with a small Kavango minority. Its leaders and the vast majority of its members strongly identified with, and participated in, the liberation struggle. The commitment of the leaders of the Church to an almost fundamentalist theology did not translate into an apolitical approach to secular matters. As in almost all African and European countries, an evangelical tradition did not preclude political involvement. On the contrary, it was often accompanied by an emphatic insistence on social justice. For most of the leaders of this church, political neutrality in the context of oppression was tantamount to heresy and an engagement in temporal affairs was viewed as a Christian obligation.

1.6. Conclusion

The historical background of the Lutheran Churches in southern Africa reveals that they are the products of various mission societies. Consequently, the churches have inherited racial and ethnic differences laid down by the different mission societies and politically triggered by the apartheid

⁷⁴ Nambala, *History of the Church in Namibia*, p. 90.

⁷⁵ *ELCIN 5 Year Plan 1996-2000*, Oniipa: ELCIN Printing Press, 1996, p. 7.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

policy of the RSA. Nevertheless, Lutheran mission societies in southern Africa started as early as 1890 to co-operate and established the notion of unity and concurrence amongst them. These actions can be seen as early attempts at Lutheran unity in South Africa and Namibia. The missionaries, although they supported colonial governments, had promoted the spirit and willingness for future developments of Lutheran co-operation and unity.

In Namibia the initiatives are still continuing because, from the start, each attempt failed due to different understandings concerning what is meant by being a church and because of the involvement of the churches in racial, social, economic and ideological aspects of Namibian society.

Chapter Two

The historical-theological background and the activities of UELCSWA (1972-1993)

2.1. Introduction

The presence of UELCSWA, the hunger for liberation and the formation of CCN (1978) and LWF-NNC (1992), created a more effective political witness for the Churches. The Black Lutheran Churches fostered in 1971 the image of being 'the voice of the voiceless', while the German-speaking churches supported the *status quo*. The co-operation between the Lutheran Churches was on a federal basis, but some kind of unity was achieved, although clear division among the three churches was experienced. UELCSWA vigorously promoted the unity spirit among the churches but internal struggles based on socio-political and economic responses to the situation in Namibia among the churches have created break-downs in the attempts of the body to achieve unity. As international attention was on Namibia, and as the Lutheran Church was the biggest church in the country, the international Lutheran community also participated in the socio-political endeavours of the three churches.

This chapter deals with the internal struggles and conflicts among the three churches and international initiatives to help UELCSWA. The deliberations between the churches took the form of Synods, Consultations, Appeals and LWF Assemblies.

2.2. Why Lutheran Unity in Namibia?

Namibian Lutheran Churches represent close to 90 per cent of the Christians in the Namibian population.¹ These Lutheran Churches have the largest concentration of Lutherans in a single country in the world, and have more in common than the forces that divide them. Therefore the argument of the Rev.B. M. Nzama, based on the Gospel of John, chapter 17 verses 12-23, clearly explains why unity is desirable. She stated: 'It has never been the will of God that Christians should

¹ *Lutheran World Federation Information*, Geneva: LWF, 1994, p. 9.

separated from each other for any reason. The criteria for belonging to God's Kingdom is to be in unity with other Christians, in accordance with Jesus' prayer where he represented these words that they may be one, even as we are one.'²

The need for Lutheran Unity is strongly supported by the fact that these Churches shared the same confession and there are no doctrinal obstacles to a visible expression of unity. The essential unity of the Churches is clearly spelled out in their respective constitutions concerning creed and doctrine. For example, all the Churches claim that Jesus Christ is the foundation of the Churches, as witnessed by the Holy Writings of the Old and New Testaments. All Churches confess their belief according to the Apostolic, Nicene and Athenian Creeds, and in accordance with the Creeds of the Church Reform, constituted in the Augsburg Confession and the Small Catechism of Martin Luther (1483-1546). All Churches deem the Word of God to be the only and absolute measure of faith, doctrine and life.³ The desired unity of the Lutheran Church is a decisive thing. It is in accordance with the Seventh article of the Augsburg Confession, which states:

'It is taught among us that one holy Christian church will be and remain forever. This is the assembly of all believers among whom gospel is preached in its purity and holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel. For it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies instituted by men should be observed uniformly in all places. It is as Paul says in Eph. 4:4,5 'There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to be one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism'.⁴

2.3. The Historical and Theological justifications for the Unity initiative.

As already stated in this thesis, Lutherans in southern Africa have emerged from diverse backgrounds and from different countries. The seeds for unity were already planted by the missionaries. But the

² B.N. Nzama, 'The History of ELCSA (1965-1994): A critical analysis of the foundation of ELCSA and its impact on the unity talks within the Lutheran Church in South Africa' (unpublished B.Th. Honours dissertation, University of Natal Pietermaritzburg, 1994), p. 30.

³ See ELCRN Archives: ELCRN Constitution; ELCIN Archives : ELCIN Constitution; and ELCIN (GELC) Archives: ELCIN (GELC) Constitution.

⁴ T.G. Tappert (ed.), *The Book of Concord*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959, p. 32.

unity process has become an unending challenge for the Lutheran Churches, because speeding-up the process was hampered by socio-political and economic aspects in the region.⁵ Therefore, from the beginning of the unity process in southern Africa, and particular of that in Namibia, it has repeatedly been asked why Lutherans have been so divided? Another important question is why it was not possible to establish a united Lutheran Church from the very beginning?⁶ In 1947, at its first Assembly in Lund, LWF was already urging member churches to foster the unity of all Lutheran churches/ families in their respective regions and countries. This Assembly expressed itself strongly on racial issues, on the basis of a Christian understanding of human values. Lutheran co-operation, the growth of United Lutheran Churches, equality and independence of all churches, the Christian obligation to overcome racial and superiority complexes, and support of a universal Declaration of Human Rights, were, and are still to this day, issues of particular importance to the situation of the Lutheran Churches in southern Africa.⁷ It is important for this study to note that these issues have been prominent at all Lutheran World Federation's Assemblies since 1947. It was unfortunate for Lutheran Churches in southern Africa that they did not take heed of all resolutions taken by LWF, but rather complied with the racial policy of the government of the RSA.

2.4. The beginning of the Unity talks between Black Lutheran Churches (1961)

The two Black Lutheran Churches in Namibia broke the historic silence of the Lutherans on socio-political and economic issues of the country in the 1960s. They had the immediate insight that the policy of separate development would be a threat to the unity of the Church and to the unity of the country as a whole. For the successful implementation of separate development in Namibia, the South African regime set up in 1962 a body, commonly known as the Odendaal Commission, to enquire into the feasibility of separate homelands for the various indigenous peoples.⁸ This

⁵ See chapter 4 for socio-political and economic aspects of this thesis.

⁶ K. Schmale, *Constituting Assembly: Development Towards Merger*, Johannesburg: FELCSA 1974, p. 2

⁷ Hellberg, *A Voice of the Voiceless*, pp. 36-7.

⁸ See G. Lawrie, *New Light on South West Africa: Some Extracts from and Comments on the Odendaal Report*, Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1964, pp. 1-15.

Commission recommended that the territory be divided into ten ethnic homelands, eight of them for Africans.⁹ The Odendaal plan produced shock-waves with the creation of the first homeland, namely Owamboland, in northern Namibia in 1968. This action finally broke the chrysalis of ecclesiastical silence in Namibia because the plan was a blueprint for the separation of whites from blacks and the fragmenting of the black population into non-viable, economically dependent, rural labour reservoirs in overcrowded, overpopulated and waterless territories unsuitable for raising livestock and equipped only with rudimentary amenities.¹⁰ The main impact of this policy was on the Damaras, Namas and Hereros, because 80 to 90 per cent of these people were affected.¹¹ The recommendations of the Odendaal Commission were promulgated as the Native Nations Act No.54 of 1968. The belief was that people would develop from tribal administrative structures to self-government and eventually to independent homelands, as was the case with the homeland system in South Africa.¹²

The Odendaal plan was seen as diametrically opposed to the movement of Church unity and was rejected.¹³ To counter these threats, the two Black Lutheran Churches undertook the important step of establishing a single theological training and educational centre for leaders of congregations, at Otjimbingwe, in June 1963. Then in May 1964 the churches wrote a memorandum to the government of the RSA, challenging the removal of indigenous people from their dwelling-places and forcing them to settle in harsh areas. This action, according to the churches, was destroying the spiritual and social unity of the people. They stated: 'Because we consider the whole of South West Africa as the home and fatherland of the different peoples and races of the country, we believe that

⁹ P. Duigan & L.H. Gann, *South West Africa-Namibia*, New York: American African Affairs Association, 1979, p. 13.

¹⁰ G.Tötemeyer, *Namibia Old and New: Traditional and Modern Leaders in Owamboland*, London: Hurst, 1978, p. 50.

¹¹ D. Soggot, *Namibia: The Violent Heritage*, London: Rex Collings, 1986, p. 34.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ ELCRN Archives: Minutes, Conference, 26 November 1964.

peace can only be maintained by close collaboration between all inhabitants of this country.’¹⁴

On 28 September 1967 the churches worked out a memorandum expressing grave concerns about the disabilities imposed by the government of the RSA on the indigenous people, including the transfer of people to undeveloped areas and locations, mass human rights violations, torture of people and the denial of free movement of people in their country of birth.¹⁵

In the action of these two churches (ELOC and ELCSWA) it was made clear that they were serious about Church unity. Therefore, they moved away from fraternal talks and statements to straightforward action on the basis of Christian convictions. Their conviction that the Gospel affected all aspects of all human life was very strong which urged them to move from a position of silence to become ‘the voice of the voiceless’ against the aggression of the South African government. When the Black Lutheran Churches protested against the consequences of separate development and the cruel reality of the RSA government policy, they did so with firm reference to the necessity for maintaining the unity of the people across ethnic divisions. This action was specifically important for the ELCSWA because it was composed of several ethnic groups, namely Namas, Damaras, Hereros, Basters, Germans and Owambos. This heroic action encouraged the Churches to take up a new role not previously known to Lutherans in Southern Africa, of raising a prophetic voice against South African government policies, through the Open Letter of 1971.¹⁶

2.5.The Open Letter of ELOC and ELCSWA (Rhenish Mission) to the South African government (1971)

The years 1971 and 1972 may be considered as a turning-point in the history of Namibia and as ‘a period when the RSA was effectively cornered’¹⁷ by the Namibian people and the international community. The Open Letter of the two Black Churches of Namibia to the then Prime Minister, B.

¹⁴ H. Hunke, *Namibia the Strength of the Powerless*, Rome: IDOC International, 1980, pp. 89-102.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 88.

¹⁶ Katjavivi et al., *Church and Liberation in Namibia*, pp. 34-5.

¹⁷ P.H. Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance in Namibia*, London: James Currey, 1988, pp. 65-6.

J. Vorster (1915-1983), was the first decisive and united expression of its kind in southern Africa by a Lutheran Church. No other single Lutheran Church document has ever had such an immediate and lasting influence in Namibia and southern Africa.

This letter became the first prophetic denunciation of the injustice and illegal occupation of Namibia by the RSA. In the history of the church in Namibia, no single ecumenical statement of theology has received such wide attention since the individual German Christians in the then South West Africa signed the Barmen Declaration during World War Two, challenging the heresy of Nazism.¹⁸ The letter sent shock waves through the White community.¹⁹ The White Lutheran Churches in southern Africa, and DELKSWA in particular, distanced themselves from this letter.

The action of the Churches was prompted by the declaration of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in June 1971 of the illegality of the RSA's occupation of Namibia. This letter, of 30 June 1971, was signed by Bishop L. Auala (1908-1983) of ELOC and Rev. P. Gowaseb (1922-1991) of ELCSWA.²⁰ DELKSWA reacted by issuing a public statement that 'the Church leadership of DELK in SWA hereby informs the public that she feels obliged to dissociate from the Open Letter to the Prime Minister and also from the declaration made from the pulpit by both the non-white independent Churches.'²¹ Totally disassociating itself from the Black Lutheran Churches, DELKSWA stated that 'The DELK is surprised by what she views as a purely political action which, in her opinion, cannot in any way be brought into harmony with previous utterances by either of these two churches.'²²

¹⁸ P.J Isaak 'Lutheran Churches' Open Letter of 1971' in Isaak (ed.), *The Evangelical Lutheran Church in the republic of Namibia*, p. 25.

¹⁹ Steenkamp 'The Churches' in Leys & Saul (eds), *Namibia's Liberation Struggle*, p. 95.

²⁰ See Appendix 1.

²¹ K. Eicholtz 'Dispute between Black and White Lutherans in Namibia after the Open Letter of 1971' in U.Duchrow (ed.), *Lutheran Churches*, p. 151.

²² Ibid.

After the meeting on 18 August 1971 in Windhoek with the South African government, the Black Lutheran Churches issued a Pastoral Letter to all Lutheran congregations in Namibia. Empowered by Christian conviction, the letter condemned the policy of separate development and called for independence and self-government. The churches stated that 'the true development of the inhabitants of South West Africa on Christian basis ought to lead to unity and fraternity between all races'.²³ The churches also recognized the fact that apartheid had divided people and created problems in the relationship between the indigenous people and the Whites.

The Open Letter to the RSA government changed the political scene in Namibia. The Lutheran Churches had taken a unified stand and officially entered the political arena and addressed political issues of gross human rights violation and of freedom for all Namibian people. This letter represented a watershed in ecclesiastical history. The Open Letter forced the RSA government to recognise church leaders as one of the major players in politics. The letter was a political conscientisation of the indigenous people. The letter sought to reconcile spiritual commitment with political involvement.

For the Black Lutheran Churches, the reaction of the German Church misrepresented the relationship between spiritual commitment and political involvement, since, for them, there were no clear-cut divisions between religious values and political concerns. Real tensions between the Black and White Lutheran Churches began after the Open Letter. There was a constant tension between the Black and White sectors of Namibian society and there was no dialogue between them in regard to questions raised by the Black Lutheran Churches in the Open Letter.

The tension between the Lutheran Churches on the question of political and social involvement was masterly explained by Prof. P.J. Isaak, in his article on the 'Lutheran Churches' Open Letter of 1971'. He noted:

'An unhealthy situation occurs when one part of the relationship allows itself to be dominated by the other, for then an imbalance results. When one part of the relationship withdraws from the

²³ See Appendix 2.

dialogue and encounter, the creative tension is removed and there is no healthy development, for one side dominates: no further progress is made. Progress only results from healthy, creative dialogue between both sides, slowly evolving towards a new harmony.’²⁴

2.6. The establishment of UELCSWA to co-ordinate Lutheran Unity (1972)

In order to maintain their new image and role the Churches needed a unified body to be the ‘voice of the voiceless’. The initial idea of establishing a United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia started in Karibib in 1961.²⁵ All three Lutheran Churches were involved in principle and decided to meet once or twice every year for working on the Unity process. Unfortunately, DELKSWA was hesitant to participate and to co-operate fully with the Black Lutheran Churches. Due to their dissociation from the Open Letter in 1971, DELCSWA was not part of the establishment of the UELCSWA in 1972. Although DELCSWA failed to join UELCSWA, ELOC and ELCSWA showed their seriousness and kept the door open for DELKSWA to enter the unity process at any time DELKSWA felt able to join. In 1972 the UELCSWA member churches urged their members, and all Christians in Namibia, to accept any brother or sister living in their proximity, regardless of his/her colour or race and political standpoint.²⁶ This fundamental position was based on the concept that in the Church of Jesus Christ neither race nor language problem should be an unbridgeable divide for the communion of believers.

The importance of UELCSWA for Lutheran Unity in Namibia became apparent in the years after the Open Letter of 1971. ELOC and ELCSWA were heavily influenced by the spirit of self-determination and human rights. This was triggered by the political changes in the region and the spirit of liberation theology. UELCSWA from the start formed a platform for dialogue and common action. The constitution of UELCSWA, based on a federal structure and working toward total unity, however limited, gave the Churches the opportunities to act independently. It was said by member

²⁴ Isaak, ‘Lutheran Churches’ Open Letter’ in Isaak (ed.), *The Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia*, p. 33.

²⁵ I.K.Shuuya, *Why and How One Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia?* Windhoek: ELCRN Printing Press, 1988, pp. 11-12.

²⁶ See Appendix 2.

churches that UELCSWA had no power to legislate for the churches belonging to it, or to interfere with their autonomy.²⁷ The body was entrusted by the Lutheran Churches to serve as a unity mediator among them. The members of UELCSWA guarded this federal character. At the same time UELCSWA represented confessional unity which logically should imply pulpit and altar fellowship, as it was to be stipulated by the Swakopmund Appeal of 1975.²⁸

As an independent body, UELCSWA was more influential politically than churches such as the Neder-Duits Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK), the Anglican Church and the RCC. UELCSWA had a unique role. It was the only body which could rightly claim that it represented the largest number of Namibians, since all ethnic groups were represented in it. Therefore, J.H.P. Serfontein rightly stated in his book *Namibia?* that UELCSWA was the 'one binding and stable force in a country which is often still divided on old tribal lines and group loyalties. It unites the indigenous people despite their differences and its unity puts the political parties to shame'.²⁹ However, it would be ridiculous to believe that 'group loyalties' no longer play any role in independent Namibia and the churches. It is one of the reasons why the Lutheran unity process cannot be fully integrated in Namibian society. Nevertheless, UELCSWA stressed greater unity on the Christian basis, transcending ethnic differences and urged unity in Christ. It was hoped that UELCSWA, because it was representing the majority of Namibians, might be the best structure to give stability in the independent Namibia by strongly advocating the unity of all people.

UELCSWA member churches had wider responsibilities than simply religious ones. They clearly spelled out their aim in April 1975, after the Synod for unity between ELOC and ELCSWA. Dr de Vries, who was then president of the UELCSWA, said that 'we have never had such a clear decision as this one to establish one Lutheran Church in Namibia.'³⁰ It was believed by the leaders of the Black Lutheran Churches that the unity of the Black Lutheran Churches expressed the will of the

²⁷ ELCRN Archives: UELCSWA Constitution clearly shows the nature and work of the body.

²⁸ *Swakopmund Appeal*, point 7.

²⁹ J.H.P. Serfontein, *Namibia?* Randburg: Fokus Suid Publishers, 1976, p. 199.

³⁰ ELCRN Archives: Report, Synod, 7-11 April 1975, p. 2.

majority of the indigenous people of Namibia. The Synod of the Churches made it clear that the two churches were to become one on a non-ethnic, non-geographic basis, although the churches would have dioceses, as indicated by the proposed Lutheran map.³¹ It was therefore clear that the original unity initiative was both theological and political and the two churches aligned themselves with the 'suffering masses' of Namibia and forged close association with the progressive political movements of the country such as SWAPO and SWANU. They have strongly stressed the issue of unity of all Namibians. Dr J.L. de Vries said 'We believe that on vital questions such as this, the church should give a lead and not come tagging behind everyone else.'³² This position of the churches created enormous tension and conflict in the later development of the unity process.³³

2.7.Activities of UELCSWA(1972-1993)

2.7. 1 The Synods of UELCSWA

UELCSWA, as the federal body, tried to bring the three churches towards unity. In order to achieve this goal, UELCSWA held in a period of 21 years seven Synods and numerous Church Council meetings, Consultations and meetings at the grass roots level. But the most important part of the life of UELCSWA was based on the following Synods:

First Synod in Otjimbingwe (1972)

Second Synod in Engela (1975)

Third Synod in Windhoek (1980)

Fourth Synod in Ongwediva (1983)

Fifth Synod in Windhoek (1986)

Sixth Synod in Windhoek (1990)

Seventh Synod in Windhoek (1993)

³¹ Ibid. See also Appendix 3.

³² *ECU News Bulletin*, 9 (July 1975).

³³ See chapters three and four of this thesis.

These Synods were important in the development of the unity process, because each one preceded important events in the lives of the three Lutheran churches.³⁴ In this study the sequence of important developments will be followed to give meaning to the deliberations and struggles of the churches.

2.7.2. The First Synod in Otjimbingwe (1972)

The First Synod held at Paulinum, Otjimbingwe, in 1972 is a significant event for ELOC and ELCSWA because these churches agreed to form a union. This event was called the 'marriage' between ELOC and ELCSWA by then president of FELCSA, the late Rev. S.W. Habelgraan, citing himself as a 'marriage officer'.³⁵ As with the Open Letter to the government of the RSA on 30 June 1971, DELKSWA did not join the two Black Churches. However, the two Black Lutheran Churches kept the door open for DELKSWA to enter the unity process any time she felt ready to come.³⁶ The only problem, according to Dr. P.J. Isaak, was that leaving the door open for DELKSWA doubtless resulted in the Black Lutheran Churches waiting too long, so that they got 'cold'.³⁷ This delay can be felt in the later developments of the unity process, because by then it had become a waiting game. For example, the UELCSWA office was closed from 1981-1984 to wait for the DELKSWA to come to terms with the total unity aspirations of the other two churches. Other examples of the famous 'wait' occurred in 1987 when DELKSWA left CCN, and in 1989 when ELCSWA suspended all UELCSWA activities. These actions of the churches are symptomatic of the Lutheran Churches in southern Africa, always in conflict and tension because of Black and White division and because of different mission backgrounds.

³⁴ Lutheran Churches in Namibia, *A Brief Historical Survey*, pp.21-6.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 23-4.

³⁶ Shuuya, *Why and How One Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia?* p. 13.

³⁷ Author's interview with Dr P.J. Isaak, Windhoek: 12 March 2001.

As already stated in the present thesis, UELCSWA was a federal body, but the two Black churches initiated progress toward unity through:

1. Unity in the Synod of UELCSWA
2. United Church Board
3. United Executive Committee
4. United Evangelical Lutheran Seminary (Paulinum, 1963)
5. Pastors' Conferences and Upgrading Courses³⁸

By 1975 negotiations on the unity process had reached such a high level that the Pastors' Conference of 4-6 March made the following recommendations for in-depth research on Church unity to the Synod of UELCSWA in Engela, 7-11 July 1975:

- '1. In the light of the Confessions of the Lutheran Churches and the resolutions taken by the FELCSA, to consider the formation of one Lutheran Church in Namibia
2. To ensure the unity process through the leadership of Church in the hands of one person, namely the presiding bishop (archbishop)
3. That the regional churches (ELOC and ELCSWA) will cease to exist as separate churches, but will become northern and southern dioceses, each under a bishop
4. The problems in the dioceses will be addressed by the diocesan leadership, while problems for the attention of the authority of the church will be referred to the Church Board. This indicates that the dioceses have a certain autonomy.
5. The administration of the church will be handled by the central office responsible for running the finances of the unified church. The central office will remunerate equal salaries to all pastors and handle placing of pastors in the congregations.'³⁹

The demarcation of the dioceses was seen not in terms of ethnic groupings, but for the better control of the congregations according to language and culture.⁴⁰ This demarcation cut across traditional ethnic regions and the South African-created homelands. Consequently, a variety of ethnic groups are demarcated in each diocese.

2.7.3. The Second Synod- Engela, Owamboland from 7-11 April 1975.

³⁸ ELCRN Archives: Minutes, Church Council, 1974, pp. 5-6.

³⁹ ELCRN Archives: Minutes, Conference, 1975, pp. 1-3.

⁴⁰ See Appendix 3.

This was a very importance Synod because the initial idea of the unified Lutheran church in Namibia was endorsed by this Synod. The Synod put forward two crucial decisions, namely:

- ‘1. the establishment of one Lutheran Church
2. to send the decisions of the Synod to ELOC and ELCSWA Synods for endorsement.’⁴¹

These decisions were also endorsed by the DELCSWA Synod in 1978.

2.7.4. The merger commission

The merger commission was established by the UELCSWA executive committee in 1975. This body was constituted to work on the Church Constitution, the Liturgy and the Theological Orders for the united Church and to produce functional recommendations to the UELCSWA executive committee. The body could not function well, due to extra responsibilities of the people assigned to the body. Some of the members of the body were congregational leaders, treasurers of the churches and other office-bearers of the churches.⁴²

However, the commission managed to present a draft constitution for the United Lutheran Church for the Synod, held on 5-9 May 1980 in Windhoek. This Synod could not endorse the constitution, because some churches had accepted the framework of unity in the process of federation.⁴³ The merger commission continued to fulfil its task, but all its attempts were in vain because the draft constitution was repeatedly sent back to them for reworking and when it was finally accepted in 1986 it was never implemented. In 1986, Bishop H. Frederik, who was then the president of UELCSWA, concluded in his report that ‘the Lutheran churches in Namibia could not have made progress in their unity talks during the last 14 years. Unfortunately the history of UELCSWA reports 14 years of fruitless attempts.’⁴⁴ This process continued to the demise of the UELCSWA in 1993.

⁴¹ ELCRN Archives: Report, UELCSWA Synod, 7-11 April 1975, p. 4.

⁴² ELCRN Archives: Minutes, Merger-Commission, 9 April 1976, pp. 9-10.

⁴³ ELCRN Archives: Minutes, UELCSWA Synod, 5-9 May 1980, p. 4.

⁴⁴ ELCIN Archives: Report, UELCSWA Synod, 27-31 October 1986, p. 7.

2.7. 5.The Swakopmund Appeal (1975)

As members of FELCSA, all three Lutheran Churches unanimously adopted the Swakopmund Appeal concerning the unity and the witness of Lutheran Churches in southern Africa. Rightfully, H.E. Winkler called this 'Appeal' 'one of clearest statements of a prophetic Lutheran Theology, a theology which stressed unity and accepted the political responsibility of the churches'.⁴⁵ This 'Appeal' urged the Lutheran Churches to make a combined response to political issues and to pave the way to total unity. In the 'Appeal', Lutheran Churches clearly identified 'alien principles' which were undermining the doctrine, the witness and the practice of the Churches and were a direct threat to the faith of the Churches.⁴⁶ The churches theologically analysed the 'alien principles' which had for a long time damaged the image of Lutheran Churches in southern Africa. These principles were:

1. An emphasis on the loyalty to the ethnic group which induces Lutheran Christians to worship in a Lutheran church dependent on birth or race or ethnic affinities which insist that the Lutheran churches in Southern Africa remain divided into separate churches according to ethnic principles;
2. The belief that the unity of the Church is only a spiritual unity which need not to be manifested;
3. The belief that the structure of society and the political and economic system of our country are to be shaped according to natural laws only, inherent in creation or merely according to considerations of practical expediency, without being exposed to the criterion of God's love as revealed in biblical message.⁴⁷

This document was a challenge to the internal division and crisis in the Lutheran churches in southern Africa. It reaffirmed the Lutheran doctrine on 'justification by grace' for all people, irrespective of race, colour, or social status. The conference clearly spelled out the concept of the Church and stated:

'We believe that the church as the body of Christ is always a supernatural and never a political entity. Entry into this body depends not on birth or race or affinities, but only on the calling of God accepted by men and confessed in faith and baptism.'⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Winkler 'The divided roots of Lutheranism in South Africa', p. 106.

⁴⁶ *Swakopmund Appeal*, point 1.

⁴⁷ Ibid., points 4, 5, 6 .

⁴⁸ Ibid., point 12.

It was also agreed that the unity of the Church and the relevance of the Church structures needed to be manifested in the organizational aspects of the church.⁴⁹

As apartheid is historically one of the major problems in the southern African region, the churches acknowledge that they were manifesting errors and misunderstandings which could not be reconciled to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The churches made the following affirmation on apartheid:

‘We affirm that the political system in force in South Africa, with its discrimination against some sectors of the population, its acceptance of the break-up of many families, its concentration of power in the hands of one race only, and the limitations it imposes on freedom, cannot be reconciled with the gospel of the grace of God in Jesus Christ.’⁵⁰

2.8. The decision of the Church Council of the UELCSWA taken on 17 September 1975

The council of UELCSWA met in September 1976 to deal with the membership application⁵¹ of the DELKSWA. Before accepting this application, UELCSWA clarified the position of the Black Lutheran churches as follows:

‘that the Black Church lives in a situation of struggle and that it cannot deviate from its present task and responsibility to proclaim the Gospel of the freedom of the whole human being as it has done hitherto...that the church is the conscience of the people and must also be the conscience of the authorities.’⁵²

The reply of DELKSWA was phrased in such a way that it did not commit itself to support the Swakopmund Appeal of FELCSA or to accept the aim of UELCSWA to strive for full unity and the merger of the Lutheran Churches in Namibia. The answer showed, in fact, that the attitude of DELKSWA was in no way changed by recent developments in Namibia. It stated that the non-negotiable basis of the application was the theological declaration of their Synod of 1975 concerning non-interference in political matters, as well as the following points of the valid constitution of

⁴⁹ Winkler, ‘The divided roots of Lutheranism in South Africa’, p.107.

⁵⁰ *Swakopmund Appeal*, point 21.

⁵¹ ELCIN (GELC) Archives: DELKSWA application letter to UELCSWA, 20 April 1976.

⁵² ELCIN (GELC) Archives: UELCSWA Church Council decision on the application of DELKSWA, 17 September 1976.

UELCSWA, namely: union on a federal basis and maintenance of the independence of the member churches.⁵³

With regard to the socio-political responsibility of the UELCSWA, member churches stated in their answer to DELKSWA:

‘as the church has been given the task to carry out the office of reconciliation as has been repeatedly affirmed by UELCSWA - we support all endeavours which lead to peaceful developments of the country, which is the homeland for members of all the three Lutheran churches. In order to have a dialogue with regard to these endeavours a union of the churches of the same confession offers itself only in the UELCSWA.’⁵⁴

In reaction, the DELKSWA stated that: ‘it reserves its freedom to judge the situation in view of the action for the Church and the Christians for example to involve in the struggles of the indigenous people.’⁵⁵

After the refusal of the application of membership application by UELCSWA, DELKSWA Synod of 20 September 1976 passed a number of resolutions on socio-political issues with reference to the theme of the LWF Assembly in 1977 in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The Synod had taken some concrete actions in order to eliminate any consequences of the policy of separate development in its own Church structure. It had, among other things, decided to eliminate apartheid in the church by merging separate congregations in which apartheid was practised on the basis of race and language differences. The Synod took note of the LWF voicing its condemnation of the institutional violence and brutality practised in South Africa and Namibia. The Synod also called upon its members to contribute toward the struggle for human dignity.⁵⁶

However symptomatic of Lutheran churches in southern Africa, the attitude of DELKSWA toward total unity was discouraging because of the political climate of that time. Therefore, the Church reiterated the so-called non-negotiable basis of the application of the Synod of 1975 and affirmed

⁵³ ELCIN (GELC) Archives: DELKSWA Synod on the decision of UELCSWA, 20 September 1976.

⁵⁴ ELCIN (GELC) Archives: UELCSWA Church Council decision to DELKSWA, 17 September 1976.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

the following points of the constitution of UELCSWA, namely:

- ‘1. union on a federal basis,
2. maintenance of the independence of member churches (par. 4 a-d of the UELCSWA constitution)
3. taking care of tasks of the church as especially mentioned in par 3 a-c of the UELCSWA constitution’.⁵⁷

DELKSWA acknowledged the task of the church in carrying out the office of reconciliation as affirmed by UELCSWA. In the same spirit, the church endorsed its support of all endeavours which would lead to peaceful political developments in the country. For the successful implementation of these endeavours, all three churches advocated the union of the churches of the same confession in the UELCSWA. However, DELKSWA reserved its freedom to judge the situation in view of any action by the church.⁵⁸

Between 1972 and 1976 the efforts of DELKSWA to join UELCSWA had not obtained any result. ELOC and ELCSWA were increasingly engaged in their role as ‘the voice of the voiceless majority’ in the worsening political climate of the country and they enjoyed no substantial support from DELKSWA. This was evident in the report of the then leader of DELKSWA, Landespropst K. Kirschnereit. He expressed his deep disappointment with the slow progress in joining UELCSWA: ‘amalgamation is not a common Lutheran confession, which in itself would justify unity and the delaying attitude of UELCSWA caused concern.’⁵⁹ The big question then was whether the concurrence by UELCSWA member churches to accept DELKSWA was meant in all honesty, or whether the formal concurrence hid various socio-political intentions. In this regard, the two Black Lutheran Churches committed themselves to socio-political and economic realities of the situation in Namibia.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ ELCIN (GELC) Archives: DELKSWA Synod on the decision of UELCSWA, 20 September 1976.

⁵⁹ ELCIN (GELC) Archives: Report, Synod, 7-11 April 1976, pp. 1-2.

A very important development in Namibia occurred in May 1976 when two of six Namibians charged under the Terrorism Act of RSA of 1966 were sentenced to death. The DELKSWA joined UELCSWA member churches and the RCC, the Anglican Church and the AMEC in signing a statement of protest addressed to the RSA government. This action of solidarity by DELKSWA improved their relations with the two Black Lutheran Churches. In fact, this was the opportunity for DELKSWA to speed up the merger negotiations with other Lutherans, but unfortunately the leader of DELKSWA did not have the full support of all the members of his Church in this act of solidarity.⁶⁰

After five years of intensive negotiations the application (dated 20 April 1975) for membership of DELKSWA was unanimously approved by UELCSWA member churches in 1977. The Church Council of UELCSWA clearly spelled out the position of the Black Churches in a situation of struggle and that it would not deviate from its task and responsibility of proclaiming the Gospel of freedom of the whole human being. DELKSWA was also informed about the ultimate declared aim of UELCSWA, to strive as soon as possible for full unity and merger of the Churches.⁶¹

2.9. The Sixth LWF Assembly : Dar es Salaam, Tanzania (1977) and Confessional Integrity

The Sixth LWF Assembly in 1977 was its first assembly in Africa. This Assembly provided an enormous opportunity for LWF and UELCSWA to review their work by 'evaluation and prioritizing for the future.'⁶² At almost at every LWF Assembly the situation of the Lutheran Churches in southern Africa was brought under urgent consideration due to the lack of socio-political and economic witness of the churches in the region. In no area had the question of unity and continuity been asked with such urgency as in the southern African Lutheran Churches' struggle against the legalized form of racism in Namibia and the RSA. This assembly also adopted the 'Swakopmund

⁶⁰ Hellberg, *A Voice of the Voiceless*, p. 158.

⁶¹ ELCIN (GELC) Archives: Minutes, Church Boards, 16-17 September 1976, p. 1.

⁶² LWF Report, no.17/18: *From Dar es Salaam to Budapest, Reports on the Work of the Lutheran World Federation, 1977-1984*, Geneva: LWF April, 1984, p. 14.

Appeal' of FELCSA to Lutheran Christians in southern Africa concerning the unity and the witness of Lutheran churches and their members in Southern Africa.⁶³ The struggles of the churches have been designated Confessional Integrity by the LWF.⁶⁴ The Assembly came up with the *status confessionis* resolution: 'that apartheid must be rejected, not only for political and economic reasons, but the reasons of faith.'⁶⁵ The understanding of the resolutions was that apartheid stands for racial separation, while the Church stands for unity. Furthermore, the Assembly specifically resolved, regarding the situation in RSA:

1. That the Assembly call upon its member churches to recognize that, from the viewpoint of Lutheran theology, the present government of South Africa has consistently violated the proper role of government and of law in relation to basic human rights.
2. That the LWF and its member churches, especially those in southern Africa and their partner churches overseas, publicly support those calling for change which will ensure universal suffrage.
3. That the member churches avoid anything that could give the impression that the churches support racism and injustice.'⁶⁶

The LWF Assembly reaffirmed the support of all member churches in southern Africa in their struggle against apartheid and their relevant witness to the gospel in the region.⁶⁷ This support and the resolution on 'confessional integrity' created extensive debate and discussion and influenced other church bodies like the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the SACC to speak of apartheid as heresy. Although the resolution had such widespread impact beyond southern Africa and Lutheranism, it appears not to have sufficiently influenced those whom it was specifically directed at, namely the White Lutheran Churches in southern Africa.⁶⁸

⁶³ LWF Assembly, *In Christ - A New Community*, Geneva: Kreutz Verlag, 1977, pp. 215-19.

⁶⁴ The Confessional Integrity deals with the heart of the identity of the Lutheran community.

⁶⁵ LWF Report, no. 27: *From Budapest to Curitiba*, Geneva: LWF, Nov. 1989, p. 22.

⁶⁶ LWF Assembly, *In Christ - A New Community*, p. 213.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ LWF Report, no. 17/18: *From Dar es Salaam to Budapest*, pp. 46-7.

There had nevertheless been significant progress towards unity from the churches. For instance, the original stance by the White churches, that the LWF had no business in addressing the domestic issues of southern Africa had changed. Some leaders of the White churches actively participated in the discussions about the meaning of *status confessionis*. The pastors of White churches called for unity with their Black brothers and sisters. Furthermore, the White churches joined frequently in protests against specific injustices caused by the apartheid system, and the leaders joined in rejecting the South African initiatives to give independence to Namibia based on the ethnic-dominated National Assembly government of 1978 ⁶⁹ and the Multi-Party government of 1985 as contrary to Christian values.⁷⁰

Unfortunately, progress appears to have been insufficient, and it neither reached the congregational level nor resulted in concrete expressions of unity. The sincere wish of the Black Lutherans in Namibia and South Africa were for the whites to sit down with them and work out the details of how the whites might feel themselves able to join the unified Lutheran church of diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. But the whites' vision of unity seemed less concrete and they pointed to the unity they already felt they experienced in federations like FELCSA and UELCSWA.

At the congregational level, Black Lutherans sometimes still found themselves excluded from the eucharist in White churches. White pastors might preach as guests in Black Lutheran churches, but Black pastors rarely found such invitations reciprocated. In Windhoek, the Black pastors at ELCSWA headquarters were never invited to preach to the German Lutheran congregation. Despite severe shortages of pastors, DELKSWA did not even ask its neighbouring Black Lutheran pastors, who were able to speak German, for pastoral help in their congregations. Black Lutheran pastors who spoke out against apartheid were not actively supported and were sometimes rejected by their

⁶⁹ Hellberg, *A Voice of the Voiceless*, p. 198.

⁷⁰ Steenkamp, 'The Churches' in Leys & Saul (eds), *Namibia's Liberation Struggle*, p. 100.

White brothers and sisters. When encounters occurred between Black and White Lutherans they were often characterized by suspicion and confrontation rather than love and trust.⁷¹

In the words of the *Status confessionis* resolution, it was found that the confessional subscription of the White churches to it had led to 'concrete manifestations of unity in worship and in working together at the common tasks of the church'.⁷²

2.10. Insecurity in the unity process

The political role of the churches created confrontation and tension between the UELCSWA member churches. For example, in December 1978, the RSA government organised an election of a Constituent Assembly, despite the call of the Churches for the implementation of UN Resolution 435 of 1978, which required Namibian independence under United Nations supervision.⁷³ On this issue the ELOC urged its members to boycott this election. However, ELCSWA urged its members to follow their free will.⁷⁴ These contradictory actions of the churches manifested in a division between political radicals and theological conservatives in the UELCSWA member churches. These developments had an enormous impact on later stages of the unity process. The notion was that some members of the churches supported an internal settlement of the problem of Namibia, while others were for genuine independence under the supervision of the UN.

In 1979 there were significant changes in the leadership of the Black Lutheran Churches. Bishop Auala stepped down due to old age and Rev. Kleopas Dumeni (born 1930) was installed as his successor.⁷⁵ In ELCSWA a leadership change took place, when Dr. J.L. de Vries did not stand for

⁷¹ This is from personal experience and the observation of the author.

⁷² LWF Report, *From Dar es Salaam to Budapest*, p. 47.

⁷³ Katjavivi et al., *Church and Liberation in Namibia*. p. 86.

⁷⁴ ELCRN Archives: Statement of ELCSWA on elections, December 1978.

⁷⁵ Hunke, *Namibia the Strength of the Powerless*, p. 111.

re-election and Pastor Hendrik Frederik (born 1935) was elected as his successor.⁷⁶ Due to these changes the positions taken up by UELCSWA on political issues became neither frequent nor spectacular but had coherence and credibility. There were no doubts as to the spiritual depth, human refinement and political awareness of the new leadership of the churches.⁷⁷

The responses of the churches to political and socio-economic issues created insecurity in the role of the churches, particularly among White Lutherans. The churches were guilty of taking sides and ELOC was considered to be pro-Swapo, ELCSWA to be more liberal and DELKSWA to support the DTA.⁷⁸

2.10.1. Resignation of Pastor Paul- Gerhard Kauffenstein .

The unity and ecumenical processes experienced a serious set-back at the beginning of December 1979, when Praeses Kauffenstein resigned from his position of vice-president of CCN in protest at the appointment of the prominent Swapo member, Mr. Daniel Tjongarero, who was also a member of ELCSWA, to the service of CCN.⁷⁹ In contrast, other members churches of CCN did not see any reason not to accept a member of a legal political party of Namibia to work for CCN.

Praeses Kauffenstein's resignation and the attitude of DELKSWA were not helpful for effective collaboration with ELCSWA and, in particular, with activities of UELCSWA. The working relationship between the two churches came into question, but shortly after the resignation of Pastor Kauffenstein for the first time since the acceptance of DELKSWA in UELCSWA in 1977 a mutual communion service for DELKSWA and ELCSWA was held in Katutura. However, earlier in 1979, the Synod of ELCSWA had 'experienced and voiced the evidence of race-worship' as a plain reality

⁷⁶ G. Gurirab 'A brief historical survey of the ELCRN' in Isaak (ed.), *The Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia*, p. 22.

⁷⁷ Hunke, *Namibia the Strength of the Powerless*, p. 111.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 112.

even within its own ranks.⁸⁰ These issues clearly indicated what the weak links were in the unity process of the churches.

2.10.2. The office of UELCSWA (1981- 1984)

The real test for the unity process came in 1980 after the Synod of UELCSWA in Windhoek in 1980. The process reached a critical stage in 1981 when all activities of UELCSWA were suspended by the churches because of lack of response by DELKSWA to the plight of the Black people of Namibia. Furthermore, the differing concepts of unity and varying intentions of the churches became clearer because DELKSWA supported the federal unity whilst the Black Churches wanted a total merger. At this stage the churches for the first time asked critical questions such as: When shall we unite? What do we need? What is the understanding and the will of our congregations? What kind of unity do we want? What is our first objective in that unity?⁸¹ The churches also realized for the first time that they were making no progress in the process because the socio-political climate made it impossible to achieve church unity. The apartheid system and the conflicting ideas it had brought to the surface had enslaved all the churches.

2.11. The Fourth Ordinary Synod of the UELCSWA: Ongwediva , 14-17 July 1983

It was already evident in the UELCSWA Church Board meeting of 8-9 September 1981 that the three churches were not satisfied with the progress of the unity process. Therefore ELOC and ELCSWA took drastic steps by stating their respective intentions concerning the unity process. Thus ELCSWA's view of the situation was expressed in the following statements:

1. 'that they are willing to work in the Federation of the Lutheran Churches in Namibia, by giving mandate for the reworking of the constitution and principles of UELCSWA.

⁸⁰ ELCRN Archives: Minutes, ELCSWA Synod, 1979, p. 5.

⁸¹ ELCIN Archives: Report, Church Boards, 1981, pp. 4 -5.

2. that ELCSWA no longer sees its position for unity negotiations with DELKSWA ,with the aim for successful establishment of one Lutheran Church.¹⁸²

This synod had a clear aim for the unity process because it clearly spelled out the 'road ahead' for the body. It addressed the issue of the federal or the United nature of the UELCSWA constitution of the churches. The Constitution Committee under the chairmanship of Rev. Paul John Isaak presented possible improvements on the existing UELCSWA constitution and proposed a united constitution of ELCSWA/ELCIN.⁸³ After presenting the proposed constitutions the Rev. Isaak highlighted consequences of the acceptance or the rejection of the constitutions. The proposals challenged the Churches to travel either the road of federation or the road of unity. He concluded his introductory remarks with a call for unity across the seas of apartheid, racism, tribalism and culturalism.⁸⁴

2.12. The Road to Suspension - Budapest, Hungary (1984)

Although under intensive pressure from the Black Lutheran Churches and the international Lutheran community, the White Lutheran Churches responded by forging a theological response that was neither defiant nor repentant. Thereafter, the road to suspension from LWF was a result of numerous resolutions, meetings, consultations and memorandums. As early as 1970 the LWF assembly in Evian, France, had made appeals for the unconditional unity of the Lutheran Churches. And the Dar es Salaam Assembly (1977) directly called the White Lutheran churches to work toward unity with the Black Churches. The assembly of Dar es Salaam clearly expressed the position and intentions of LWF on the question of unity. Therefore, as already stated above, the LWF appealed to the white churches to commit themselves to the total eradication of apartheid within the churches, and in society in general, in Namibia and the RSA. The LWF consultation of January-February 1982 in Switzerland urged concern for unity across racial lines in the southern African region. The

⁸² ELCIN Archives: Report, Synod, 14-17 July, 1983, pp.1-2.

⁸³ I. K. Shuuya, *What is UELCSWA?* Windhoek: ELCRN Printing Press, 1988, pp. 28-30.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 31.

consultation questioned whether the situation in southern Africa represented a *status confessionis*.⁸⁵ These attempts of the LWF and Black Lutheran Churches to convince the White churches to eradicate apartheid were dismissed as interference in their domestic affairs by UELCSA churches in 1984.⁸⁶

In order to resolve the conflicts and tensions between the White and Black Lutheran Churches in December 1983, the LWF attempted to set up a Pre-Assembly of All Africa Lutheran Consultation in Harare, Zimbabwe. This Pre-Assembly of All Africa Lutheran Consultation recommended that

‘in the absence of any significant and meaningful progress toward church unity and their failure to reject publicly the sin of the apartheid system . . . as an interim measure the white member churches be suspended from the LWF membership until such time that they reject apartheid publicly and unequivocally and move toward unity with other member churches in the area.’⁸⁷

It was hoped that the White Lutheran Churches of southern Africa, between the time of the Harare consultation and the coming Budapest Assembly, might take some definitive action in response to the resolutions on *status confessionis*. DELKSWA was against unity itself, but encouraged the other two churches to unite and asked them to leave the door open to enter at a later stage. In January 1984, in order to rescue the situation, the Executive Committee of LWF discussed in detail the situation in southern Africa and the action of the Harare consultation. The executive committee then authorized that the recommendations of Harare be placed on the agenda of the imminent Assembly in Budapest. In February 1984, the LWF Executive Committee, under the General Secretary, made a strong effort to visit the churches in southern Africa in order to discuss the socio-political problems with the churches concerned.

The LWF Assembly in Budapest was convinced that the White Lutheran Churches in southern Africa had rejected the offers and the efforts of the Black Churches and the international Lutheran

⁸⁵ LWF Report, no.19/20: *Budapest 1984: Bericht der Siebenden Vollversammlung*, Geneva: LWF, 1985, pp.187-8.

⁸⁶ ‘Message of the Church Council of the United Evangelical Church in Southern Africa (UELCSA) to its Congregations’ in Ipinge (ed.), *What is UELCSWA?* pp. 48-50.

⁸⁷ Shuuya, *What is UELCSWA?* pp. 47-8.

community for fellowship at congregational level. The Assembly also concluded that the White churches had failed to aid Black churches in their struggle against the aggression of the apartheid policy. The LWF Assembly voted unanimously to suspend the two White Lutheran churches, namely, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa ELCSA (Cape Church) and DELKSWA.⁸⁸ The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa Natal and Transvaal ELCSA (N-T) decided to withdraw its intended application to become a member of LWF⁸⁹ after observing what happened to other White churches.

The suspended churches were asked by the LWF Assembly to 'publicly and unambiguously reject the system of apartheid and end the racial division of the churches.'⁹⁰ The condition for the lifting of the suspension was based on the willingness of the churches to create practical and judicial conditions for the removal of all apartheid practices in the church and in the society as whole.⁹¹

H.E. Winkler, in his thesis 'The Divided Roots of Lutheranism in South Africa', stated that:

'The international Lutheran community expressed its support for the prophetic theology which had been developing. It required that the unity between the Lutheran churches be taken seriously and that the churches also address themselves to the political situation, before the white churches would be readmitted to the LWF. The international campaign to isolate apartheid and all its supporters had affected even the Lutheran churches.'⁹²

The suspension of the White churches was widely reported in Namibia and South Africa. The suspended churches felt that they were left in the lurch by the Black churches and the international Lutheran community. The statement of UELCSA dated 8 September 1984 declared that the suspension had caused perplexity and disappointment within the congregations and they considered

⁸⁸ S. Rothe, *Kirchen in Südafrika*, Hamburg: Entwicklungspolitische Korrespondenz, 1986, p. 77.

⁸⁹ LWF Report, no. 19/20: *Budapest 1984: Bericht der Siebenten Vollversammlung*, pp 187-8.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.188.

⁹² Winkler, 'The divided roots of Lutheranism in South Africa', p.112.

it to be unjust.⁹³ Again in this regard Winkler summed up the position of the white Lutheran churches. Instead of ‘examining themselves critically, White Lutherans tended to retreat into their German-Lutheran circles, isolated themselves further from ecumenical relations, and restated their old theological positions.’⁹⁴ This conclusion can be supported by the eventual withdrawal of the DELKSWA from the CCN in 1987. But this will be discussed in the section dealing with the withdrawal.

2.13. The Unity status after Budapest

It is essential to understand the status of the suspended churches. Important measures were taken by the Assembly encouraging the suspended churches to repent and conducive measures were put in place for possible lifting of the suspension. This support and assistance was to include:

- ‘1. A visit of a delegation of the federation to counsel with and encourage the Lutheran churches of the Southern Africa.
2. Encouraging other regular visits to the churches by the member churches and the Federation.
3. Continued appeals to member churches around the world to support all Lutheran churches and all churches in Southern Africa in prayer.
4. Continued commitment to strong advocacy on the part of LWF and its member churches, seeking to support peaceful and positive change toward the quality of all people in the societies of Southern Africa.
5. Encouragement of all member churches to engage in ongoing self-examination in the light of Scripture, rejecting all forms of racial discrimination.’⁹⁵

⁹³ ‘Message of the Church Council of the United Evangelical Church in Southern Africa (UELCSA) to its Congregations’, in Ipinge (ed.), *What is UELCSWA?* pp. 48-50.

⁹⁴ Winkler, ‘The divided roots of Lutheranism in South Africa’, p.112.

⁹⁵ LWF Report, no.19/20: C.H Mau, Jr. (ed.), *Budapest 1984: In Christ - Hope for the world. Official Proceedings of the Seventh Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation*, Budapest Hungary, July 22-August 5, 1984, pp. 179-180.

After the LWF Assembly in 1984 the future unity process of the three churches encountered great difficulties. The Assembly of Budapest had rightly addressed the divisions among Lutherans, the apartheid system, the lack of human rights and injustices in Namibia and the RSA. Rev. I. K. Shuuya, then the General Secretary of UELCSWA, regarded the Assembly 'as a medicament, a measure, a compass and a mirror'⁹⁶ for the Lutheran Churches in the southern African region, but in particular the Lutheran churches in Namibia. For the UELCSA churches it 'means a painful retrogression on the way of the Lutheran Churches toward unity.'⁹⁷ The Assembly definitely provided the opportunity for the churches to re-examine and discover their status in the Namibian context. Thus, for the purpose of progress, the decisions and statements of the Assembly were not in vain. However, for the UELCSA member churches, the outcome of the Assembly caused them to 'deplore the extent of the lack of understanding and the lack of love in Budapest, whereby even untruth was not refrained from which the resolutions, so disappointing to us, were brought about.'⁹⁸ DELKSWA spelt out that the church objected and condemned apartheid even before Budapest. Nevertheless, the Assembly had saved UELCSWA from hopelessness because, for the first time, the Lutheran Churches in Namibia were able to re-examine their position in the Namibian context. The activities of the churches confirmed the renewed spirit of the churches on the unity process after the Assembly.

Shortly after the Assembly, the Lutheran Churches met on 16-17 October 1984 in Windhoek to review the decisions and statements of Budapest. This action of the Churches was courageous after such a very frustrating and confusing situation. The end result of the meeting was the willingness of the churches to continue with the unity process. As they stated: 'In this important meeting the indispensable resolutions were passed as the signs of new hope. All three member churches of UELCSWA:

- '1. reconfirm their stand against racism and condemn on the basis of God's Word the sin of apartheid.
2. reaffirm their commitment to continue their work according to the decisions of

⁹⁶ ELCIN Archives: Report, Church Council, 20 May 1986, p. 2.

⁹⁷ 'Message of the Church Council of the United Evangelical Church in Southern Africa (UELCSA) to its Congregations' in Ipinge (ed.), *What is UELCSWA?* pp. 49-51.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

UELCSWA Synod in Ongwediva to form one Lutheran church in Namibia.

3. accept this motion in the spirit of LWF Seventh Assembly resolution on confessional integrity as a challenge to speed up the process toward unity.’⁹⁹

These resolutions were circulated to all Lutheran congregations in the country. This was a clear indication by the Churches that they were serious about unity corporation between Black and White Lutherans. The first priority of the revived spirit of unity was to speed up the process through Pastors’ Conventions and combined worship services.

2.14. The Fifth Synod of the UELCSWA: Windhoek, 27-31 October, 1986

The Fifth Synod of UELCSWA of 27-31 October 1986 passed a resolution in Windhoek that in the year 1992 the Constituting Synod for the new church would take place. All churches were very much in favour of the merger. The Synod confirmed the commitment of the churches to form one Evangelical Lutheran church in Namibia. This intention was only an endorsement of previously taken resolutions at the Synods in Engela (1975), in Windhoek (1980) and in Ongwediva (1983).

The Synod urged the churches to embark upon necessary programmes in preparation for the formation of a new and united Lutheran church.¹⁰⁰ The churches were so determined in this course that close co-operation in activities of UELCSWA was experienced all over the country. Co-workers of the churches were able to meet together to talk openly on the Lutheran unity process. In the meetings the goals of the churches were clear and the target for a merger was no longer so remote. These actions of the churches encouraged UELCSWA to escalate the unity motivating programmes and aggressively revitalize unity activities. On the strength of these developments the UELCSWA office completed a programme for the unity objective of 1992.

⁹⁹ ELCIN Archives: Minutes, Church Council, 20 June 1986, pp. 3.

¹⁰⁰ ELCRN Archives: Minutes, Synod, 27-31 October 1986, p. 7.

2.15. The withdrawal of DELKSWA from CCN

While the churches were busy deepening their concerns in the unity process and concentrating on merger programmes, another negative and disappointing event occurred in 1987. In August 1987 the DELKSWA Synod decided to withdraw from the CCN ¹⁰¹ after accusing it of being too politicized. The Synod refused to receive the Pastoral delegation from the LWF. The DELKSWA reaffirmed its membership to the UELCSWA. With these actions the DELKSWA retarded the process which was already moving very slowly (see Appendix 4).¹⁰² On the issue of DELKSWA's withdrawal, the UELCSWA Synod stated that it would follow its way to one Lutheran church without hesitation.¹⁰³ This action of the DELKSWA was seen by other churches as indirect defiance of the Lutheran unity attempt and ecumenical fellowship. The withdrawal of DELKSWA was however a clear indication that it had a different understanding of UELCSWA and CCN from the two Black Lutheran churches. But the two Black churches had a committed interest in both UELCSWA and CCN.

The Ecumenical Fellowship of the Council of Churches in Namibia had been constituted in 1978 to promote Christian commitment and ecumenical spirit among its members. The body had committed itself at an extremely difficult time in Namibian history to social ministry, caring about the community, fostering unity and assisting member churches in their common calling to proclaim the Gospel to all people. As Namibia was considered a Christian country, CCN had committed itself to protect Christian values and defend the poor and needy against what it perceived as economic exploitation from the RSA government and countries like West Germany, Great Britain and the USA, which supported the RSA in the illegal occupation of Namibia.

¹⁰¹ ELCIN (GELC) Archives: Minutes, Synod, August 1987, p. 2.

¹⁰² This UELCSWA Graphic was drawn up by Rev. I. K. Ipinge to illustrate the movement and achievements of the federal body.'

¹⁰³ ELCRN Archives: Statement, Synod, 1987, pp. 3.

The objective of the CCN was facilitation, co-ordination and promotion of different ecclesiastical and social services. Anglican Bishop James Kauluma had been elected as the first president of the Council. It is interesting to note that the DELKSWA had become first observers and then members, and Pastor Paul-Gerhard Kauffenstein, then the leader of the DELKSWA, had been elected as the vice-president of the CCN.¹⁰⁴

The subsequent withdrawal of DELKSWA, in August 1987, was based, according to them, on the political involvement of the CCN which affiliated itself with one political party.¹⁰⁵ This withdrawal brought the unity process to a premature halt and was regarded by the Black churches as withdrawal from the common Christian struggle and also as disassociation from the Black churches. The CCN and UELCSWA were both affected by the withdrawal, because ELOC and ELCSWA in CCN were members of UELCSWA. In the words of the General Secretary of UELCSWA,

‘it is illogical, for example, for somebody to abandon and dissociate himself from one group inside the room, while in the same associate with the group outside the room, which in fact are the same people, belonging together, having the same objectives and facing the same problem and jointly fighting against it.’¹⁰⁶

As a result of the withdrawal of DELKSWA in August 1987, UELCSWA activities were suspended by the Black member Churches from September 1987. Unfortunately, the whole operational process and assessment of UELCSWA, including the functions of LWF-NNC, were severely affected. The suspension of the UELCSWA had paralysed the unity process. This situation led to serious delay of the unity process but clearly showed the real characteristics of the churches involved in the unity process.

The suspension of UELCSWA activities was a strong signal by the Black Churches to the DELKSWA to reconsider its place in the fellowship of Christians. For the Black churches,

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ M. Asino, ‘White Lutheran Church wants to join CCN and drops South West Africa from its name’, *CCN Messenger*, 1, 4 (November 1991), p. 6.

¹⁰⁶ ELCRN Archives: Report, Conference, 1990, p. 5.

DELKSWA as a church in the Namibian context was necessarily integral to the struggle and Christian witness. Therefore it demanded that DELKSWA return and re-affiliate to CCN. Meanwhile, to counter the withdrawal of DELKSWA, ELCSWA suspended its involvement in UELCSWA.

2.16. The suspension of UELCSWA activities by ELCSWA in 1989.

For ELCSWA, the withdrawal of DELKSWA was in serious defiance of the unity process. In 1987 ELCSWA had already clearly spelt out its commitment to the process and stated that the DELKSWA did not take the initiatives of the Black churches seriously, but rather aligned itself with the German-speaking churches in South Africa.

The UELCSWA meeting of 11 October 1989 received the withdrawal decision of ELCSWA. The decision was made by the ELCSWA Thirteenth Ordinary Synod held in Swakopmund from 23-29 September 1989. The decision stated that ELCSWA 'has noted no progress in unity talks with the Deutsche Evangelische Kirche in Südwest Afrika (DELKSWA).'¹⁰⁷ The Synod also stated that it had no confidence in trilateral negotiations on the merger of the Namibian Lutheran churches.¹⁰⁸

2.17. The end of UELCSWA

During the period 1989 to 1993 the churches found it very difficult to come to terms with the unity process. With the withdrawal of DELKSWA, and the suspension of activities of UELCSWA by ELCSWA and ELCIN, all negotiations by the three churches ceased to progress further. Therefore the target date set by the Synod of UELCSWA in 1986 for the total merger of the churches remained

¹⁰⁷ ELCRN Archives: ELCSWA withdraws from UELCSWA, 2 October 1989.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

nothing more than an unfulfilled dream. At the Sixth General UELCSWA Synod of 1990¹⁰⁹ in Windhoek the two churches, ELCIN and DELKSWA, acknowledged the fact that this dream was no longer achievable. Nevertheless, the churches resolved that:

- ‘1. The discussions between DELKSWA, ELCSWA and ELCIN should continue aiming at the formation of one Lutheran Church.
2. The preparation of co-operation at congregational level should continue: Worship services, youth activities, women activities and conferences of all three churches, etc., in order to strengthen the unity at grassroots level.
3. Synod appeals to ELCSWA and DELKSWA to start negotiations in order to remove obstacles on their way to reconciliation and unity of the Lutheran churches in Namibia. ELCIN and ELCSWA also are requested to do the same.
4. DELKSWA and ELCSWA are requested to reconsider their decisions of withdrawal from CCN and UELCSWA.’¹¹⁰

These resolutions were taken in the absence of ELCSWA and were presented to the founding member church by the office of UELCSWA.

The Seventh and last Synod of UELCSWA was held in Windhoek on 15 May 1993. This Synod did not make any progress, nor improve the situation, with regard to the unity process. As the discussion was mostly based on the past 21 years of intense struggle, it took the unity process back to the nineteen-seventies. The Synod terminated the attempts to create Lutheran unity and officially disbanded UELCSWA.

2.18. Conclusion

Unity could not take place as planned by the Lutheran churches because of a lack of mutual cultural understanding, or a desire to form a single community. The failure of theological agreement on socio-political and economic issues and, above all, the absence of mutual respect between the three churches was another factor. It is clear from all the initiatives and struggles of the churches that the interaction between the indigenous people and the German-speaking Lutherans did not mature into a fertile learning commitment on either side.

¹⁰⁹ ELCSWA was not represented at this Synod on account of its suspension from all UELCSWA activities.

¹¹⁰ ELCRN Archives: Resolutions of the Sixth General Synod of UELCSWA, 22-24 February 1990, pp. 7-8.

The unity process occurred in a context of total economic underdevelopment and social degradation. Therefore people struggled to eradicate colonialism in all its forms and to build a united, non-racial society. The attempts by UELCSWA to construct bridges across the chasms of history, culture and language could only be achieved through Christian conviction and not through fusion of languages and cultures.

It is hard to believe that such a struggle for unity, so enthusiastically started and undertaken with utmost seriousness and determination, came to a end after more than twenty-one years of internal and international endeavour in such total disappointment and uncertainty.

The best explanation for the failure of the unity process is that all three Lutheran churches were responsible.

Chapter Three

The Lutheran Church Polity

‘The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of conflict and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy’. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968).

3.1.Introduction

Despite all the attempts by UELCSWA, the interest of the churches in unity appeared to have been only a dream and a failure. This chapter deals with the impact of institutional differences between the churches on the unity process.

3.2. Institutional factors disturbing the unity process

One of the greatest obstacles facing the unity process was the institutional structures of the churches, which were based on their autonomous and independent operations. The churches were not willing to break away from these structures; on the contrary, they strengthened them as a result of inherited differences from the missionary period which had been intensified by the RSA government policy of apartheid and division.

3.2.1.The concept of unity

One of the main reasons for the decline of the unity process could be attributed to the different understanding of the concept of the unity by the three churches. For the Black Lutheran churches the unity process was theological and political since they were linked to the question of the national independence, as well as to their ecumenical relationship to other churches like the RCC, the Anglican Church, the AMEC and so on.¹ The initial idea, reached in 1972 by the two Black Lutheran churches, was to form a United Church as they saw no alternative to their theological and political

¹ Hunke, *Namibia the Strength of the Powerless*, pp. 110-11.

obligations to unite.²

However, the sentiments of the Black Lutheran churches were not shared by the DELKSWA leaders and members. DELKSWA openly talked of theological unity based on the Augsburg Confession's Article Seven dealing with the task of the Church and preaching the pure Gospel and administering of the sacraments.³ For DELKSWA, as long as the pure Gospel was preached and Holy Communion shared, the unity of the Churches was achieved. This was not enough for the two Black Lutheran churches, because they wanted more than just preaching of the Gospel and sharing of Holy Communion. They wanted a church unified against South African domination in Namibia.⁴

The inclusion of political agendas in the unity process by the two Black Lutheran churches caused intense conflict and tension which the three Lutheran churches were unable to resolve through deliberations. These acute differences were illustrated when DELKSWA members felt highly uncomfortable with the CCN-Swapo alliance (where statements like 'the Church is the people and the people is Swapo' were uttered) and withdrew in 1987 from the ecumenical body. This withdrawal indicated DELKSWA's views on political involvement.⁵ To counter this action of DELKSWA, in 1989 ELCWSA withdrew from UELCSWA, stating that if the churches could not work together within the ecumenical framework then they could not work in the Lutheran framework either.⁶ Such actions clearly indicated that there were sharply differing theological and political understandings concerning unity among the three Lutheran churches.

² Author's interviews with Rev. A. Hasheela, Windhoek: 9 March 2001; Prof. P.J. Isaak, Windhoek: 12 March 2001; Rev. Pastor I.K. Shuuya, Windhoek: 19 March 2001.

³ See Tappert, *The Book of Concord*, pp.168-180.

⁴ Author's interviews with Prof. P.J. Isaak, Windhoek: 12 March 2001.

⁵ ELCIN (GELC) Archives: The statement of DELKSWA Synod, August, 1987.

⁶ ELCRN Archives: ELCWSA withdraws from UELCSWA, 2 October 1989.

3.2.2.The Draft Declaration of Intention

In 1971 and in 1984 FELCSA churches signed the 'Draft Declaration of Intention', dealing with Lutheran unity in southern Africa. For the Black Churches, structural unity had to be lived and become visible in all spheres of human life, and therefore endorsed the intention of Lutheran Churches in southern Africa, namely,

‘that in a situation where national and ethnical identity plays a dominant role and determines the structures of society the church has to testify by means of its own greater structural unity, that national and ethnical identity cannot be a criterion dividing the church and that unity cannot be seen merely spiritually.’⁷

On this relationship between the Black and White Lutheran churches in southern Africa, the Rev. B.M. Nzama noted in 1994:

‘Although this declaration seems to be written by all churches it is not convincing that after so many years, white churches can come out overnight with the statement that national and ethnical identity cannot be a criterion dividing the church and that unity cannot be seen merely spiritually, because the church has been racially divided from the beginning and continues to be so even now.’⁸

DELKSWA as a church with a congregational church polity believed in independence and autonomy of congregations. Thus, for DELKSWA, as in all German speaking churches in southern Africa, the congregation is a ‘Church’.⁹

3.2.3. What kind of unity?

From the deliberations of the churches it was clear that the churches had different models of unity, namely total unity for the Black Lutheran churches, and federation for the German church. The churches were not able to come out clearly as to whether they wanted one leadership, one constitutive organ or a legislative organ. In principle, the three Lutheran churches agreed that unity

⁷ ELCRN Archives: Declaration of Intent to Unity by the Lutheran Churches in Southern Africa, 1984, p. 2

⁸ Nzama, ‘The history of ELCSA’, p. 34.

⁹ Author's interview with Mr. D. Esslinger, Windhoek: 14 March 2001.

should be visible and that it was desirable to have one Lutheran Church in Namibia.¹⁰ But what kind of unity they needed was not clear among the churches. Was it to be spiritual, political, organic or federal?

However, the federal structure supported by DELKSWA introduced some unwanted political overtones, and was also misleading because it was associated with a loose kind of inter-church association which was quite different from the unity proposed by the two Black Lutheran churches. A federation could be defined as a body formed by totally different and separate societies, each retaining control of its internal affairs. However, for all Lutheran churches in the unity process, UELCSWA was a federal body meant to lead the churches to unity.

In 1972, the model of a complete Unitary Church, where everything would be exactly the same for all, including the liturgy and hymnal, was proposed by the two Black Lutheran Churches. An alternative proposal made by ELOC in 1983 was that the churches should keep their respective liturgies and hymnal books until a stage was reached where all the churches were sufficiently comfortable to adopt the same liturgy and hymnal books and become one institution.¹¹ However, the DELKSWA Synod of 14-17 April 1983 reiterated its firm commitment to the federal structure of the churches in UELCSWA.¹² It was evident from the 1970s that these different models would always form part of unity deliberations of the churches.

From the beginning, therefore, the lack of enthusiasm and motivation from the churches hampered the unity process. The Lutheran church leaders mostly focussed on the divisions of the churches instead of looking at their similarities, although they were convinced that unity based on political and economic principles would not last long without theological unity.¹³ However, political and

¹⁰ ELCIN (GELC) Archives: The Decision of the Synod of DELCSWA, 7 July 1988.

¹¹ ELCIN Archives: A Future View of ELOC on the Unity Process, 1983.

¹² ELCIN (GELC) Archives: Declaration of DELKSWA Synod, 14-17 April 1983.

¹³ ELCRN Archives: Minutes of UELCSWA Fourth Ordinary Synod, 14 -17 July, 1983.

economic reasons were the most disturbing factors in the unity process.

To complicate the unity issue still further, although these churches were self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating, the two Black Lutheran Churches depended on overseas financing. While the members of DELKSWA benefited from the land settlement plans of the colonial regimes,¹⁴ the Black Lutheran churches were excluded from them and pushed to arid and semi-desert areas of Namibia.¹⁵ With differing stages of development, compounded by language barriers, long distances and the race question, it was to prove difficult for Lutheran churches in Namibia to unite organically, even after the independence of Namibia.

3.3. Historical and sociological differences

Another important aspect of the Lutheran unity process concerns the ecclesiastical traditions of the churches. It is important to note that the churches were very much tied up with their respective traditions. There are differences between traditions in the Black Lutheran churches, brought from abroad by the FMS and RMS, and the indigenous cultural traditions from various parts of the country, all of which have had an impact on the approach of the churches toward unity. These traditions have deep roots in the Namibian Lutheran churches and had an enormous impact on the development of the unity process. Other differences of the churches are based on the inherited (from mission societies) church structures and administration methods, which are very deep-rooted because of the racial discrimination and violation of human rights in Namibia.

Historical differences of the churches were responsible for the way they have responded in the areas of church polity and doctrine. DELKSWA was a carrier of the German tradition, which meant many

¹⁴ C. Botha, 'The politics of land settlement In Namibia, 1890-1960', *South African Historical Journal*, 42 (2000), pp. 232-76.

¹⁵ ELCRN Archives: Letter of Rev. Paulus //Gowaseb to the Prime Minister of Republic of South Africa, 1965.

differences which they could not sacrifice for unity.¹⁶ Besides attempting to build the church of Christ, they also became agents for preserving the bonds between the immigrants and their homeland. The church services and literature were in the German language and not in Afrikaans which was the official language of Namibia (before Namibian independence in 1990).

According to Rev. I.K. Shuuya, then Secretary-General of UELCSWA, the following excuses were used by the three Lutheran Churches:

- ‘1) What language will be used in one Lutheran Church?
- 2) Why do the brothers and sisters from abroad want us to unite while they are not united?
- 3) How does the episcopal structural church fit to the congregationalistic structural church?
- 4) How will the money be handled in one church?’¹⁷

These excuses were clumsy because the three Lutheran churches gave signs of committed interest in the unity process but it was so indefinite. On the question of language I.K.Shuuya stated that ‘UECLSWA does not intend to destroy vernacular.’¹⁸ However, DELKSWA declared in 1983, that the church was not against the unity process, but preferred that church services and counselling services should be done in the German language.¹⁹ This decision of the German Church could not be taken lightly, because the preservation of identity, language and culture became synonymous in their minds with the spreading of the Gospel. The fact that all three Lutheran churches wanted to deal exclusively with their own language group was clear because of the racial divisions which were prevalent in the country.²⁰ However, already in 1976 the Synod of ELCSWA decided to eliminate apartheid in its separate congregations and instructed the Church Board not to give preference to

¹⁶ See Winkler, ‘The divided roots of Lutheranism in South Africa’, pp. 26-7.

¹⁷ ELCRN Archives: ‘The Unity Status After Budapest’, 20 May 1986.

¹⁸ ELCRN Archives: The Survey by the General Secretary to UELCSWA Executive Committee Meeting, 30 April 1985.

¹⁹ ELCIN (GELC) Archives: Declaration of the Synod of DELCSWA, 14-17 April 1983.

²⁰ See the heading of chapter one of this thesis dealing with ‘A brief history of the structures and membership of the three Lutheran churches’.

language and ethnic ties in the placing of church workers. Furthermore, the Synod instructed the constitutional commission to amend all paragraphs which referred to ethnic and language differences in the church constitution.²¹

Basically, Lutheran churches in Namibia have the same faith and confessions. The churches should have a strong united voice which will be heard more and more in Namibia. What is needed is a more rapid transition from ethnic, geographical and politically inclined churches to be a single Namibian church. With Namibian independence things should have accelerated in that direction, but for the Namibian Lutheran churches the opposite happened. Differences have become entrenched communication has broken down and a spirit of pride, exclusiveness and intolerance has become prevalent. For example, due to the lack of communication and tolerance, the office of UELCSWA closed from 1981- 1984 to give the churches the chance to reconsider their position in UELCSWA and in the church unity process. Again, UELCSWA could not function well after the withdrawal of DELKSWA in 1987 from CCN and the suspension of UELCSWA activities by ELCSWA in 1989. These developments show that it was clear that UELCSWA would not last long as the body capable of bringing Lutheran churches to the table of unity.

Historically, division has been inevitable from the very beginning in the history of the Christian Church. It is worth recalling that from the start the Christian church has been characterized by unity and diversity and most definitely by division. Diversities, both theological and practical, resulted in establishment of different kinds of churches. The Church appears differently in the Pauline epistles, in Matthew's Gospel and in Luke's Acts, to name only three parts of the New Testament. There have been many differences in belief and practice and Christian Church history is marked by differences that have resulted in schisms and the formation of different groups like Arianism, Monophysites, Copts, Nestorians, Armenians, Greek Orthodoxy and so on.²²

²¹ ELCRN Archives: Resolutions, Synod of the ELCSWA, 27 September to 1 October 1976, p. 15.

²² J.Olson, *The History of the Christian Church: 20 Centuries and Six Continents*, Yaounde: Editions CLE, 1972, *passim*.

3.3.1. Congregational structures.

As already stated in this thesis, DELKSWA proposed a congregational structure, while the Black Lutheran churches had a top-down structure, starting with the Synod, then the Church Boards, and then Administrative Boards.²³ These differing structures posed a problem in the unity process, because in DELKSWA, the congregations are independent and autonomous and thus a kind of church. On the other hand, the congregations of the Black Lutheran churches are dependent on the Synods and Boards, and without autonomy. In the German church structure the congregation can call a pastor to fill a position and own property, while in the Black Churches everything belongs to the church and the Church Boards decide to which congregation of the churches to send pastors.²⁴

3.3.2. The transfer system.

The Church Boards of the Black Lutheran churches have the constitutional right to place pastors or transfer pastors from one congregation to another.²⁵ This transfer system of the Black churches was a problem in the unity process for DELKSWA. In the traditional call system employed by DELKSWA, the Congregational Council has the right to advertise a vacancy and interview

²³ For the congregational structure of ELCIN (GELC) see its Constitution, articles 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 16. For the top down structure of ELCSWA see Gurirab 'Membership and structures of the ELCRN', in Isaak (ed.), *The Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia*, pp. 36-9 and ELCRN Constitution article 6. For ELCIN see *ELCIN 5 Year Plan 1996-2000*, pp. 9-6.

²⁴ See sections dealing with the transfer system and property in this chapter.

²⁵ See ELCRN Archives: ELCRN Constitution, article 6. For ELCIN see ELCIN Archives: ELCIN Constitution, section IV.

prospective candidates and chose the best candidate to serve the congregation.²⁶ However, in the Black churches the transfer system is not based on mutual consultation or consideration of the spiritual interests of the concerned pastor and the congregation.²⁷ In the Black churches the principal practice of the transfer is a command without explanation. It means the concerned groups, namely the pastor and the congregation, have no opportunity to have a say or rejection in the matter.²⁸ Since the congregation does not own property and cannot 'call' pastors in the traditional Lutheran way, they cannot judge the pastors and dismiss pastors, as in the case of DELKSWA. It means that only DELKSWA subscribed to the Lutheran tradition of 'call' in this respect.

The problem raised a question whether the system of the transfer of pastors by the church councils of ELOC and ELCSWA is appropriate for a unified Church. The system might have been justified during the times of the missions, when the missionaries received their salaries from Germany and Finland. Consequently, the congregations did not share the financial responsibility with the RMS and FMS. The argument of ELOC and ELCSWA was that the 'call' system was not in line with the traditional way of practice of the indigenous people. The congregations of the two Black Lutheran churches demanded to be served by pastors even if their resources did not justify the salaries of the pastors.²⁹ This conflict between the traditional call system and that of transfer thus became one of the main areas of concern in the unity process.

²⁶ See ELCIN (GELC) Archives: ELCIN (GELC) Constitution articles 8, 13, 14 and 15.

²⁷ See ELCRN Archives: ELCRN Constitution, article 6. For ELCIN Archives: see ELCIN Constitution, section IV.

²⁸ Presently ELCIN (GELC) has the call system while the Black Lutheran Churches transfer and place their pastors.

²⁹ It happened in ELCRN that small congregations demanded pastors from the Church Board like //khomi //aus congregation of Fransfontein in which the author worked from 1995 to 1997 on R300-00 per month.

3.3.3. The question of salaries

The three Lutheran churches in the unity process had different salary scales.³⁰ In the unified church it was intended to share and enjoy equality. At the time the unity process was in progress people in Namibia were not paid according to their abilities, but according to their skin colours.³¹ According to the General Secretary of UELCSWA, the Rev. I.K.Shuuya, the following justifying arguments were used on the issue of the salaries:

‘You get less because you work among your own people. You get less because you are indigenous. The people from abroad get their salaries from their home churches. The partners do not support the salaries, but only the projects.’³²

During the unity process fear and uncertainty dominated the thoughts of the leaders and members of the Lutheran churches and many people feared that the existing financial arrangement would be disturbed in the advent of the unity. Some feared that the collections and the church contribution would be drastically affected. Some feared that partnership ties with overseas organisations like EKD, UEM and FEMS would be disturbed.³³ It was clear from these issues that the churches were not prepared to share resources equally and it caused very serious disturbances in the unity process.

³⁰ See salary scales of the three Lutheran churches from the early 1970s in their respective archives. See also *ELCIN 5 Year Plan 1996-2000*, pp. 16-17; G.Geiseb, ‘The financial situation’, in Isaak (ed.), *The Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia*, pp. 57-1.

³¹ For a better understanding of the salary system in the Lutheran mission societies and churches in southern Africa see the article by Bishop Dr M. Buthelezi in the *Sunday Tribune*, Durban, 9 March 1969. See also Serfontein, *Namibia?* pp.27-8; K. Abrahams, ‘The Waserauta Phenomena: additional notes on the Namibian elite’, *Namibian Review*, 25 (July/August 1982), pp. 23-4; *Namibia in the 1980s*, London: Catholic Institute for International Relations, 1986, pp. 31-2; P. Denis et al., *The Casspir & the Cross: Voices of Black Clergy in the Natal Midlands*, Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 1999, pp. 32- 44.

³² ELCRN Archives: Minutes, Executive Committee Meeting, 30 April 1985, p. 9.

³³ Shuuya, *Why and How One Lutheran Church in Namibia*, p. 44.

3.3.4. The question of property

The question of property was one of the highly contested areas in the unity talks. In the proposed draft constitution of United ELCSWA/ELCIN (1983) the existing properties of the three churches would, in the event of unity, have become the property of the newly established Church, but those properties registered and owned by the congregations of DELKSWA would have remained the property of the congregations.³⁴ This meant that institutions such as the Paulinum (United Evangelical Lutheran Theological Seminary), Andreas Kukuri Centre (this centre serves as an organisation for ministries to the men, to women and to youth, and for the music ministry of ELCRCN), ELOC Printing Press, guest houses, farms or any congregational buildings would become property of the united Church. In the case of DELKSWA some properties would have been transferred to the new church, but all properties belonging to the congregations would have remained the property of the congregations.³⁵ This issue posed a real stumbling-block in the unity deliberations because the churches could not reach agreement on these issues.

3.4. Church structures

Great changes were taking place between 1972-1993 in ELCIN (GELC), ELCRN and ELCIN. During the unity process, church structures were one of the areas of concern. These involved the titles of church office-bearers and ordination of women. ELCRN had a *praeses* (president) system but changed to an episcopal one in 1986.³⁶ ELCIN(GELC) used the position of *Landesprost* (same as president) for the leaders, but changed to an episcopal church structure in 1994 to align with the Black Lutheran churches. The question whether the churches adopted an episcopal or a synodical

³⁴ ELCRN Archives: Minutes, Synod of UELCSWA 'Constitutional Questions', 14-17 July 1983, pp. 9-11.

³⁵ See Prof P.J. Isaak, 'Why and how do we go for Lutheran unity? The road ahead', paper delivered at the Biennial Conference of Phillipine Lutheran Women of Namibia at Okabandja, Andreas Kukuri Conference Centre, 24-27 May 2001, p. 4.

³⁶ J.R. Tjibeba deals with 'The implications of Episcopal structure on ELCRN' (unpublished B.Th. Honours thesis, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1995), *passim*.

type of church polity is currently not a problem, since all the churches have adopted the former.

In 1978 ELCRN was the first church to ordain women pastors in Namibia, while ELCIN would only ordain its first women pastors in 1992, in order to come into line with other Lutheran Churches. This development in ELCIN was inspired by the decision taken in Finland in 1988 on the ordination of women. ELCIN went a step further, to become the first church in Namibia to appoint a woman as a dean in 1998. The ordination of women in ELCIN (GELC) was never a problem, because the first women pastors in Germany were ordained in 1929. By 1977, 68 per cent of LWF member churches ordained women.³⁷

Another issue of concern during the unity process was the lifetime tenure of bishops in ELCIN. This has changed and all churches have a term of office for bishops, deans and other office-bearers.³⁸

3.5.Conclusion

The efforts of the three Lutheran churches to try to achieve unity, given the deep inroads made by apartheid are highly commendable. The historical division between Black and White Lutherans due to racial prejudice were too wide in practice and too narrow in theory to be easily done away with. Financial and leadership questions were often reasons for splits in the churches, organizations and institutions. Because people were so accustomed to living comfortably with their traditions and privileges, for someone to come and wipe them away for the purpose of church unity proved too taxing an exercise in a racially and politically divided country such as Namibia. DELKSWA wanted to retain the right of their congregations to own property and to call a pastor of their choice, as they always had done. ELCSWA and ELOC wanted to transfer their pastors. Financial imbalances because of German colonialism and South African apartheid policies scared DELKSWA away from

³⁷ R.A.K. Musimbi, 'Women in the Lutheran Communion' in R.A.K. Musimbi (ed.), *In Search of a Round Table Gender Theology & Church Leadership*, Geneva:WCC Publications, 1977, p. 129.

³⁸ For ELCIN (GELC) see Constitution, article 37 for the term of office for bishops. This constitution is from 4 October 1970 with amendments up to the Synod of 1997. For ELCRN see ELCRN Archives: Regulations, paragraph 18, 2000. Presently ELCIN has the old term system to the retirement age of the bishop, but the new structure of terms will be endorsed during the next Synod in 2002.

uniting because it could end up carrying the salary responsibilities for ELCSWA and ELOC pastors as well.

In the process of unity, the churches acted as autonomous and independent entities and thus any negotiation between the churches had to be based on the process of compromise. However, in the process the churches failed to abandon all the elements within their respective domestic infrastructures which were responsible for misunderstanding, mistrust, suspicion and inconvenience among the members of the churches.

Chapter Four

The impact of socio-political and economic factors on the unity of Lutheran Churches

‘A civilization that proves incapable of solving the problems it creates is a decadent civilization. A civilization that chooses to close its eyes to its most crucial problems is a stricken civilization. A civilization that uses its principles for trickery and deceit is a dying civilization’.¹

4.1. Introduction

For understanding and determining the failure of the Lutheran churches in the unity process, one needs to take many factors into account. The most important of these factors are the political involvement of the Lutheran churches and their racial and ethnic composition. With these factors coincided also class interests, the character of political and church leaders, the history, tradition, theology, structure and resources of the different churches and the policies and actions of the colonial and post-colonial governments.

Concepts like national liberation, black consciousness philosophy, Christian consciousness, nationalism, ethnicity, superior and inferior race, and economic and sociological factors played a very important role in the deliberations of the churches. Therefore, historically-nurtured differences in politics, economics, social strata, church structures, financing and religious customs were so strong that the efforts to unite the Lutherans inevitably have become a drawn-out process. This chapter will reflect critically on the impact of socio-political and economic factors and the role of ethnicity, racism and regionalism on the unity process.

4.2. A brief look at the socio-political situation in this period

The period starting in 1971 might be considered a turning point in the history of Namibia. The ICJ's declaration of the illegal occupation of Namibia by South Africa and the Open Letter of the Black Lutheran Churches to the Prime Minister of South Africa stand out as truly significant events for the

¹ A. Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972, p. 9.

Namibian people. It was also the period in which serious developments occurred on the political front in southern Africa. A noted Namibian historian, Dr. P. Katjavivi, rightly labelled the period as 'the period when South Africa was effectively cornered'² by the Namibian people and the international community. The situation in Namibia was volatile due to the massive presence of the RSA military and security forces in the country.³ During this period many people and political activists were jailed, tortured and killed in detention⁴ and some prominent people were confined to certain areas and the best qualified people fled the country out of fear and disillusionment.⁵ The context was marked by the fact that the minority successfully managed to suppress the opinions, rights and expectations of the indigenous people. In such a situation ELOC and ELCSWA struggled for a united Lutheran church through UELCSWA. However, the churches responded differently to the political ideologies of the period.

4.3.Lutheran Churches and political involvement

Lutheran churches in Namibia have a long tradition of submission to secular authorities and the leaders preferred to keep a low profile and avoid confrontation with the RSA regime. It took a number of developments on the political and theological levels to break the 'chrysalis of

² Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance in Namibia*, pp. 65-6.

³ For military involvement of South African army in Namibia see B. König, *Namibia: The Ravages of War*, London: Shadowdean, 1982, *passim*; Swapo, *To Be Born A Nation. The Liberation Struggle for Namibia*, London: Zed Press, 1981, pp. 100- 17; D.L. Sparks & D. Green, *Namibia: The Nation After Independence*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1992, pp. 32-8.

⁴ B. König, *Namibia*, pp.17-3. See also the ELCRN Archives: 'Joint Statement on Torture in Namibia', May 1977, signed by Bishop L. Auala, Rev. Dr.J.L. De Vries, Bishop R. Koopmann, Rev. E. Morrow; and 'Statement by Church Leaders in Namibia during bloodshed in Katutura Township', 7 March 1978, signed by Rev. Dr J.L. de Vries, Rev. E. Morrow and Bishop R. Koopmann; H. Hunke & J. Ellis *Torture: A Cancer in our Society*, London: Catholic Institute for International Relations, 1978, *passim*.

⁵ For the explanation of this period see Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance in Namibia*, pp. 65-71; Katjavivi et al., *Church and Liberation Struggle in Namibia*, p. 144; L. Cliffe et al., *The Transition to Independence in Namibia*, Boulder & London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994, pp. 13-40; Swapo, *To Be Born A Nation*, *passim*; D. Soggot, *Namibia: The Violent Heritage* London: Rex Collings, 1986, pp. 226-37.

ecclesiastical silence'.⁶ The Odendaal plan of 1964, and the separate development policy of the RSA regime motivated the Black Lutheran churches to draw up a memorandum warning the RSA regime about creating a chaotic situation in Namibia. According to Philip Steenkamp, a noted historian, the activism of the Black churches could hardly be stated as confrontational or challenging, because their initiatives were not made public and were couched in polite, almost deferential, terms and the legitimacy of the state was not questioned, and only 'a listening' church was allowed to emerge.⁷

The stand taken in 1971 with the Open Letter by the two Black Lutheran churches against the violations of human rights in the liberation struggle made the churches objects of harassment by the South African government.⁸ The bombing of the printing press of ELOC in May 1973 and the harassment and arrest of church members and church workers because of political activities, as well as the expulsion of foreign missionaries⁹, marked the change from a period of expectation to frustration, starting in 1972 for the churches, and called them to enter the political arena.¹⁰ In 1973 the Lutheran churches were accused by the White sector of Namibian society as being a political organisation rather than a church.¹¹ In answer to these accusations, Dr J. L. de Vries, then the President of UELCSWA, reported in 1973 to the Board of UEM in Wuppertal-Barmen that:

'The church must break its ties with a European-influenced pietistic theology, which does not take into consideration the values of man in his wholeness... We have for too long lived behind the church-walls, forgetting that people are living with their political and social sufferings outside these walls. We do not allow ourselves to be directed by the policies of South Africa; we are directed by the Gospel of Jesus that brings forth a revolutionary change also in the socio-political

⁶ Soggot, *Namibia: The Violent Heritage*, p. 34.

⁷ Steenkamp, 'The Churches' in Leys & Saul (eds), *Namibia's Liberation Struggle*, p. 94.

⁸ See ELCRN- Archives: the Open Letter of the Black Lutheran Churches in Namibia to the Prime Minister of South Africa, 30 June 1971; and also the Maseru Declaration, Maseru, Lesotho, June 1984

⁹ On expulsions and deportations of missionaries see Katjavivi et al., *Church and Liberation Struggle in Namibia*, pp. 17-19.

¹⁰ Hellberg, *A Voice of the Voiceless*, p. 189.

¹¹ See Kauffenstein, *Kirche muss Kirche bleiben*, *passim*.

life.’¹²

This effort was seen as the theological definition of the stand of the Lutheran church in Namibia.¹³ The statement had ‘a conviction that the situation of the church in Namibia was unique and could not be defined by the traditional, European-influenced theological measures.’¹⁴

The understanding of the Black Lutheran Churches, that on the basis of its Christian faith the church was called to participate in party politics, was not shared by DELKSWA.¹⁵ This understanding was not shared even by some pastors of the Black Lutheran churches, especially in ELCSWA. It seemed like that there were five groups in the unity process supporting different political parties and ideologies on church unity in Namibia. For example, ELOC was seen as a predominantly Swapo church and DELKSWA as supporting the DTA, while there were three groups in ELCSWA, namely the pro-Swapo group, the ‘anti-Moscow line’ group and a group propagating a mediating role for the churches. For some, political involvement of the churches was seen as contrary to the Evangelical Lutheran Confessions, and party political directives were not accepted by church leaders, especially in DELKSWA and by some in ELCSWA. On this issue, in 1989 the DELKSWA Synod endorsed the previous statements of the 1970s on involvement of the church in politics, with the statement that ‘This applies to all political programs’.¹⁶ In contrast, ELCSWA, held that their ‘active involvement does not transform the church into a political organization’.¹⁷ The ELCSWA Synod argued that the individual Christian had the full right to participate in party politics and to be a member of a political party. At the same time the Synod stated that the church must not become a political organization or subject itself to the dictates of any political party.¹⁸

¹² ELCRN Archives: The Report of Dr J.L. de Vries, 1973.

¹³ DELKSWA was not a member of UELCSWA when Dr. J.L de Vries made this statement.

¹⁴ Hellberg, *A Voice Of The Voiceless*, p. 191.

¹⁵ See Kauffenstein, *Kirche muss Kirche bleiben*, p. 138.

¹⁶ ELCIN (GELC) Archives: Statement of DELKSWA Synod, 1-14 May 1989.

¹⁷ ELCRN Archives: Statement by the Thirteenth Ordinary Synod of ELCSWA, 23-29 September, 1989.

¹⁸ Ibid.

To foster their support of liberation movements, the Churches in Namibia remained determinably part of the work of CCN. Father Heinz Hunke said that 'the churches had distinct categories for the support of the liberation struggle and in opposition to the RSA regime: Institutional by providing a framework within which a culture of resistance could take root and grow, Ideological by articulating the interest of oppressed Namibians and Operational by offering protection and support to Namibians, albeit the role of shepherd looking after a flock.'¹⁹ By contrast, DELKSWA identified issues that stood between the churches as:

- '1) numerous statements and activities of CCN, while observing the political responsibility of Christians of the Church, one-sided representation of party political directions,
- 2) the dependence on Swapo's politbureau, as observed by us (DELKSWA)
- 3) the construction of mutual enemy-images,
- 4) CCN's partiality in the process of independence, insofar as this contradicts our Christian duty'.²⁰

With these statements DELKSWA confirmed that, according to the Evangelical Lutheran Confessions, the church could not accept party-political directives and programmes as binding.²¹ These opposing views on the involvement of the churches in the political situation of the country had a crucial impact on the unity process of the three Lutheran churches.

The first crisis in the unity process probably occurred in 1974 when a group of young Lutheran members and church leaders, some of them in leadership positions of ELCSWA and ELOC, initiated the formation of a new united Black political front based on the Black Consciousness philosophy.²² The attempt was not greatly successful, but it had an enormous impact on the future developments of the unity process, because some of the pastors became executive members of Swapo and the

¹⁹ H. Hunke, 'The role of European missionaries in Namibia' in B. Wood (ed.), *Namibia 1894-1984*, London: Namibia Support Committee, 1988, p. 632.

²⁰ ELCIN (GELC) Archives: Statement of DELKSWA Synod, 11-14 May 1989.

²¹ Ibid.

²² ELCRN Archives: 'Blacks let's unite' Conference, 13-15 December, 1974.

Namibia National Front.²³ Such a situation was unheard of in church circles at that time because the Lutheran Churches were trying hard to foster unity between their Black and White members.

The unity process was still in its infancy, but it was already confronted with differing views on the involvement of church leaders and the churches in the political arena. For example, in 1975 the Rev. Dr. Zephania Kameeta (born 1945 and a former deputy bishop of ELCRN, former Deputy Speaker of the Namibian Parliament and, in September 2001, Bishop-elect of ELCRN) became an Executive Committee and Politbureau member of Swapo. On the question 'Can us preachers not leave this struggle to the politicians?' he answered:

'The struggle in our land has to do with the liberation of Namibia, but it goes further and deeper than that. The presence of the South African government is not just a political question, but it is a threat to the Gospel of Jesus Christ! Thus, I see it as the task of every Christian to see to the knocking of this government. The South African government and its supporters proclaim, especially by what they do, a message diametrically opposed to the Gospel. While God tells us in Jesus Christ he has broken down the wall of separation between himself and us, and between us and our fellow men, the South African government proclaims and builds the wall of separation which bring about alienation, mistrust and prejudice, fear, hatred and enmity. Therefore I see the struggle in Southern Africa, and especially here in Namibia, not merely as a political struggle, in which only politicians may participate, but as a struggle in which all Christians are called to participate. And if this should happen, an armed struggle can be avoided, because the word of the cross is enough for us to be able to tackle this task. Or should God withdrew from the history of this world, hand it over to the Devils, and restrict himself to the temples and church buildings?'²⁴

Political involvement was not a problem for ELOC but it became a burden for ELCSWA because of opposed opinions of the pastors on this vital issue of the time. DELKSWA, on the other hand, had a clear position on the issue of church involvement in politics.²⁵

As ministers of the Lutheran churches came from different eras and theological interpretations of the Gospel, the political involvement of the leaders of the churches did not appeal to all pastors. In

²³ J. Ellis, 'The Church in mobilization for national liberation' in R.H.Green, K. Kiljunen and M.L.Kiljunen (eds), *Namibia The Last Colony*, London: Butler & Tanner, Frome, 1981, p. 142.

²⁴ This analysis is quoted in G. Totemeyer, *South West Africa/Namibia: Facts, Attitudes, Assessment, and Prospects*, Randburg: Fokus Suid Publishers, 1977, pp. 221-22.

²⁵ See Kauffenstein, *Kirche muss Kirche bleiben*, *passim*.

ELCSWA, especially the older ministers and missionaries felt that the church should be neutral and not follow the 'Moscow line'.²⁶ However, for younger ministers, neutrality meant silence and the condoning of iniquity, so they advocated close identification between the church and the political struggle for independence. Representing those who took the middle road, Dr J.L. de Vries saw the role of the church as that of a mediator working for reconciliation and peace among the belligerent factions.²⁷ This middle road was severely criticized by radical younger pastors who said 'while the hope of reconciliation must remain, one can only be accepted by South Africa as a mediator if one ceases a principled criticism of its policies.'²⁸ The understanding by the younger pastors was that the development of politics in the Namibian context was and should be a revolutionary act of liberation. Therefore the role of the church and its people was seen as an attempt to speak with one voice for the people against the sin of apartheid in Namibia. This activist role of the Lutheran churches was nevertheless not clearly articulated in Church/State relations, because of the divisions that manifested themselves between the political radicals and theological conservatives.

As the political situation in Namibia intensified, the struggle for independence became the confrontation between the moderate political groups, like DTA, seeking independence in agreement with South Africa, and radical 'socialistic communistic' groups represented by Swapo, seeking national independence by the use of violence.²⁹ This situation, created by the role of the Black Lutheran Churches, looked increasingly like a confrontation between the Christian and socialistic atheistic ideology and raised the fundamental question whether or not the church sided with the

²⁶ Indicating support for Swapo.

²⁷ J.L. de Vries, 'The political situation, the role of the Church and requirements for peace' in *The Future of SWA/Namibia: a Symposium*, Johannesburg: South African Institute of International Affairs, 1978, pp. 8-10.

²⁸ Ellis, 'The Church in mobilization for national liberation', in Green et al. (eds), *Namibia The Last Colony*, p.142. See J. L. de Vries, 'Christian responsibility in Namibia', *Human Rights Journal*, 9, 2/3 (1976), pp. 468-72.

²⁹ Hellberg, *A Voice of the Voiceless*, p. 195.

atheistic ideology of Swapo.³⁰ This issue created a severe problem in the development of a consensus for the unity among the Lutheran Churches in Namibia.

Another obstacle in the way of Lutheran unity can be attributed to the displacing of the preaching of the Gospel with Swapo's message of liberation. Consequently, Black Lutheran Churches were systematically politicised by their leaders in support of liberation movements to cultivate strong anti-RSA sentiment in their members. It must be stated that a small number of pastors in ELCIN and ELCRN remained true to their calling. They refused to be used as instruments for the advancement of any party-political objectives, either by Swapo or the South African government. However, it was not easy to find a way through the troubled situation of a highly polarized society and they were constantly faced with the physical dangers and psychological torments of various kinds affecting the lives of the Namibian people. There were often strong pressures to join the radical conformists and some were exposed to attacks by Swapo freedom fighters, especially in the north, and by the security forces of South Africa.

The leaders of the Black Lutheran churches justified their involvement in politics on biblical grounds, by referring to the dual role of Moses as a political and a religious leader of the oppressed people of Israel in Egypt. The understanding was that religion illuminates the way by suggesting the principles and guidelines according to which political action was to be taken. For most Black Lutheran leaders, it was a divine calling to identify with the liberation struggle of their people and they were, in fact, responsible for politicizing a large sector of the community.³¹ The general approach adopted was to call for radical reform toward the ideal of equality for all men and women. This message was contrary to the policy of the RSA. The churches publicly denounced oppression and discrimination closely associated with the racist policies of the RSA.³² As always in such

³⁰ The Black Lutheran Churches were seen by the South African government as Swapo churches and were labelled as being in favor of communism in Namibia.

³¹ This was especially the view of ELOC due to constant harassment of people by security forces in the north.

³² ELCRN Archives: The Open Letter to the Prime Minister of South Africa , 30 June 1971.

situations, where human judgement is of utmost importance, there were also moderate interpretations of the situation, while other pastors openly propagated the political message of the theology of total revolution and the struggle for a classless society.

Professor Charles Villa-Vicencio, in his book *Trapped in Apartheid*, said that people know that 'their liberation is tied up the with radical transformation of society, their personal quest for life is part of a communal struggle for survival, rendering all distinctions between a personal and social gospel void.'³³ In his view, the calling of the Church is to be one without class or social distinction. This raised the pertinent question whether the rich and powerful DELKSWA, which had never known the material deprivation and alienation of the historical poor, could ever become part of a united church. Villa-Vicencio thus doubted whether they were in a position to comprehend the mystery of God.³⁴ Indeed, the question which haunted all Lutheran Churches was 'Can black and white Christians who supported the system of apartheid really give testimony to the message of God in sincerity and initiate unity among Christians'.³⁵ The churches were not able to give clear answers on these important questions. In practice, they found it difficult to adhere to the statements of Paul in Galatians 5:1: 'For Freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery.' Yet, at the same time, the political developments in the southern African region opened the doors of the colonised people for struggle of self-determination in the region.

4.4. Political developments in the period 1974 -1975 and the Lutheran church unity process

The sudden end of Portuguese colonial domination in Angola in 1975 opened the doors for hope among the people of Namibia and raised hopes of Namibian independence. The Lutheran churches were not left behind by these developments in 1975, and with other churches in Namibia rejected the ethnically composed Turnhalle Constitutional Conference, because of the absence of major role

³³ C. Villa-Vicencio, *Trapped in Apartheid*, New York: Orbis Books, 1988, p. 197.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ ELCRN Archives: Minutes of ELCRN Synod, 1979.

players in the politics of Namibia.³⁶ The churches unilaterally declared in a letter to the then American Secretary of State, Dr Henry Kissinger, that:

‘The truth about these talks is that the vast majority of the Black population has no interest or confidence in them. One reason for this is that black delegations which are said to represent various population groups there have no mandate from those whom they purport to represent.... Another more important reason why these talks are suspect is the dominating influence of white officials ...behind the facade of a promised new order. We can only conclude that the Turnhalle talks in their present form have a negligible chance to succeed. Certainly one cannot any longer sanely gamble with the future of a nation and subcontinent at such long odds.’³⁷

The changing political scene in southern Africa led to changes in the political situation in Namibia. These, in turn, had enormous influence on the decisions made by the leaders of the three churches in connection with the role of the churches in the political arena. Two important developments - one in December 1974 and other in May 1975 - swayed the prospect of the Lutheran unity process in another direction. Firstly, during 13-15 December 1974, a conference was held in Okahandja under the theme ‘Blacks let's unite’. This conference was organised by Rev.Dr Z. Kameeta and the late Mr D. Tjongarero (1946-1997), a member of ELCSWA and internal Swapo Secretary of Publicity and Information. This conference was attended by church leaders, teachers and politicians from different political parties. Its aim was to establish a consensus movement for the attainment of political unity and stability among the indigenous people. At its conclusion a powerful political umbrella body, the Namibia National Council, was formed.³⁸ The paradox of the matter was that the same leaders of the Black Lutheran Churches who were involved in this process of creation of a Black political forum were simultaneously looking for an unified Lutheran church in Namibia with DELKSWA, which was considered as a ‘White Church’.

³⁶ Ellis, ‘The Church in mobilization for national liberation’ in Green, et al. (eds), *Namibia The Last Colony*, pp. 140,142.

³⁷ ELCRN Archives: Letter to Dr. H. Kissinger, signed by Dr. J.L. de Vries, ELCSWA; Bishop L. Auala, ELOC, Bishop R. Koopmann, RCC; Rev. E. Morrow on behalf of Bishop C. O'Brien Winter, Anglican Diocese of Damaraland, 18 June 1976.

³⁸ ELCRN Archives: ‘Blacks let's unite Conference’, 13-15 December, 1974.

Secondly, at the beginning of May 1975, the 100 000 Whites in Namibia were informed of the political changes in southern Africa by South African government officials.³⁹ They were prepared psychologically for the dangerous international situation for South Africa and for the dismantling of the internal apartheid structure as a step towards Namibian independence.⁴⁰ The possibility that the Western powers and Russia might unite against South Africa if its racial policy was not modified was explained to them. They were informed that the dominant position of the Whites in Namibia would not be affected if Blacks were treated with dignity, but that better racial understanding but would improve the international opinion.⁴¹ These developments undoubtedly affected DELKSWA because in 1977 they joined UELCSWA. However, it was not enough to bring them to Lutheran Church unity and an acceptance of an independent Namibia.⁴²

4.5.The question of non-violence and violence and Church Unity

Another development which possibly stood in the way of Lutheran church unity was the statement by the Rev. Dr J.L. de Vries, then the president of UELCSWA, in October 1975. He stated:

‘We declare our solidarity with the liberation groups and organizations, although we continue to reject acts of violence and to advocate non-violent resistance. We support the aim of the liberation movement, although we cannot endorse its actions from the Gospel, because we are for non-violence’.⁴³

After the escalation of violence in Namibia against the defenceless people in Namibia by the South African army, Dr. de Vries stated at a pastors’ conference in Wuppertal, in September 1978, that:

³⁹ Serfontein, *Namibia?* pp. 106-7.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 107.

⁴¹ Hellberg, *A Voice Of The Voiceless*, p. 203.

⁴² See H. Veii, ‘Blankes is nie vir onafhanklikheid voortberei nie’, *Deurbraak*, 7, 3 (June 1978), pp. 2-3.

⁴³ S. Groth, *Namibia the Wall of Silence: the Dark Days of Liberation Struggle*, Wuppertal: Peter Hammer Verlag and David Philip Publishers, 1995, p. 29.

‘So far the church has been trying to go the way of non-violent resistance. But the church may find itself compelled to endorse the other way as well, which can be illustrated so clearly in the history of the German churches’.⁴⁴

This views was not shared by all members of the Lutheran churches in Namibia. Even among the Black Lutheran churches the use of violence or non- violent methods created disunity. The position of DELKSWA was clear on this issue namely, that the church could not support armed struggle. As the military situation intensified in Namibia so did the views on the involvement of the church in armed struggle. In early 1986 Rev.Dr. Z Kameeta commented on the issue of violence in Namibia and he drew a comparison with German church history. He said:

‘I am fully aware that there is only one way for the Church, and that is the proclamation of the Word of God in the word, in deed and in campaigns for justice and reconciliation. We have no other way. But this is a very common question: what can we say on the issue of violence? It is not just a South African issue. It is a question which should be extremely common in Germany where there was a Confessing Church and a man like Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The oppressed population in South Africa did not take up arms as an end in itself. They did not suddenly pass a conference resolution to take up arms. Rather, they were forced to do so by a situation of violence, a situation which has prevailed in Southern Africa for 300 years. You have no doubt read and heard of the violent and brutal oppression of the Namibian people by the imperialist German regime. The place where we are sitting now was once occupied by a concentration camp where members of my family were imprisoned from 1905-1911 (near Luderitzburg). And if I am now deciding to take up arms, then the word of God should not be misused by saying that it never permits such step. We are aware that violence is evil. But there can be a time in the life of a nation when the only option for action that is left open is to turn to violence. We know that God will judge us one day. And it is with the knowledge and with prayer for forgiveness that we have been taking up arms and will continue to do so. We understand our brothers and sisters who are taking up arms in South Africa in this spirit. They are doing so as a church, hoping for a day of justice and of peace.’⁴⁵

These attitudes among some leaders of the Lutheran churches could be understood in the light of the escalation of violence in Namibia. However, the Swapo detainee crisis became known to churches in 1976 in Namibia and it created changes in some of the perspectives of the church leaders on the role of the churches concerning political involvement.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 30.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 30-1.

4.6.The detainees crisis⁴⁶ and the unity process of the three Lutheran churches.

As the violation of human rights escalated in Namibia in 1976, there was a cycle of arrests, torture, imprisonment and executions of Swapo members in exile.⁴⁷ The 'Andreas Shipanga affair'⁴⁸ came to the attention of church leaders in Namibia. Some church leaders, notably exiled Bishop Winter of the Anglican Church, pressurised Swapo to release the detainees.⁴⁹ However, the issue of the Swapo detainees was never discussed in public, in order to safeguard the support of the liberation spirit and only came into public domain in 1989, when detainees returned from exile.

When the detainees crisis became known in Namibia, it had a great impact on the thinking of some of the leading figures in the Lutheran Churches, such as Dr de Vries. Despite his strong stand against neutrality and political indifference⁵⁰ in the early seventies, when the information concerning detainees in Swapo detention and camps reached Namibia, Dr de Vries stated in his paper, 'Namibia at the Crossroads' that:

⁴⁶ See N. Basson & B. Motinga (eds), *Call Them Spies: A Documentary Account of the Namibian Spy Drama*, Windhoek and Johannesburg: African Communications Project, 1989, *passim*. This book was compiled just before the first democratic elections in Namibia and although it contains authentic documents it should be treated with due care because it was a result of South African electoral interference aimed at blocking the two-thirds majority win for Swapo. See also Groth, *Namibia the Wall of silence*, pp. 63-6, 100-29.

⁴⁷ See Leys & Saul, *Namibia's Liberation Struggle*, pp. 49-50; Steenkamp, 'The Churches' in Leys & Saul (eds), *Namibia's Liberation Struggle*, p.104; Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance in Namibia*, pp.105-8; See also Swapo, 'Report of the Findings and Recommendations of the John Ya Otto Commission of Inquiry into Circumstances which Led to the Revolt of Swapo Cadres between June 1974 and April 1976', Lusaka: 4 June 1976.

⁴⁸ Andreas Shipanga was a former politbureau member of Swapo and Acting Secretary for Information and Publicity. He returned to Namibia and launched Swapo-D in 1978. For a detailed explanation on his actions see Sue Armstrong, *In Search of Freedom: The Andreas Shipanga Story*, Gibraltar: Ashanti Publishing, 1989, *passim*.

⁴⁹ Steenkamp, 'The Churches' in Leys & Saul (eds), *Namibia's Liberation Struggle*, p. 104.

⁵⁰ See the position of Dr de Vries on neutrality in 1973 in 'Christian responsibility in a multiracial land, 29 January 1973' in Hertz (ed.), *Two Kingdoms One World*, p. 265.

'The church in Namibia must play the role of the mediator between the fronts and the political parties...The church sees neutrality in the light of the New Testament. That is why the church in its theological thinking has come to the conclusion that the church should be the church for all, even those called 'collaborators of the government' or the stooges of the government.'⁵¹

This approach of Dr de Vries started heated debates on the question of neutrality and was a direct threat to any possible unity among the three Lutheran churches. For example, Dr Kameeta stated that:

'A prophetic voice can never be neutral in a situation of conflict. Neutrality has in fact no place in the vocabulary of God. There is and will be no such a time where this voice can be tamed into neutrality. How can the messenger of God be neutral, while the God who is sending him or her is never neutral'.⁵²

The detainees crisis reached a climax in the 1980s. During the Lusaka Conference in May 1984, the Swapo delegates from Namibia learnt of the terrors of mass incarcerations, torture and killings of Namibians accused by Swapo of being South African spies.⁵³ On return to Namibia the delegates asked the church leaders in Namibia, especially the CCN, to respond to the crisis. A detailed memorandum dealing with the critical conditions in the Swapo camps, and a reminder of the role of the churches was sent to the church leaders by the Committee of Parents.⁵⁴ The committee clearly stated that: 'This situation requires church leaders to take on their Christian responsibilities to our people and call the Swapo leaders to order'.⁵⁵

⁵¹ J.L. de Vries, 'Namibia at the crossroads', *Report on International Namibia Consultation*, Wuppertal: Ökumenische Werkstatt, 1976, p.11.

⁵² Z. Kameeta, 'A Black theology of liberation' in Z. Kameeta (ed.), *Why, O Lord? Psalms and Sermons from Namibia*, Geneva: Risk Books, WCC, 1986, p. 53.

⁵³ Steenkamp, 'The Churches' in Leys & Saul (eds), *Namibia's Liberation Struggle*, pp. 104.

⁵⁴ The Parents Committee was established by the concerned parents of people in exile and in Swapo camps. The committee demanded information about the whereabouts and well-being of the people in exile who were under direct responsibility of Swapo. See Groth, *Namibia the wall of silence*, pp. 140-150.

⁵⁵ ELCRN Archives: Memorandum, 'Aan die Namibiese Kerkleiers', Junie 1985.

Rev. Siegfried Groth⁵⁶ was appointed by the Black Lutheran churches in the early 1970s to serve Namibians in exile in Zambia and Botswana. In April 1985 he discovered that Namibians in exile were living in a very dangerous situation. He reported these issues of detentions and torture to the Rev. Dr. Z Kameeta (15 May 1985), Bishop H. Frederik and Bishop C. Dumeni (14 June 1985).⁵⁷ Groth informed the church leaders because he was only answerable to them and not to the Swapo leadership. In contrast, chaplain Erastus Haikali and his staff were answerable to the Swapo leadership. According to Groth, when Haikali visited him in Lusaka in 1977, there were people who were excluded by Swapo from the church in exile and from the Christian fellowship it provided. Groth stated that Haikali avoided these people.⁵⁸ This meant that there were two churches in exile: a Swapo-church and a dissidents church. The Namibian Christians consequently experienced separation in exile based on political allegiance. The Black Lutheran church leaders in Namibia declared solidarity only with Swapo and looked at the Swapo dissidents as renegades.⁵⁹ The division in the Christian church in exile severely affected the already struggling unity process of the Lutheran churches in Namibia.

The question of Swapo detainees was kept out of the public spotlight because it was not discussed - as was the issue of apartheid - in sermons and group discussions in the Black Lutheran churches.⁶⁰ In other words, the handling of the Swapo detainees crisis by the Black Lutheran churches in its way was timid: it was similar to the responses of DELKSWA to apartheid policies. The Black Lutheran

⁵⁶ Rev. Siegfried Groth was assigned in the 1970s by the Lutheran Churches in Namibia as a pastor for exiled Namibians in Zambia and Botswana. He was an adviser on South African affairs to the UEM in Wuppertal from 1961 and was banned by the South African authorities from Namibia in 1971.

⁵⁷ Steenkamp, 'The Churches' in Leys & Saul (eds), *Namibia's Liberation Struggle*, p. 105. See also S. Groth, *Menschenrechts verletzungun in der Exil- Swapo's (Human Rights Violations in Swapo in Exile)* Wuppertal: Ökumenische Werkstatt, 18 September 1989, *passim*.

⁵⁸ In 1974, Erastus Haikali was appointed as chaplain for the church in exile by the Swapo leadership. See Groth, *Namibia The Wall Of Silence*, pp. 42-3.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁶⁰ This assumption is based on personal experience and observations by the author. The author was a theological student in 1986 at the seminary of the two Black Lutheran churches.

church leaders condemned the abuses suffered by the detainees but they were equivocal in their criticism of Swapo. Thus, while Black Lutheran churches blamed apartheid for sowing suspicion and distrust, and for destroying the unity of the oppressed, they failed to acknowledge their own failure to respond decisively to the reports of the Rev. S. Groth. This silence had a negative impact on the Lutheran Church unity process, because some of the church leaders were convinced that Swapo, liberation and the church were inseparable, or, in other words, that ‘the people are Swapo and the people are the church’.⁶¹ To bring the atrocities of the liberation movement to the public eye could be a fatal exercise to the unity of the oppressed. The analysis by the historian Philip Steenkamp ‘that the moral authority and material interests of many organizations and individuals were closely intertwined with the Swapo’s image’⁶² is borne out by the differences the three Lutheran churches had in openly addressing this embarrassing issue.

4.7. The impact of Racism, Ethnicity and Separate Development on the unity process

The words ‘divide et impera’ (divide and rule) clearly characterised the Namibian socio-political and economic scene and colonial experience. Throughout the history of Namibia, ethnic and tribal identities of the indigenous people were of great concern for the colonial governments,⁶³ who successfully used the ‘divide and rule’ system to destabilize possible political and church unity among the different ethnic and tribal groups.⁶⁴ The intellectual systematization for this standard colonial system of division came from Dr. H. Vedder in 1938.⁶⁵ It was further advanced by the

⁶¹ Katjavivi et al., *Church and Liberation in Namibia*, p. 189.

⁶² Steenkamp, ‘The Churches’ in Leys & Saul (eds), *Namibia’s Liberation Struggle*, p. 107.

⁶³ See Ben Fuller, ‘We live in a Manga’ in P. Hayes et al., *Namibia under South African Rule Mobility & Containment*, London: James Currey, 1998, pp. 194-216.

⁶⁴ For the discussion of tribal divisions see H. Drechsler, *Let Us Die Fighting*, London: Zed Press, 1980 pp. 80, 84; I. Goldblatt, *A History of South West Africa, from the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century*, Cape Town: Juta, 1971, pp. 120-28; Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance in Namibia*, pp. 7-24; Herbstein & Evenson, *Devils Are Among Us*, chapter 6.

⁶⁵ See H. Vedder, *South West Africa in Early Times*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938, *passim*.

creation of apartheid in South Africa in 1948 and the Odendaal homeland policy for Namibia in 1964. The creation of homelands for the purpose of 'divide and rule' by the South African administration gave rise to inter-ethnic differences not based on historical precedent. A clear example was the Herero-Owambo conflict in 1978 after the assassination of Herero chief Clemens Kapuuo (1925-1978)⁶⁶. There had been very little pre-colonial contact between these two groups, but systematic South African attempts to separate them created antagonism evident in the clashes after Kapuuo's assassination. In other words, the relationship between the people in Namibia was determined by the institutionalised racial discrimination and ethnic categorization imposed by the South African government, and inevitably led to a volatile situation.⁶⁷

Ethnic, and more particularly racial, tensions can be a potentially divisive and even explosive element, as proven by the history of the Lutheran unity process in Namibia.⁶⁸ The intermingling of diverse races, peoples, cultures and religions have posed many problems in various parts of the world, and the Lutheran churches in southern Africa have proved no exception. Political and social differences seemed consequents to be unbridgeable even when the majority of Namibians were Lutherans. The Owambo-speaking Namibians form the backbone of Swapo and represent more than 60 per cent of the total population of Namibia. Race and ethnicity thus remain latent lines of stress in Namibia and appear to be a limiting factor in the development of a broader class of national identity in Namibia.

The political characteristics of the indigenous people in the Black Lutheran churches were marked by many divisions based on political differences and tribal rivalries, as well as on personal jealousies and inter-tribal feuds. There were forty political parties or groups and three political alliances in

⁶⁶ See Ellis, 'The Church in mobilization for national liberation', in R. Green, et al., *Namibia The Last Colony*, pp. 140-42.

⁶⁷ On people of South West Africa during the unity process, see J.S. Malan, *Peoples of South West Africa/Namibia*, Pretoria: HAUM, 1980, passim.

⁶⁸ See M.J. Olivier, 'Ethnic relations in South West Africa', *Plural Societies*, 2 (1971), pp. 31-42.

Namibia in 1976.⁶⁹ Attempts to foster national consciousness were met with limited success. No political party in Namibia cut across Namibian tribal identities. Therefore, unity was as elusive as a mirage in the desert.

The extent of the Lutheran churches' involvement in mobilising people to church unity proved to be doubtful, because the official policy of 'divide and rule' of the South African government was not the only excuse for divisions among the people in Namibia. The South African authorities did restrict the movement of people, but in urban townships people could mix and discuss issues of concern. The concern of church unity had no appeal among the ordinary Black Lutheran members because liberation from South Africa was the top priority of the time.

No colonial act was more catalytic in the process of ethnic mobilisation than the special treatment of the Whites and the Owambo-speaking Namibians politically, economically and socially. The political system in Namibia was a pyramid of power that was effectively based on race, and the Owambo came to conceive themselves differently as they were treated differently. They were the people most victimized by the RSA government during the liberation war that started in 1966. The special treatment of the Owambo created a sense of ethnic superiority that came to the forefront in the move towards the struggle for national independence. The apartheid colonial policy created a political complication that still haunts Namibia today. And this is still evident in the struggle towards Lutheran church unity.

During the colonial period infrastructure such as schools and hospitals were concentrated in the so-called white areas. Distribution of schools all over the country was uneven and unfair. Northern Namibia was deprived of any kind of development. This was a conscious colonial government policy of making northern Namibia a region reserved for cheap unskilled labour.⁷⁰ Such a social policy could only deepen ethnic and regional cleavages and make the church unity initiatives impossible.

⁶⁹ See Duignan & Gann, *South West Africa-Namibia*, pp. 23-31; Tötemeyer, *South West Africa/Namibia*, table 4.

⁷⁰ See N. Hishongwa, *The Contract Labour System and its Effects on Family and Social Life in Namibia. A Historical Perspective*, Windhoek: Gamsberg Macmillan Publishers, 1992, *passim*.

The process of unity was characterized by denial and the reluctance by those who (Black or White) practise racism to come to terms with their own prejudices. Despite all fears, prejudices and uncertainties, racism could have been addressed if all Namibians had been committed to making a meaningful contribution to the healing process for a bright and harmonious future. However, the situation in Namibia was not conducive for such meaningful changes, even in the unity process of the Christian churches.

Racial prejudice did not help the progress of the unity process. Professor Charles Villa-Vicencio's statement that 'many in the white population continue to be trapped in racial stereotyping ethnocentrism, xenophobia entitlement and a strange sense of being victims' ⁷¹ would be applicable to whites in the German Church in Namibia during the unity process in the turbulent years of the liberation struggle. This scenario was evident in Namibia, but other very important issues contributed to the situation.

4.8. The impact of socio-economic factors on the unity process

The general life of the people in Namibia was determined by their race or ethnic group. During the colonial occupation by South Africa in Namibia, the chance for a Black child to survive disease to reach the age of five was 50 per cent. In the same period the government spent over 700 US Dollars annually for the education of a White child, while for the Black child the amount was only one-sixth of that. The annual income for every White man, woman and child was an average of \$3500, and for Blacks it was less than \$150.⁷² In the midst of such imbalances, an Afrikaner school inspector from Owamboland once said in 1979: 'You can never bring these people up to our level, and besides, they prefer much to keep to themselves. Why can't the Bantu [Black] be left alone in his ways and the White in his?'⁷³ From such utterances it was obvious that race, language and colour were the

⁷¹ Villa-Vicencio, *Trapped in Apartheid*, p. 206.

⁷² Southern Africa Program Peace Education Division, *Namibia: One Hundred Years of Struggle and Hope*, Philadelphia, Pa: American Friends Service Committee, n.d., p. 3.

⁷³ Ibid.

determining factors for any integration of White and Black Namibians. Accordingly, the Rev. Dr. Z. Kameeta once asked: 'Have these three gods (race , language and colour) taken the place of the Trinity in the hearts of our White brothers?'⁷⁴

During the colonial period the churches operated in a land of wealth and poverty, of awesome beauty and terrible oppression. Namibia is one of the richest countries in the world in relation to the size of its population. In the colonial periods it was perhaps the most exploited in the world in terms of the gathering of the wealth into foreign hands and that was the reason for the continued refusal of the RSA regime to cease colonial administration of the territory.⁷⁵ Over 85 per cent of the Black wage-earners in Namibia were paid below the Poverty Datum Line.⁷⁶

During the unity process of the Lutheran churches Namibian society was structured in such way that people could not forget the differences that made certain groups feel superior to others, even among the Blacks.⁷⁷ The ideological preoccupation with the racial differences was not only confined to the Black and White churches, but was apparent in the economic field, the type of work, income, housing standard of living and productive life experiences of the total population of the country.⁷⁸

The situation in Black Namibian society was full of frustrations and feelings of hopelessness during

⁷⁴ Z. Kameeta, 'Rasse, Sprache, Hautfarbe: Die drei Apartheid Götter' in *Namibia Dokumente: Menschenrechte ausser Kraft*, Hammikeln: Von der Ökumenische Projektgruppe, Namibia Woche, 1975 , p. 39

⁷⁵ Sparks & Green, *Namibia: The Nation After Independence*, p. 73. See also Cliffe, *The Transition to Independence in Namibia*, p. 15-16.

⁷⁶ Because the RSA government did not take an accurate census of Namibia and refused to report economic information on the territory, in most cases all statistics were calculated estimates drawn up by the British Council of Churches and the Catholic Institute of International Relations. See also Serfontein, *Namibia?* pp. 27-8.

⁷⁷ See Olivier, 'Ethnic relations in South West Africa', pp. 32-42.

⁷⁸ See R. Murray, 'Namibia: more problems than answers in the ethnic game', in *New African Development*, 11, 4 (1977), pp. 299-300.

the 1970s and 1980s because people were expecting national independence. The fact that Namibian society was compartmentalised had devastating effects on the life of the three Lutheran Churches. As the churches shared a common confessional integrity, they were expected to co-operate better, but the Lutheran Churches followed the dominant secular paradigm of 'divide and rule'. Different responses by the churches to socio-political and economic issues accurately reflected the ethnic differences in Namibian society.⁷⁹ Lutherans in Namibia were impatient because the image that the churches portrayed lacked the dynamism which the followers of Jesus Christ should display, but the churches were overpowered by the liberation spirit and were in the web of the apartheid policy of the RSA. The Christian charisma of bold, dynamic, creative and imaginative leadership to bring the different Lutheran ethnic groups under a united Lutheran church was absent from all three churches.

4.9. Ethnicity and regionalism

What became clear in the constriction of political and social space in Namibia was that no church or political movement would reduce the negative impact of ethnicity and regionalism in such a country. Certain concrete issues clearly stand out. First, the Churches were not in control of the duration of the transition of a society where there was a crystallization of socio-economic groups on which they could not base a united church. During the unity process, the political climate in Namibia was nowhere near to creating a substantial working and middle class on which to base political pluralism and a united church.⁸⁰

Secondly, the attempts by the Lutheran churches to unite could not claim that in the process they had reduced ethnic and regional divisions. It was not clear whether the churches have had the effect of lowering the regional and ethnic divisions in the country, even among the two Black Lutheran churches. There were two crucial opportunities (in 1984 and 1987) for the Black churches to unite

⁷⁹ S. Groth, 'The condemnation of the apartheid by the churches in South West Africa: a historic occasion for the Church and Ecumenism', *International Review of Missions*, 61, 242 (April 1972), pp. 183-93.

⁸⁰ K. Mbuende, 'Church and class struggle in Namibia' in Katjavivi et al., *Church and Liberation in Namibia*, pp. 27-47.

without the German church, but they failed to use these opportunities by claiming that they were waiting for their sister church.⁸¹ Nevertheless, it seems that the ethnic and regional tensions had been very strong among the Black Lutheran churches and had even increased after 1990. This can be seen in the continued establishment by ELCIN of new congregations in areas where ELCRN and ELCIN(DELK) have congregations.⁸² The truth is that ethnicity and regionalism have not disappeared in independent Namibia. The bitterness in the north-south divide has deepened as the Swapo government has chosen to develop the north at the expense of other communities in the south. There has also been an increasingly unequal access to the resources of Namibia's economic success. The ethnic mind-set of the Swapo government towards the people of the south borders on confrontation and racism. The militarism and ethnic mind-set exploited in the north and in the electoral process have left the country in the grip of ethnicity, militarism and authoritarianism.⁸³

The political problems in 1970s and 1980s can be attributed to sectarian politics in Namibia. The contention is that as long as society is divided vertically, be it by religion or by ethnicity, it is difficult to build unity. And when the situation is one of division between Black and White people then it is more difficult to dismantle the barrier of differences. The nature and the role of the stakeholders in the unity process have an impact on ethnic consciousness. Church unity implies restructuring of the churches. Therefore, ethnically organized churches, like ELCIN and ELCIN (GELC), are bound to resist unity, since the whole survival of the churches hinges on ethnic hegemony over resources.

The purpose of dividing the churches on racial lines was mainly for obtaining church power in order to access resources commanded by the mission societies. This was obvious in the formation of Black and White Lutheran churches and the breakaway of the Basters to established the Rynse Kerk in

⁸¹ Author's interview with Dr P. J. Isaak, Windhoek: 12 March 2001.

⁸² ELCRN Archives: The co-ordinator of LWF-NNC complained in her report on the policy of ELCIN in 1999.

⁸³ These are the views of the author on the north-south problem which definitely stands in the way of Church unity.

1957.⁸⁴ Because of the iniquitous resource distribution in both colonial and post-colonial Namibia, ethnicity has proved to be an effective means of political mobilization for those who seek access to power in order to change the pattern of resource distribution. Given the centrality of material resources in the production and reproduction of ethnicity, the unity process was bound to be problematic in the face of ethnic tension.⁸⁵

The Lutheran churches failed to bridge the ethnic conflict and ethnic consciousness which were overshadowed by the liberation spirit that stood in the way of the integration of the two Black Lutheran churches and White Lutherans during the unity process. However, the churches also failed to integrate their members due to the political climate of the time. The present work argues that the Lutheran churches were never in a position to address political, social and economic iniquities and imbalances in Namibian society. There was no democratic process in Namibia which ensured social expansion, no political space, and no democratic institutions to facilitate the peaceful transfer of power and tolerance of alternative political views in the Lutheran churches. After independence, the nominal attainment of human rights was not sufficient to induce the Lutheran Churches to unite.

The Lutheran Church unity process proved to be problematic in ethnically plural societies. The solution to the problem of ethnicity is not to suppress ethnic identities and consciousness. Ethnic identities become amenable to political manipulation, either when suppressed groups feel marginalised from the political and economic processes, or when privileged groups feel that their interests are threatened. The solution is the expansion of social and political space, not its constriction, and the recognition of civil and political rights of every member of society. On this issue, African social scientist Bernard Magubane observes that 'ethnic consciousness and expression in terms of conflict or cleavages must be derived from social structure and not relegated to psychological variables(tribalism) or to innate hatreds between ethnic and racial groups. Ethnicity

⁸⁴ Nambala, *History of the Church in Namibia*, p. 74.

⁸⁵ Sparks & Green, *Namibia: The Nation After Independence*, pp. 20-1.

has a social history'.⁸⁶ It is made through historical, political, economic and social processes. It is therefore through these processes that ethnicity may be reconstructed.⁸⁷ The genesis of ethnic crisis in Namibia, as in most parts of Africa, is linked mainly to the colonial intervention process and the particular organization of power in society.⁸⁸

4.10. Post-colonial practices and reproduction of ethnicity

In the midst of the nation-building policy of the Namibian government,⁸⁹ the general state of affairs was the reproduction, rather than the deconstruction, of ethnicity in the Namibian body-politic. Ethnicity came to play a major part in church elections in post-colonial Namibia. For instance, in 1993 ELCRN failed to elect a bishop. This was the first election of a Lutheran bishop in an independent Namibia. The failure of this election was based on the ethnic differences within ELCRN.⁹⁰ The electorate failed to reach the required two-thirds majority. Then an interim leadership was established to lead the church to an Extraordinary Synod of 1994 to elect a new leader. This succeeded and Bishop Petrus Diergaardt was elected as the second bishop of the church. In September 2001 ELCRN successfully elected its third bishop in the first round of the election.⁹¹ This situation was a clear illustration that there is a change in the perspectives of the electorates of ELCRN.

⁸⁶ B. Magubane, 'Pluralism and conflict situations in Africa: a new look', *Africa Social Research*, 7 (July 1969), p. 541.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ On people of Namibia during the unity process, see Malan, *Peoples of South West Africa/Namibia, passim*.

⁸⁹ On the role of the Church and national reconciliation policy see V. Munyika 'The message of National Reconciliation as a challenge to the Church in Namibia', (unpublished M.Th. dissertation, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1994), *passim*.

⁹⁰ This is the view of the author which is based on close observation of the election in 1993.

⁹¹ However, it is interesting to note that ELCRN recently elected Rev. Dr Z. Kameeta with a two-thirds majority in the first round.

4.11. Conclusion

It appears that the Lutheran churches had no a clear vision or mission concerning the unity process. During the 1970s and 1980s the process became an unending source of confrontation, frustration, unhappiness and despair because of the political, economic and social responses of the churches to the Namibian situation, which encouraged intolerance and animosity and drove the churches to different extremes of life in Namibia. As the Lutheran churches represent the majority of Christians in Namibia, these divisions affected the whole country, and specifically the policy of national reconciliation.

The distrust, animosity and division among the churches have been experienced since the establishment of independent Lutheran churches by the different mission societies, and have continued to exist after Namibian independence. Due to differences in political, economic and social responses to the Namibian situation, the self-justification was one of the prime reactions of the Lutheran churches. Thus, the love of God was absent from the deliberations of the churches. And even though the Rev I.K. Shuuya stated in an interview that the Black and White leadership of the churches in the 1970s called themselves broeders and susters (brothers and sisters),⁹² this early scenario changed as the political situation in the country intensified and became uncontrollable. Not surprisingly, the churches failed to reach their target date of 1992 for unity. The churches started with a new initiative under LWF-NNC in 1993. It seems that the churches were far removed from the Lutheran confession of 'commuica in communicatio sanctorum' (communion of saints) which they confess in the Apostolic Creed. The words and deeds of Lutheran churches were not dominated and geared by faith toward unity but by worldly dimensions, and by self-centred and divisive behaviours and actions.⁹³

The effort of the three Lutheran churches in Namibia to promote Lutheran church unity and witness

⁹² Author's interview with the Rev. I.K. Shuuya, Windhoek: 19 March 2001.

⁹³ Z. Kameeta, 'A Theological Perspective' in Isaak (ed.), *Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia*, p. 11.

took place in one of the most complicated and difficult situations in the world. The two Black Lutheran churches have been critical of the lack of unity of the Lutheran churches in the country, but their main concern was with the liberation struggle of Namibia. For all three churches Lutheran unity was not a priority because of the political uncertainty in the country.

The heterogeneous situation of the country made it very difficult for the churches to become unified. The main issues are differences in languages, cultures, traditions and institutions. The question is: How can one even think of uniting all these linguistic, racial and geographical entities into one united Church? As early as 1959 the late Lutheran missionary, Theodore Homdrom, in his thesis, 'The Problem of Lutheran Unity in South Africa' posed pertinent questions which are relevant today. He asked 'What has been done and what is being done to give the world a faint hint that such a task has a chance of succeeding?'⁹⁴ The unity struggle in Namibia has proved that the spirit of liberation and the political independence of Namibia were not strong enough to bring the Lutheran churches from different backgrounds into a unified church. Even with thoroughly debated constitutions drawn up under the auspices of UELCSWA and LWF-NNC, as part of national and international initiatives, the insolubility of the problem remains.

After examining the stillborn endeavours of the three Lutheran Churches to achieve unity one realizes that there are many rivers yet to cross before a united Lutheran church can become a reality in Namibia. For twenty-one years UELCSWA deliberated on the differences of the three Lutheran churches without any significant success. Finally, the Lutheran churches stopped the process in 1993 and started afresh under the auspices of LWF-NNC.

⁹⁴ T. Homdrom, 'The problem of Lutheran unity in South Africa' (unpublished M.Th. dissertation, Graduate Faculty of the Luther Theological Seminary, Chicago, 1959), p. 46.

Conclusion

The history of the Lutheran churches in southern Africa is the history of the struggle for unity. Therefore the quest for a united Lutheran church in Namibia can be explained by examining the history of division in Lutheran churches in southern Africa and their relation to socio-political and economic issues in the Namibian society during the liberation struggle and after the decolonisation process in 1990. This thesis argues that the political involvement of churches, misinterpretation of the Doctrine of Two Kingdoms and the real meaning of being a Christian church severely hindered the churches from reaching the desired goal of a united Lutheran Church. The failure of the Lutheran churches to form a unified church has been perhaps the greatest stumbling block in the struggle for self-determination in Namibia.

The history of the Lutheran Churches in southern Africa is also the history of divisions along confessional, racial and ethnic lines. The question of unity has thus become a site of struggle between Black and White Lutherans. It is true that RMS and FMS mission societies working in Namibia introduced different confessional structures into Namibia. This resulted in separate Lutheran Churches, based on the traditions of the mission churches, combined with various indigenous traditions and cultures, as in the case of ELCIN and ELCRN.

The historical development of the German concept of *Volkskirchen*, based on separate churches for each ethnic group, created unbridgeable divisions between Black and White Lutherans in southern Africa. This idea was further exacerbated by apartheid and the separate development policies of the South African regime after 1948 and the Odendaal plan of 1964 in Namibia.

The establishment of Black and White Lutheran congregations by RMS fitted well with the colonial practice of *divide and rule*. Externally, Lutheran Churches in Namibia were all members of FELCSA and later LUCSA and were internally members of UELCSWA, but the churches failed to unite because division became entrenched with apartheid, racism, ethnicity and regionalism.

The aim of this thesis has been to locate the historical position of the failure of the Lutheran unity process and to explain that people, even with the same confessions and Lutheran Church tradition, were not able to unite. The specific context of the period 1972 to 1993 shows the uniqueness of the struggle.

The study grapples with the question why there were so many role-players within the Lutheran churches who were willing to operate within the political and cultural framework that was provided by the socio-political and economic climate of the country. The study showed that the period 1972 to 1993 was one of rapid changes in Namibia's political history and the responses of the churches to these changes. During this period there was severe social and political dislocation among the people of Namibia and eventually, when stability came in 1990 in Namibian socio-political and economic spheres, the spirit of unity lost its vigour.

It was clear from the nature of the history of the three Lutheran churches that they were from different mission societies, as was the case with all Lutheran church groupings in southern Africa. Because of these differences the Lutheran churches responded differently to socio-political and economic issues in the southern African region. These different responses to socio-political and economic issues severely tarnished the image of Lutheran churches in southern Africa, and specifically the Lutheran churches in Namibia, because they represented the majority of the Namibian people.

Research into the unity process of the churches reveals that the desire for unity was expressed and exercised for different political or spiritual reasons. The evidence suggests that the church unity process during the 1970s was exercised in an orderly manner for peaceful co-existence of all Lutherans in Namibia. Furthermore, the evidence examined suggests that in the 1970s the reasons for the failure of the unity process could be attributed to responses of the churches to the political involvement of certain church leaders and the Swapo detainee crises of 1976.

This thesis gives rise to several implications for Lutheran understanding of church unity. The study forces Lutherans to rethink their use of political language to explain church unity. From the endeavours of the three Lutheran Churches it was clear that the doctrine of Two Kingdoms, the Augsburg Confession, Article Seven, and other important Lutheran doctrines were inadequately explained or the churches failed to heed the call of being Lutheran in a racially divided society and thus failed to bring Lutherans to unity. The study reveals that the Lutheran church leaders featured prominently in starting the conflicts within the Lutheran Churches.

The struggle for a united Lutheran church is not an end in itself. Although unity has not been achieved after nearly three decades of intensive struggle, the intention of the Lutheran Churches is a genuine one and therefore it will become a reality, because God is guiding the course of His Church.

OPEN LETTER TO SOUTH AFRICAN PRIME MINISTER B.J. VORSTER
FROM THE CHURCH BOARDS OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN OVAMBOKAVANGO CHURCH
AND THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN SOUTH-WEST AFRICA,
JUNE 30, 1971

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On June 21, 1971, the International Court of Justice at the Hague ruled that the continued presence of South Africa in Namibia was illegal, and that South Africa was under obligation to withdraw its administration from Namibia immediately. The response of the two black Lutheran churches in the territory is expressed in the historic "open letter" to Prime Minister B.J. Vorster.

After the decision of the World Court at the Hague was made known on June 21, 1971, several leaders and officials of our Lutheran churches were individually approached by representatives of the authorities with a view to making known their views. This indicates to us that public institutions are interested in hearing the opinions of the churches in this connection. Therefore, we would like to make use of the opportunity of informing your Honor of the opinion of the church boards of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in South-West Africa and the Evangelical Lutheran Ovambokavango Church, which represent the majority of the indigenous population of South-West Africa.

We believe that South Africa in its attempts to develop South-West Africa has failed to take cognizance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations (1948) with respect to the non-white population. Allow us to put forward the following examples in this connection.

1. The government maintains that by the race policy it implements in our country it promotes and preserves the life and freedom of the population. But in fact the non-white population is continuously being slighted and intimidated in their daily life. Our people are not free, and by the way they are treated they do not feel safe. In this regard we wish to refer to Section 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

2. We cannot do otherwise than regard South-West Africa, with all its racial policy, as a unit. By the Group Areas Legislation the people are denied the right of free movement and accommodation within the borders of the country. This cannot be reconciled with Section 13 of the Declaration.

3. People are not free to express or publish their thoughts or opinions openly. Many experience humiliating espionage and intimidation, which has as its goal that a public and accepted opinion must be expressed, but not one held at heart and of which they are convinced. How can Sections 13 and 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights be realized under such circumstances?

4. The implementation of the policy of the government makes it impossible for the political parties of the indigenous people to work together in a really responsible and democratic manner to build the future of the whole of South-West Africa. We believe that it is important in this connection that the use of voting rights should also be allowed to the non-white population. (Sections 20 and 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights)

5. Through the application of Job Reservation, the right to a free choice of profession is hindered, and this causes low remuneration and unemployment. There can be no doubt that the contract system breaks up a healthy family life because the prohibition of a person from living where he works hinders the cohabitation of families. This conflicts with Sections 23 and 25 of the Declaration.

The church boards' urgent wish is that in terms of the declarations of the World Court and in cooperation with the United Nations, of which South Africa is a member, your government will seek a peaceful solution to the problems of our land and will see to it that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights be put into operation and that South-West Africa may become a self-sufficient and independent state.

With high esteem,

Bishop Dr. L. Auula,
Chairman, Church Board,
Evangelical Lutheran Ovambokavango
Church

Moderator Pastor P. Gowaseb,
Chairman, Church Board,
Evangelical Lutheran Church in
South-West Africa, Rheinisch Mission

"A Lutheran Reader on Human Rights", edited by Jørgen Lissner and Arne Sovik for the Commission on Studies of the Lutheran World Federation, LWF Report No. 1/2, September 1978, pp. 46-47.



The Rt. Rev. Leonard Auula
(1910-1980), Bishop of the
Evangelical Lutheran Ovambo-
Chokwe Church from 1960-1975
(Photo: LWF)



(1922-1990)

The Rev. Paulus Gowaseb,
LATE Moderator of the
Evangelical Lutheran Church
in South-West Africa/Namibia
- Rheinisch Mission (ELC) in
Okahandja
(Photo: LWF)

The following letter signed by the leaders of the Evangelical Lutheran Ovambo-Kavango Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in S.W.A. (Rhenish Mission Church) was sent by the Church Boards to the congregations and members of the two churches at the same time of the Open Letter, June, 1971.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ,

We greet you with the words of Jesus: 'Peace be with you,' (John 20:19).

On the 30th June, 1971, we gathered together as the Church Boards of our two Lutheran Churches because we felt that we must direct words of leadership and guidance to our congregations in this hour of need.

We are concerned about the future of this country and about the future of the various peoples who live here. We not only feel this concern today but because of the judgment of the World Court given on the 21st June, 1971, we can no longer remain silent. We feel that if we, as the Church, remain silent any longer, we will become liable for the life and future of our country and its people.

The judgment of the World Court was the answer to the Prayer of many of our people, because this judgment involves the hope of freedom and recognition of personal worth. We believe that our people would not have taken themselves to other bodies and also not to the U.N.O. if the Government of South Africa had not withheld from them the basic rights of man.

The mandate which was given to South Africa included the obligation to create conditions of peace and freedom and to guarantee such conditions for all the inhabitants of South West Africa.

True peace does not allow people to hate each other. But we observe that our people are caught up with fear and that the hate between people is increasing, especially between white and non-white. In our opinion this fatal development is caused and upheld by the policy of apartheid. We believe that a false impression arises when it is stated that peace reigns in our country. The peace is maintained by forceful measures.

To the freedom of the people belongs also the freedom of the spread of the Gospel. We are concerned that Christians of various population groups are hindered by numerous laws and regulations from freely gathering together for the word of God.

As a result of the application of the Group Areas Laws the activities of the Church are severely restricted and the unity of the various races of the Church curtailed. Individual Ministers of the Gospel and Christians are filled with fear and distrust. They are also sometimes hindered in their evangelising by the refusal of permits.

The true development of the inhabitants of South West Africa on a Christian basis ought to lead to unity and fraternity between the races. We are convinced that this must be the lasting goal for further and future development. The Government, by the application of the Homelands policy, contributes to the creation and continuation forever of the divisions between the races. It is stated that this policy is intended to lead the races to self-government and independence. But our small race groups cannot really be aided by separation. They will be isolated and denied the chance to take a proper part in the development of the country.

We also want to inform the members of our congregations that we are determined to inform the Government of this state of affairs and of our conviction of what changes must occur. We appeal to you to maintain the peace and with a peaceful disposition to continue seeking our brothers in all racial groups. We want to advise you also to build bridges and not to break down contact.

Dear Congregations, we as your Church Boards do not intend sowing seeds of animosity, discord and strife. Our purpose is to stand for the truth and for a better future for our people and races, even when it involves suffering for us.

May the Lord be with you in His Mercy and give you guidance through His Spirit. Let us continue praying for all authorities (I Tim. 2:1-2) so that they may be prepared to alter the grievous circumstances and to take cognizance of the true interests of this country and its peoples.

On behalf of the two Church Boards,

(signed) Dr. L. Auzla

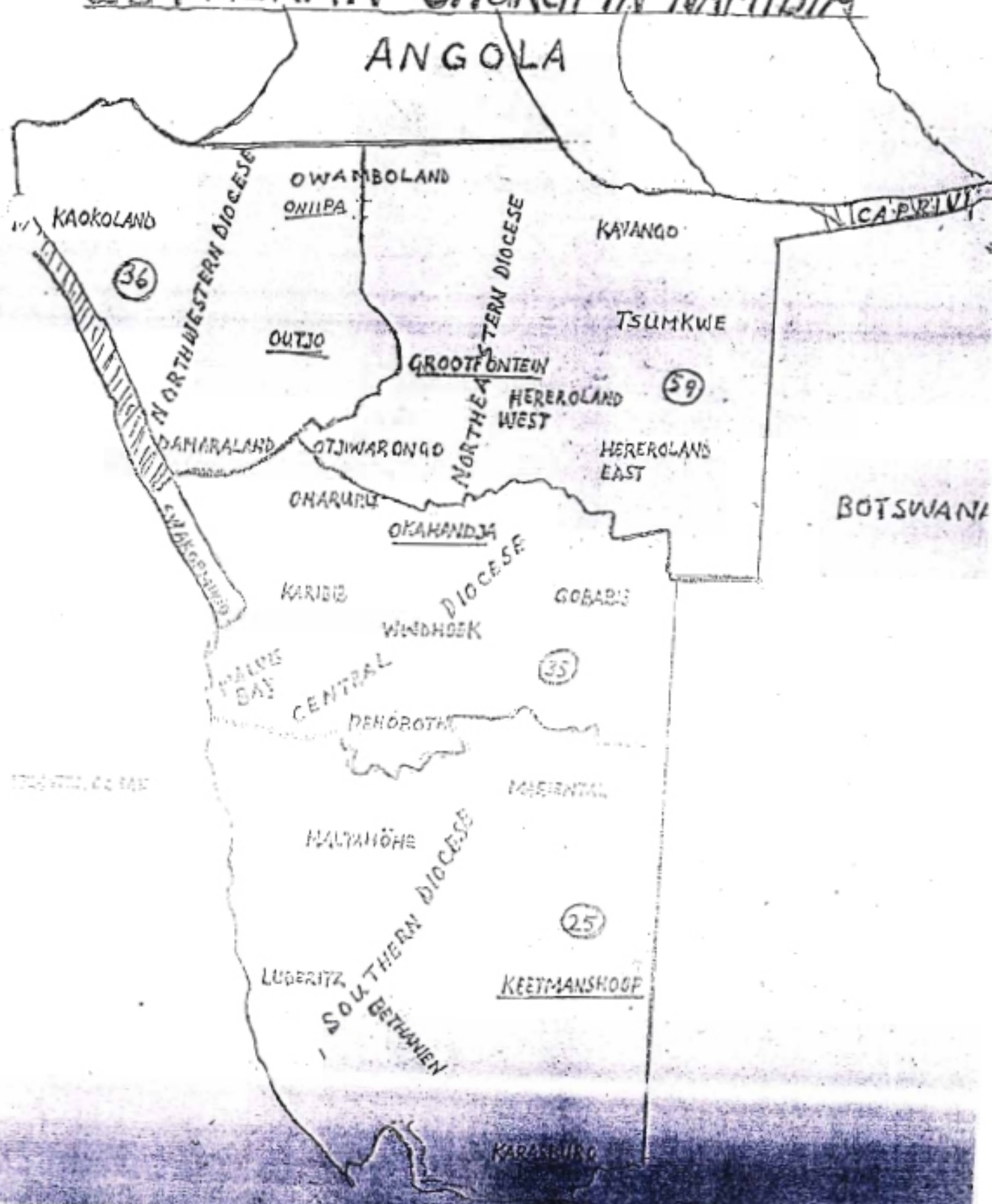
Chairman of the Church Board
Ev. Luth. Ovambo-Kavango Church
Ondangwa, Ovamboland

(signed) Paulus Gwaseb
Chairman of the Church Board
Ev. Luth. Church in S.W.A.
(Rhenish Mission Church)
Windhoek, S.W.A.

Windhoek, 30th June, 1971.

DIOCESES' MAP

LUTHERAN CHURCH IN NAMIBIA



UCLCSWA GRAPHIC

by Dr. S. A. 1988
OS 105-1988

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List of categories into which the bibliography is divided

1. Manuscript Sources

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3. Oral Sources

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Prof. P.J. Isaak, current Chairman of ELCRN Synod Council: Windhoek: 12 March 2001

Bishop R Keding of ELCIN (GELC): ELCIN (GELC) headquarters in Windhoek: 9 March 2001

Rev. P. Pauly, retired pastor and archivist at ELCRN Archives: Windhoek: 15 March 2001

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