

**The Church as a peace broker:
the case of the Natal Church Leaders' Group and
political violence in KwaZulu-Natal (1990-1994)¹**

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Abstract

Moves by the state to reform the political landscape in South Africa at the beginning of 1990 led to increased tension between the Inkatha Freedom Party and the African National Congress in the province of Natal and the KwaZulu homeland. Earlier efforts by the Natal Church Leaders' Group to end hostilities through mediation had yielded minimal results. Hopes of holding the first general democratic election in April 1994 were almost dashed due to Inkatha's standoff position until the eleventh hour. This article traces the role played by church leaders in seeking to end the bloody clashes taking place at that time by engaging with the state and the rival political parties between 1990 and 1994. Despite the adoption of new strategies, challenges such as internal divisions, blunders at mediation, and the fact that the church leaders were also "political sympathisers", hampered progress in achieving peace. While paying tribute to the contribution of other team players, this article argues that an ecumenical initiative was responsible for ending the politically motivated brutal killings in KwaZulu-Natal in the early years of 1990.

Introduction

The announcement in 1990 by State President FW de Klerk about the release of political prisoners, including Nelson Mandela, and the unbanning of all political parties was a crucial milestone on the journey towards reforming the South African political landscape.³ While these reforms were acclaimed by progressive thinkers within and outside South Africa, tension between

¹ This article follows on, as part two, from a previous article by the same author. The first article focused on the period 1987 to early 1990 and this second article draws attention to the work of the Natal Church Leaders' Group in the years between 1990 and 1994. See Michael Mbona, "On embassy to Ulundi: the Natal Church Leaders' Group mediation attempts in war-torn Natal (1987-1990)", *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 36, 1, (May 2010), 141-162.

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³ Reporter, "The President's opening address", *Natal Witness*, 3 February 1990, 3.

Inkatha and the African National Congress (ANC), mainly in Natal and KwaZulu, was exacerbated. Both parties went on membership recruitment drives backed by the establishment of private armies linked to hit-squad activities.⁴ In July 1990 Inkatha transformed itself from a Zulu cultural liberation movement to a political party, the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP).⁵ This article explores interventions by church leaders amid continued political violence in Natal and the KwaZulu homeland between 1990 and 1994. Other studies have shown that the journey towards the first general election in April 1994 in South Africa was marked by incidents of political turmoil, and these areas were no exception.⁶

Moved by a catastrophe created by humans and arising from growing tension between the ANC and the IFP, an informal ecumenical body, known since 1988 as the Natal Church Leaders' Group (NCLG), resolved to continue with the task of seeking a solution to avert a bloody crisis.⁷ The churches included the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA), the Church of the Province of Southern Africa (CPSA),⁸ the Roman Catholic Church (RCC), the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa (PCSA),⁹ and the United Congregational Church of South Africa (UCCSA).¹⁰ Some leading figures were the Reverends Khoza Mgojo, Stanley Mogoba, Norman Hudson and John Borman (MCSA), Archbishop Denis Hurley (RCC), and Bishop Michael Nuttall (CPSA). (Within the MCSA the title "bishop" applies to an

⁴ Alexander Johnston, "Politics and violence in KwaZulu-Natal", in William F. Gutteridge and John E. Spence, eds., *Violence in Southern Africa* (London: Frank Cass, 1997), 86.

⁵ Ben Temkin, *Buthelezi: A Biography* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 268. See also Anthea Jeffrey, *The Natal Story: Sixteen Years of Conflict* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1999), 1-2.

⁶ John Aitchison, "Numbering the dead: the course and pattern of violence in the Natal Midlands: 1987-1989" (Unpublished MA diss., University of Natal, 1993). See also Matthew Kentridge, *An Unofficial War: Inside the Conflict in Pietermaritzburg* (Cape Town and Johannesburg: David Philip, 1990); Graham Linscott, "Natal killing fields", Roots of the conflict in Natal: a selection of papers on violence in the colony and province presented at a workshop at the University of Natal on 25-26 October 1993, (Pietermaritzburg: Department of Historical Studies, University of Natal, 1994), 81-89; Jeffrey, *The Natal Story*; Johnston, "Politics and violence in KwaZulu-Natal", 79-107; and Thembisa Waetjen and Gerhard Maré, "Shaka's aeroplane: the take-off and landing of Inkatha, modern Zulu nationalism and royal politics", in Benedict Carton, John Laband and Jabulani Sithole, eds., *Zulu Identities: Being Zulu, Past and Present* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2008), 352-362.

⁷ Natal Diocesan Archives (DN), DN/DR/B/17.15.1.2, Minutes of NCLG meeting, 7 May 1988. See also Mbona, "On embassy to Ulundi", 142.

⁸ Recently renamed Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA).

⁹ See DN/DR/B/17.15.1.23, Minutes of the NCLG meeting, 3 July 1989. The author is also grateful to James Elias for information on the PCSA shared with him on 30 August 2011.

¹⁰ Michael Nuttall, interviewed by author in Pietermaritzburg, 10 October 2007. See also DN/DR/B/17.15.1.82, The Natal Crisis, memorandum presented by John Aitchison to the Minister of Law and Order, 29 January 1990; and DN/DR/B/17.15.1.167, Minutes of NCLG meeting, 17 September 1990.

ordained minister who is elected to be in charge of a church district. The title “presiding bishop” refers to the bishop who is at the helm of the MCSA conference. Apparently, the titles were conferred for a specific fixed term of office and should be appreciated in that context.) Representatives of ecumenical agencies operating in Pietermaritzburg and Durban were also incorporated into the group. Among them were Lizo Jafta of the Pietermaritzburg Council of Churches, Athol Jennings of the Vuleka Trust, Peter Kerchhoff of the Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Awareness (PACSA), and Paddy Kearney of Diakonia Council of Churches.¹¹

This article argues that, despite the attempts by the NCLG to operate as peace brokers between mainly the ANC and the IFP, the success of the exercise was hampered by a number of factors. First, the NCLG functioned without a mission statement until January 1991, whereafter facilitation of mediation was identified as one of the key tasks.¹² Second, the members of the NCLG were not experts at political mediation and therefore often made blunders. Third, within the church leaders’ group there were some perceived differences in approach, which tended to retard progress. Fourth, in a way the church leaders were political sympathisers while at the same time the conflicting parties and the state all had a political agenda. Regarding mediation, Ronald Kraybill’s argument for impartiality is particularly relevant: “Mediators cannot advocate a particular party or point of view, but rather we can and often advocate particular processes for making decisions.”¹³ Similarly, John Burton also warns that the intervention of a third party into relationships between others is a delicate task and can easily do more harm than good, especially when the relationships touch upon deeply felt issues of value, as is the case with [political] conflicts.¹⁴ Not many alternatives seemed open to the church leaders but perhaps by then it was too late to back out of the engagement.

The article then discusses the meeting between the NCLG and the state president in April 1990. This is followed by an account of a series of mediation attempts, including the perceived contributions to two historic meetings between Mandela and Buthelezi in 1991 and 1993. The mediation roles of both Archbishop Desmond Tutu (CPSA) and the South African Council of Churches (SAAC) receive attention. Finally, the contribution of the NCLG in creating an enabling environment for the first general election of April 1994 is explored. Even though at times the church leaders seemed

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² DN/DR/B/17.15.2.2, Mission Statement of the NCLG as discussed at the meeting, 31 January 1991.

¹³ Ronald S. Kraybill, Robert A. Evans and Alice F. Evans, *Peace Skills: A Manual for Community Mediators* (San Francisco: A Wiley Company, 2001), 20.

¹⁴ John W. Burton, *Conflict Resolution: Its Language and Process* (London: The Scarecrow Press, 1996), 45.

confused, exhausted and divided, an ecumenical spirit was enhanced by combined action at regional or national level, and the church seemed to work better ecumenically on social issues.¹⁵

The meeting with President de Klerk

The gruesome and traumatic calamities of the “Seven Days War” of March 1990 in Edendale Valley, near Pietermaritzburg, led hard-pressed members of the NCLG to seek a meeting directly with President de Klerk. A number of church leaders had vivid memories of the war and they correctly alleged state complicity for which de Klerk was answerable. An earlier public statement in the media warning the nation to shun violence, issued by Stanley Mogoba, the presiding bishop of the MCSA, had made very little impact.¹⁶ For example, extracts from the findings by Commissioner Richard Lyster reported to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in March 1998 gave a detailed chronology of the seven days war. Lyster explained: “It was an event of enormous public significance. Over 100 people were killed, a large number of houses were destroyed by fire and approximately 20 000 people fled their homes as a result of the violence.”¹⁷ The fact that the police and security agencies were lethargic, at best, in seeking to forestall the violence was a clear indication that the state had a vested interest, and of course that came as no surprise. Furthermore, Radley Keys, who closely monitored the situation, remarked about the police’s reluctance to intervene: “There seemed to be little urgency in their [police] manner or actions, to deal with the battle that was unfolding half a kilometre up the hill.”¹⁸

The meeting with President de Klerk held on 11 April 1990 at the Union Buildings at the request of the NCLG resulted in limited achievements. For instance, of the four proposals put forward by members of the church leaders’ group, de Klerk would not budge on the call to establish a judicial commission of enquiry, and to institute a joint working group drawn from government security forces, Inkatha, the ANC, the United Democratic Front (UDF) formed in 1983, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), churches and the business community. De Klerk agreed on two proposals, namely the establishment of a peacekeeping force, and the declaration of affected areas as disaster zones.¹⁹ The NCLG’s reservations arising

¹⁵ DN/DR/B/17.15.1.167, Minutes of NCLG meeting, 17 September 1990.

¹⁶ BHL, Reporter, “Bishop’s warning of long, hard road ahead”, *Daily News*, 14 February 1990, 4.

¹⁷ Richard Lyster, “Introduction”, in Lou Levine, ed., *Faith in Turmoil: The Seven Days War* (Pietermaritzburg: PACSA, 1999), 12.

¹⁸ Radley Keys, “March 27th and 28th 1990: Edendale/Vulindlela Valley, Pietermaritzburg”, in Levine, ed., *Faith in Turmoil*, 96.

¹⁹ DN/DR/B/17.15.1.114, Synopsis of NCLG delegation and State President meeting, 11 April 1990.

from the meeting with de Klerk were evident: "We did not feel that we came away from the meeting with positive fruit in terms of decisions made ... As a communications exercise we believe it was a very important and worthwhile meeting."²⁰ However, Bishop Nuttall commended de Klerk for being a better listener than his predecessor, PW Botha.²¹ Progress was made towards the establishment of a commission of enquiry in 1990. The findings from investigations by the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) in August 1990 confirmed state involvement in the Natal violence, and that gave credence to the NCLG's earlier perception.²²

Blunders at mediation

The extent to which members of the NCLG were perceived as neutral seems to be one of the major sticking points which, in turn, gave rise to numerous blunders at mediation. While the IFP cannot be blamed for its misgivings regarding the NCLG, it should be admitted that no facilitator of mediation could go into this process without preconceived thoughts. It appears that the NCLG's preconceived notions about the evils committed by the IFP were an open secret, and in attempting to be prophetic, the NCLG sought to shame the guilty party. The neutrality of a mediator is a complex phenomenon, as argued by Sharon Leviton and James Greenstone:

Reality would indicate that the mediator comes to the session with her [or his] personal history, value system, and perceptions about the world. These qualities are intrinsic to an individual's humanness. The key is not whether the mediator has strong feelings or bias toward the parties or toward the positions being taken or toward the issues at stake. Rather, the key is that she [or he] be able to make the separation behaviourally between her [or his] needs and those of the parties.²³

Apparently, the extent to which members of the NCLG could go into the mediation process and still be seen as neutral by the main two parties, the ANC and the IFP, was the major test. Meanwhile, churches that subscribed to

²⁰ DN/DR/B/17.15.1.114, Synopsis of NCLG delegation and State President meeting, 11 April 1990.

²¹ Nuttall, same interview.

²² International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), *Signposts to Peace: An Independent Survey of the Violence in Natal, South Africa*, (December 1990), 28-29.

²³ Sharon C. Leviton and James L. Greenstone, *Elements of Mediation* (Pacific Grove: Books/Cole, 1997), 24-25.

the *Kairos Document*,²⁴ which was published in 1986, called for churches to take a clear position on political matters by standing up against people who were perceived as supporting the apartheid government. That neutrality was not an option had been a recurring theme in theological comment on the South African situation for some years. The naming and shaming of the violent acts allegedly committed by the IFP was seen as part of being prophetic, yet that became a major stumbling block in the mediation efforts.

The aftermath of a pastoral visit in April 1990 to Ulundi by Bishop Norman Hudson of the MCSA, also a member of the NCLG, highlighted an impression shared by Chief Buthelezi that church leaders were taking sides in the ongoing conflict.²⁵ For instance, despite the initiative undertaken by some members of the national and Natal church leaders in holding separate meetings in Ulundi with Chief Buthelezi in the morning and in Pietermaritzburg with Nelson Mandela in the afternoon,²⁶ little progress was made. While the NCLG offered Frank Chikane support as general secretary of the SACC, mediation efforts were disrupted in the first week of July 1990 by joint civic mass action marches organised by the Standing for the Truth campaign (SFT).²⁷ It appears that at the planning stage the campaign received approval from COSATU, ANC, UDF, Inkatha and the NCLG. Problems emerged later when, as part of the campaign, the marching crowds called for the disbanding of the KwaZulu police, incarceration of "warlords", police neutrality, repealing of the state of emergency, and freedom of political activity.²⁸ The term "warlords" referred to those people who were fighting against others, and in this context supporters of the IFP were perceived as such, and the use of the word thus seemed derogatory.²⁹ John Aitchison observed that such sentiments were likely to have emerged from ANC supporters in predominantly urban areas where they formed a majority.³⁰ However, the IFP expressed grievous disquiet over the call to disband the KwaZulu police, also under Chief Buthelezi.³¹

Consequently, the IFP's scepticism of the NCLG as a facilitator of mediation grew stronger and the organisation called the group's credibility into question. In a letter to Bishop Nuttall, the IFP leadership expressed dis-

²⁴ For this see Institute of Contextual Theology (The), *The Kairos Document: The Challenge to the Church*, revised second edition (Braamfontein: Skotaville Publishers, 1986).

²⁵ DN/DR/B/17.15.1.122, Minutes of NCLG meeting, 28 April 1990.

²⁶ Michael Nuttall, *Number Two to Tutu: A Memoir* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2003), 74.

²⁷ DN/DR/B/17.15.1.142, South African Council of Churches: press statement and code of conduct during the week of public demonstrations, 27 June 1990.

²⁸ DN/DR/B/17.15.1.140, SFT to the Honourable State President, Re: Mass action 2-7 July 1990, c. a. June 1990. See also ICIJ, *Signposts of Peace*, 13; and Kentridge, *An Unofficial War*, 244.

²⁹ Kentridge, *An Unofficial War*, 9.

³⁰ Aitchison, interviewed by author in Pietermaritzburg, 8 August 2008.

³¹ Nuttall, *Number Two to Tutu*, 77.

illusionment about the ongoing peace talks, and cited abusive statements made by national demonstrators against the party. The IFP's resolution to stay out of the peace talks bewildered the NCLG:

We are now inclined to say, "here we stand and we can say no more". Let history judge us harshly if we reneged culpably when we could have stopped the gushing streams of blood from becoming a deluge that will surely drown us all. The meeting we were due to hold on 5 July was postponed to 16 July; but that probably means *sine die*. It is therefore with sad hearts that we have to tell you sir, that we are back to square one.³²

Unfortunately, the NCLG placed itself in a compromising position because some of its members were also patrons of the SFT in Pietermaritzburg, notably John Forbes, the Anglican dean of the Cathedral of the Holy Nativity in Pietermaritzburg), Peter Kerchhoff, Khoza Mgojo, Michael Nuttall and Ben Nsimbi, an ordained minister of the MCSA and coordinator of the SFT in the Pietermaritzburg region.³³ Athol Jennings made the important observation that the NCLG appeared essentially naïve about the reality that mediation on the one hand, and the prophetic and standing for the truth function on the other hand, were incompatible.³⁴ Apparently, some of the church leaders argued that both roles were part of their calling and they therefore wished to do justice to both. However, others from within the group expressed the opinion that perhaps progress could have been made if the mediation role had been led by Jennings, whose experience in and knowledge of conflict resolution was vast.³⁵ Such sentiments serve to illustrate the existence of subtle divisions within the camp. It appears that the bishops also wanted to gain the limelight as mediators and therefore clung on despite alleged biases against one of the warring parties, as discussed in this article.

At a meeting in August 1990 between the ANC, the Joint Working Committee (JWC) of COSATU/UDF, and the NCLG, it was agreed that blaming the IFP alone for the violence was not satisfactory. Thabo Mbeki, who represented the ANC's national executive committee, argued that the government was the main culprit because the state was the only group that could address the conduct of security forces and the police.³⁶ It was clear that

³² DN/DR/B/17.15.1.64, Dr F T Mdlalose to the Right Reverend Michael Nuttall, Re: Peace Talks between UDF/COSATU/ANC/ and Inkatha, c. a July 1990 (Not dated).

³³ DN, SFT to all ministers and clergy in Pietermaritzburg, Re: Joint mass action 2-7 July 1990, 22 June 1990 (not indexed).

³⁴ DN/DR/B/17.15.1.167, Minutes of NCLG meeting, 17 September 1990.

³⁵ Aitchison, same interview.

³⁶ DN/DR/B/17.15.1.157, Report of the ANC, Joint Working Committee of COSATU/UDF (JWC) and NCLG, 7 August 1990.

the government did not wish to hand over power to blacks without showing resistance. Security forces and the police were often accused of being both “player and referee”. In another bid to resolve the impasse, the NCLG successfully encouraged the ANC and the IFP to meet, and that developed into a joint peace committee meeting on 8 August 1990. Alec Erwin, Diliza Mji, Willis Mchunu and Jacob Zuma represented the ANC/COSATU/UDF, while Frank Mdlalose, Denis Madide, Steven Sithebe, Velaphi Ndlovu, Musa Zondi and Nqobizizwe Nkehli represented the IFP. During the meeting, Sithebe correctly observed that political violence would persist in Natal as long as the relationship between the two political parties was characterised by belligerence.³⁷ The commitment by Oliver Tambo, the leader of the ANC, and Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi of the IFP, to stop political violence remained hanging in the balance.

Further to this, the issue of neutrality on the part of the NCLG as a facilitator of mediation was brought up at the same meeting, citing its significance for future peace talks. In this regard, Sithebe stated: “Posturing will not work. If we work as mediators, we do not mention one death caused by the other side.”³⁸ Although political parties shared much of the blame for the political violence, the NCLG was not exonerated. For instance, the IFP accused the NCLG of undermining the peace process by publicly exposing the evils committed by only one of the parties and for being too close to the ANC.³⁹ In the presence of the NCLG, the IFP objected to the vilification of its members by the ANC and blamed Oliver Tambo for not responding to a letter from Chief Buthelezi.⁴⁰ As part of the IFP’s rhetoric, Sithebe further accused the members of the NCLG of behaving as if they were an extension of the ANC, and dismissed any mediation on their part as biased and therefore unacceptable. Furthermore, Ndlovu’s blatant insistence that Nuttall should be asked to participate as a representative of the ANC served only to indicate the NCLG’s lack of credibility as a mediator. As if that were not enough, it was suggested that church leaders should forget about trying to bring the ANC and the IFP together and should stop blaming Inkatha for the killings. The IFP representatives further suggested that the NCLG should visit areas that had been devastated in order to encourage members of the community to stop the killings.⁴¹ In other words, the church leaders were being sacked from the mediation role and relegated to pastoral work, something that appeared unwelcome to them at that hour.

³⁷ DN/DR/B/17.15.1.159, Report on Peace Committee of UDF/COSATU and Inkatha meeting, 8 August 1990.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Paddy Kearney, interviewed by author in Pietermaritzburg, 21 August 2008.

⁴⁰ DN/DR/B/17.15.1.160, Report on NCLG and an Inkatha delegation meeting, 13 August 1990.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

The allegations against the NCLG by the IFP were not completely unfounded. For example, the August 1987 attack on and injuries to an Inkatha group in Vulindlela by Alfred Ndlovu of COSATU, using a borrowed AK47, was allegedly ignored by the clerics.⁴² In another case in Edendale, the UDF youth and comrades allegedly stopped buses and harassed travellers, took groceries, abducted girls and killed people.⁴³ The IFP expected the church leaders, as honest brokers, to publicly condemn such acts, and the fact that this did not happen provided a basis for the argument that the NCLG seemed partisan. The NCLG's silence over such incidents served to confirm the allegation that they were close to the ANC, as is discussed further below. However, it appears that members of the NCLG were seen as a necessary evil in relation to the greater task of averting the conflict and political violence. Madide remarked that "the church must understand that there is a culture of violence in this region and ... must help to eliminate this. We need to reflect and come together and meet to talk about peace."⁴⁴ That the IFP appreciated the need for mediation meant that, even though the church leaders could not provide the desired model, the doors remained open.

Tutu and SACC

At the close of 1990 it was an open secret that not much progress had been accomplished through mediation, and the NCLG sought the support of Archbishop Desmond Tutu and the SACC for a renewed initiative. The senior Anglican cleric extended an invitation to Buthelezi and Mandela to meet at Bishopscourt, Cape Town on 23 November 1990.⁴⁵ It appears that the strained relations between Buthelezi and Tutu since the unpleasant events at Robert Sobukwe's funeral in 1978 were a stumbling block.⁴⁶ Sobukwe was a former leader of the Pan African Congress. However, Tutu, now Archbishop of Cape Town and an outspoken critic of apartheid, was seen by the NCLG as the best candidate to resolve the impasse. Buthelezi, a licensed lay minister of the Anglican Church, had also served on the Council of St Peter's College from 1961 to 1963.⁴⁷ According to Inkatha, the SACC had been an enemy

⁴² Aitchison, "Numbering the dead", 49.

⁴³ Linscott, "Natal killing fields", 82, 83.

⁴⁴ DN/DR/B/17.15.1.160, Report on NCLG and an Inkatha delegation meeting, 13 August 1990.

⁴⁵ DN/DR/B/17.15.1.172, Points arising out of meeting between Bishops Michael Nuttall, Lawrence Zulu and Dr MG Buthelezi, Re: Proposed meeting at the Bishopscourt, Cape Town, 23 November 1990.

⁴⁶ For a detailed discussion of this see Nuttall, *Number Two to Tutu*, 62-63. See also Desmond Tutu, *Hope and Suffering: Sermons and Speeches of the Right Reverend Desmond Mpilo Tutu* (Johannesburg, Skotaville Publishers, 1983).

⁴⁷ Philippe Denis, "Men of the cloth, the Federal Theological Seminary of Southern Africa, Inkatha and the struggle against apartheid", *Journal of Southern African Studies* 34, 2, (June 2008), 309.

since 1983.⁴⁸ Efforts by the NCLG to engage the SACC in a bid to resuscitate mediation talks were fraught with problems. A special meeting consisting of ten members from the IFP and five delegates from the NCLG was convened with the aim of seeking ways to mend the relationship between the SACC and the IFP. With the IFP blaming the SACC, no progress appeared in sight and dialogue between the NCLG and the IFP almost ceased, thereby stalling the mediation process.⁴⁹ In Buthelezi's perception, the NCLG was an extension of SACC and could be accused of demonising its affiliate, the Zululand Council of Churches, and Inkatha.

The dilemma of clergy involvement in politics

There was nothing sinister in members of the clergy being supporters or members of the ANC, the IFP or any other political party. This brings to the fore, as does much of the present discussion, the issue of the clergy's involvement in political parties, whether in an established democracy, under tyranny, or during the process of establishing democracy. However, on realising the complexities arising from the need to minister to communities aligned to different political persuasions, the CPSA resolved in 1990 that the Anglican clergy had to be apolitical.⁵⁰ This did not, of course, stop the said clergy from being involved in politics, though those who were paid a price. In 1991, the NCLG supported a move by Bishop Nuttall and John Forbes to host the leadership of the ANC and the IFP in a short service in the Anglican cathedral. The letter of invitation, signed by Nuttall and Forbes, cast a dark shadow over the initiative in accusing the IFP and Buthelezi of vindictiveness towards the Anglican Church. Part of it read: "We had the cathedral grounds available for Mr Mandela's press conference during his visit in April 1990 and we were accused of being an ANC church. We have had the sadness of an attack on our cathedral receptionist as a message to the Bishop that this is an ANC church."⁵¹ Aitchison acknowledged that although Chief Buthelezi was an Anglican, some Anglican bishops found him to be an obstinate person because "personality wise he was slightly paranoid, very suspicious and reacted badly to criticism".⁵² Matthew Kentridge, a writer on the Natal violence between 1987 and 1990, made a similar observation: "Chief Buthelezi, in addition, is extremely sensitive to any comment, be it ever so mild, which he feels might impair either his or his organisation's dignity."⁵³

⁴⁸ For this see Denis, "Men of the cloth", 315, 316.

⁴⁹ DN/DR/B/17.15.2.21, Minutes of NCLG meeting, 10 June 1991.

⁵⁰ Nuttall, *Number Two to Tutu*, 58.

⁵¹ DN/DR/B/17.15.2.6, Dean Forbes and Bishop Nuttall to Chief Buthelezi and Mr Mandela, 8 March 1991.

⁵² Aitchison, same interview.

⁵³ Kentridge, *An Unofficial War*, 9.

However, the NCLG blundered by placing blame on one of the guest parties (Buthelezi and IFP), and that compromised the much-anticipated “positive” outcome.

The arrangements for joint meetings with the ANC and the IFP suffered another setback. Mdlalose’s remarks at a “World Conference on Religion and Peace: Briefing on the IFP/ANC Peace Accord”, in Durban in 1991, drew attention to alleged weaknesses of the NCLG. Bishop Nuttall made a few notes about Mdlalose’s continued accusations against some of the Natal church leaders and raised concerns with him after the conference.⁵⁴ It was apparent that the Tugela River that separated Natal and Zululand (including KwaZulu) divided the church leaders into two camps politically between the ANC and the IFP. For instance, Philippe Denis, quoting Sipho Sokhela, confirmed that the Zululand Council of Churches included several members of Inkatha.⁵⁵ Similarly, Paddy Kearney elaborated on this theme as follows:

And the flavour down here was UDF, ANC and the flavour on the other side of the Tugela River was Inkatha. That was what the church was like. Because one of the strange things that happened was that when the church leaders would go to see Chief Buthelezi he would surround himself with six, seven, nine or ten clergy who were sympathetic to him as if he had his own church leaders’ group up there.⁵⁶

Unfortunately, for the first time since 1987, members of the NCLG realised that no headway could be made without working closely with clergy from Ulundi, Buthelezi’s capital. Surprisingly, church leaders from the Pietermaritzburg and Durban areas had up to this day remained unaware of the influential contribution, positive or negative, of their counterparts based in northern Natal and KwaZulu. The move to coordinate the clergy from both sides of the Tugela River into one team from 1993 onwards was part of an effort to unite the “men of the cloth”.⁵⁷

There is a need to explore the reasons why the ANC had confidence in the church as a facilitator of mediation. Briefly, the argument given by the ANC for being in favour of the role of the NCLG was that the church had no political ambitions or allegiances but had a human face only.⁵⁸ It appears that

⁵⁴ DN/DR/B/17.15.2.12, Minutes of NCLG meeting, 25 April 1991. See also short handwritten notes by Bishop Nuttall on copy of filed minutes.

⁵⁵ Denis, “Men of the cloth”, 316.

⁵⁶ Kearney, same interview.

⁵⁷ DN/DR/B/17.15.2.125, Minutes of NCLG and representatives of Northern Natal Church Leaders’ meeting, 23 February 1993.

⁵⁸ Aitchison, same interview.

some former members of the NCLG, such as Bishop Nuttall, contradicted this perception: ‘‘They [IFP] tended to see us as favouring the UDF first of all and then the ANC. Of course we favoured the liberation struggle. We favoured the struggle for liberation in our own land and we couldn’t be unsympathetic towards the activities of the liberation struggle.’’⁵⁹ The ANC was seen as the torchbearer of freedom and some liberal whites, including former members of the church leaders’ group, were enamoured of its policies. The ANC was perceived as a modern liberal party and was also regarded as the only party that was able and willing to end apartheid. By contrast, the IFP was seen as traditional, rural-oriented, conservative, out of touch with modern politics and as having colluded in apartheid.⁶⁰ Zulu ethnicity was at the core of the IFP, which is largely why it failed to become a national political party, but that principle of identity received strong support from rural communities: ‘‘Even so, Zulu identity constituted a powerful appeal, mobilising large numbers of mainly rural people.’’⁶¹ Both the tact and impartiality of the church leaders were in question and this tarnished their role as facilitators of mediation.

Within IFP circles, the church leaders regionally and nationally were not regarded as being above reproach. Chief Buthelezi believed that members of the NCLG were closer to the ANC than to the IFP, and this disturbed him. In a welcome address to the Anglican bishops at KwaNzimela in November 1992, Chief Buthelezi openly reiterated his perception of the church’s weakness:

For many years I have been disowned by great personages in the Anglican Church and the South African Council of Churches. I have had to face a hostile SACC which stood with the ANC/SACP alliance in their vilification of me, and their condemnation not only of the detail of what I was doing, but also the condemnation of my very existence as Chief Minister of KwaZulu and as President of the IFP.⁶²

Though addressed to the leadership of a particular denomination, these remarks were typical of his views regarding church leaders in general, including members of the NCLG. It seems obvious that Buthelezi held the position that church leaders, including Anglican clerics, ought to keep out of politics and that he therefore saw any mediation on their part as futile. Despite Buthelezi’s strong views, Archbishop Tutu did not give up easily and

⁵⁹ Nuttall, same interview.

⁶⁰ Aitchison, same interview.

⁶¹ Waetjen and Maré, ‘‘Shaka’s aeroplane’’, 354.

⁶² DN/DR/B/17.15.2.107, Mangosuthu Buthelezi, Chief Minister of KwaZulu and President of the IFP, Greetings to the Bishops of the CPSA, 11 November 1992.

might have used pastoral visits to Chief Buthelezi in pursuit of a political agenda. It seems that the “pastoral” visits and contacts finally paid dividends, as is further discussed below.

The meetings between Nelson Mandela and Mangosuthu Buthelezi

The members of the NCLG considered the meeting between Nelson Mandela and Chief Buthelezi in Durban on 29 January 1991 as a firm step in the direction of peace. Although the church leaders were not directly involved, the subtle pressure they exerted behind the scenes prior to this event cannot be ruled out as having been of no consequence.⁶³ Though the commitment was short-lived, both parties did, in fact, commit themselves to political tolerance and freedom of political activity.⁶⁴ The historic meeting between Mandela and Chief Buthelezi became a reality on June 1993, after much persuasion from Archbishop Tutu. The excitement of a possible breakthrough in peace talks ranked quite high, and Bishop Nuttall reiterated that the church leaders deserved credit for the said meeting:

The fact is that we managed to get Nelson Mandela and Mangosuthu Buthelezi in a one on one, but with their teams, with their colleagues in June 1993, at a time when there was a deep rift still between the IFP and the ANC. And the two organisations had not themselves succeeded to have a meeting between the two leaders other than a very brief one in January 1991 in Durban. Church leaders got them together in 1993 to talk, to try and cross the gulf that existed between them. During that nine-hour meeting of intense discussion, we arranged for Mandela and Buthelezi to have lunch on their own for a whole hour.⁶⁵

That the NCLG was directly part of a process that culminated in the meeting might not have been the case. However, the church leaders were initially responsible for the process and were then represented by Archbishop Tutu and Bishop Mogoba. Subsequently, the NCLG shared in the excitement that the possibility of peace was dawning on the Natal and KwaZulu political landscape: “We are greatly encouraged to hear about the matters on which you were able to agree, and pray that God will bless each of you in carrying out the commitments made on that occasion.”⁶⁶

That church leaders and politicians used religion to claim inspiration from God was apparent. For example, Chief Buthelezi’s address to guest

⁶³ Nuttall, same interview.

⁶⁴ Lutheran Theological Institute (LTI), W. Kistner Collections, 1971A, Joint Statement of the IFP and ANC, 29 January 1991.

⁶⁵ Nuttall, same interview.

⁶⁶ DN/DR/B/17.15.2.157, NCLG to Chief Buthelezi and Mr Mandela, 1 July 1993.

Anglican bishops at KwaNzimela in November 1992 stated: “I come to this meeting from a prayer-filled night and I come humble in the knowledge that nothing I can say here would be of any value if it were not said in obedience to Jesus Christ, and if what I said was not conveyed to you by the Holy Spirit in South Africa today.”⁶⁷ It is beyond the parameters of the present discussion to analyse Buthelezi’s Christian claims save to mention that he wanted to be seen in a positive light by his bishops. In another open secret, Mogoba, who was close to Mandela, unequivocally defended Mandela against allegations in the media in 1990 that the ANC leader was a communist and not a Christian.⁶⁸ This was a long-running and favourite demonising claim of the apartheid regime, that every ANC member and supporter, and potentially anyone else who opposed apartheid, including Tutu on several occasions, was a communist and part of the “total onslaught” against South Africa [sic] – a reflection of the impact of the Cold War and the widespread fear of the USSR and communism among white South Africans. These cases serve to illustrate an inseparable relationship between religion and politics within the South African context.

Inkatha and the election

By the close of 1992, another mediation initiative was undertaken by the NCLG when it held separate consultative meetings with the ANC together with its alliance partners and the IFP. Unfortunately, members of the NCGL made a blunder by undertaking to expose alleged culprits in these crimes and called for public apologies for any transgressions committed.⁶⁹ The purpose of this move by the church leaders was to expose the government forces for alleged involvement in atrocities. Such a prophetic stance had the potential of upsetting the peace-building efforts. In the meantime, the MCSA Christian women’s organisations also entered the fray of peace initiatives. For instance, a fruitless attempt was made by the Methodist Manyano, Natal West District, under the leadership of Dorcas Mkhize. In 1993, an invitation was extended to the two opposed and most outspoken political stalwarts in the Pietermaritzburg area to discuss ways of securing peace. David Ntombela of the IFP and Harry Gwala of the ANC initially accepted, and agreed to attend a planned meeting, but both of them, in the words of Dorcas Mkhize, simply

⁶⁷ N/DR/B/17.15.2.107, Mangosuthu Buthelezi, Chief Minister of KwaZulu and President of the IFP, Greetings to the Bishops of the CPSA, 11 November 1992.

⁶⁸ HL, The Reporter, “Long link with the Church”, *Daily News*, 8 February 1990, 19. See also BHL, Daily News Correspondent, “Mandela shows the friendly touch as he meets the press”, *Daily News*, 13 February 1990, 3; picture of Archbishop Desmond Tutu leading the way for Nelson and Winnie Mandela into his Bishopscourt garden in Cape Town soon after release from prison from same article; and Nuttall, *Number Two to Tutu*, 71.

⁶⁹ DN/DR/B/17.15.2.111, Record of NCLG and ANC & IFP meetings, October-November 1992. See also DN, Minutes of NCLG and ANC meeting, 19 October 1992 (not indexed).

“absconded”.⁷⁰ The women who spent a whole day waiting for the Ntombela and Gwala were disheartened. The fact that the two men were well known to Mkhize and her late husband as longstanding family friends⁷¹ might have prompted them to abort the proposed meeting, possibly for personal and political reasons.

Events following the meeting between Mandela and Buthelezi in 1993 soon turned out to be a source of disenchantment for the NCLG. The IFP withdrew from peace talks, accusing the ANC of domineering. Mdlalose, for instance, stated:

The IFP felt “mauled”, “eaten up”, “destroyed.” The attitude of the majority party seemed to be “destroy Inkatha and then you can have a better South Africa”. The IFP was being projected as a “spoiler” and they were thought to be opposed to democratic elections.⁷²

Consequently, Inkatha grew bitter and threatened secession – a move intended to create a self-governing Zulu state within South Africa. Buthelezi was long suspected of wanting precisely this: “We wanted a constitution which establishes a federation of states, entrenching social, cultural and economic pluralism ... Meaningful amendments to the constitution will enable the Inkatha Freedom Party to participate in the elections.”⁷³ However, Thembisa Waetjen and Gerhard Maré argued: “This threat of secession was abated rapidly, though Inkatha’s commitment to participate in the 1994 elections remained tenuous right into the eleventh hour.”⁷⁴ Apparently, it was public knowledge that for many years Buthelezi had blocked the notion of declaring the KwaZulu homeland a self-governing entity along the lines of Transkei, Bophutatswana and others, which nobody seriously believed were independent states. Taking cognisance of the fact that the majority of the IFP supporters were from Natal and KwaZulu, Buthelezi’s probable intention may have been to ensure the establishment of a self-governing region where he would exercise full political control.⁷⁵

At national level, multi-party negotiations were going on in preparation for proposed general elections. Apprehensive about the possibility of an outbreak of a full-blown civil war due to the IFP’s standoff position, the church leaders were on their feet again trying to mediate and persuade the IFP to participate in the planned democratic elections. A gulf of mistrust

⁷⁰ Dorcas Mkhize, interviewed by author in Pietermaritzburg, 13 October 2008.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² DN/DR/B/17.15.2.160, Minutes of NCLG Liaison Committee and representatives of the IFP meeting, 14 July 1993.

⁷³ LTI, W. Kistner Collections, 3226A, A word of welcome to international mediators by Mangosuthu Buthelezi, President of IFP, 12 April 1994.

⁷⁴ Waetjen and Maré, “Shaka’s aeroplane”, 359.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* See also Temkin, *Buthelezi: A Biography*, 264

separated Mandela and Buthelezi, and they were frustrated with each other. Faced with this situation and amid growing political tension, the NCLG reaffirmed its commitment to peace:

The official stance of the NCLG was to fully support the talks at Kempton Park. Monitors were encouraged to relay this to their governments. There is a perceived need for the church leaders to play a growing leadership role as well as to continue in a mediation role.⁷⁶

Foreign peace monitors were already in the country to assess the pre-election environment in order to ascertain the credibility of the democratic elections. For the NCLG, democracy in South Africa was tenable only if all political parties participated in the general elections: “We call on all political parties to participate in the elections. This will enable all voters to exercise their right to vote and to do so secretly.”⁷⁷ Buthelezi responded by confronting the NCLG and accusing them of being partisan by not considering the views of the IFP and the KwaZulu government.⁷⁸ Furthermore, the IFP questioned the silence of church leaders over issuing a statement condemning the ANC’s Umkhonto WeSizwe. In IFP circles, Umkhonto WeSizwe, a military wing of the ANC, was regarded as the source of the killings of IFP supporters in Natal. By and large the IFP also accused the NCLG of supporting violence indirectly through the SACC and the World Council of Churches (WCC) programme to combat racism. This was another recurring mantra, originating with the apartheid regime at least as early as the 1970s, and using the same polemic as the regime did little to give the IFP credibility with the electorate. In South Africa, for example, the ANC was a beneficiary of the WCC special fund for liberation movements fighting against an apartheid government.⁷⁹ Unfortunately, the NCLG continued to be naive about the conflict of roles and was unrepentant: “We would however ask you to recognise that there are two aspects of the churches’ pastoral role: a mediation aspect and a prophetic aspect and we would be untrue to the gospel if we neglected either.”⁸⁰

The “breakthrough”

⁷⁶ DN/DR/B/17.15.2.181, Minutes of NCLG meeting, 20 October 1993.

⁷⁷ DN/DR/B/17.15.2.194, NCLG to Chief Buthelezi, Re: Statement on elections, 24 November 1993.

⁷⁸ DN/DR/B/17.15.2.195, Chief Buthelezi to Norman Hudson, Convenor of the NCLG, Re: Response to statement on elections, 25 November 1993.

⁷⁹ John W. De Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 25th anniversary edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 126. See also CPSA, *The Enthronement Charge of Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Sermon of the Archbishop of Canterbury*, 7 September 1986.

⁸⁰ DN/DR/B/17.15.2.196, NCLG to Chief Minister Buthelezi, 2 December 1993.

Meanwhile, the NCLG agreed to be part of a joint spiritual initiative spearheaded by Michael Cassidy, based at African Enterprise (AE). Cassidy, an evangelical lay member of the Anglican Church in Pietermaritzburg, and perhaps from the right wing, seems to have enjoyed the trust and respect of Buthelezi, unlike most members of the NCLG. A proposed “Natal for Jesus Peace Rally”, to be held at Kings Park Stadium in Durban on 17 April 1994, became a major landmark in the quest to elicit the IFP’s participation in the general election. In an invitation letter to the NCLG, Cassidy stated:

Arising out of the Natal/KwaZulu Leaders Forum (February 24th), plus conversations with various Natal church leaders, plus a meeting with the Durban Churches Task Force, some of us have come to believe that the urgent need in our province right now is for a “Natal for Jesus Peace Rally”, to call all Christian believers together from all over Natal on 17 April (possibly at Kings Park Stadium) – time uncertain, maybe shortly after midday. This would be for a great act of prayer, penitence, praise and proclamation.⁸¹

Cassidy seems to have shared a conviction that ongoing political violence was partly a consequence of human folly, which could only be overcome by true penitence, confession and prayer. Bishop Mogoba of the NCLG and Cassidy were scheduled as the main speakers at the rally.⁸² There might be no reason to doubt the existence of separate mediation initiatives spearheaded by Cassidy and others. Cassidy’s proposal appeared attractive at a moment when there were acute signs of despair in KwaZulu-Natal. Kearney remembered Cassidy as someone who had always believed in adopting a different style in his approach to the political crisis in Natal, and “kept throughout all these troubles an open door with Buthelezi.”⁸³

Jacob Zuma of the ANC, Chief Buthelezi of the IFP and Danie Schutte of the National Party were present on this day, seated in the VIP lounge of Kings Park Stadium.⁸⁴ Though some participants perceived this as mere coincidence, speculation that all three leaders attended the rally by invitation may be well founded. Whether or not the rally had been planned to coincide with the presence of international mediators in South Africa is a matter of conjecture. It is widely believed that this was a well-calculated strategy. The greatest “miracle” of all time for church leaders and others was the IFP’s acceptance, at the eleventh hour, of the need to participate in the

⁸¹ DN, Michael Cassidy to Michael Nuttall, 1 March 1994 (not indexed).

⁸² DN/DR/B/17.15.3.33, Church leaders of KZN and AE, Open invitation to the Jesus Peace Rally, KwaZulu-Natal, 17 April 1994.

⁸³ Kearney, same interview.

⁸⁴ Nuttall, same interview.

elections. The decision by the IFP came amid prayers and biblical messages and all shared the credit, including the NCLG.⁸⁵ However, Kearney felt that more credit was due to Cassidy: “It was seen like a kind of miracle rally: the evangelicals were particularly happy about it. I think he did a great job. I have great admiration for Michael Cassidy.”⁸⁶ There was no mention of the physical presence of any church leader in the meeting of the trio, but the church shared in the commendation for having exercised an enabling role. After all, a lot of things would have been going on behind the scenes at this “eleventh hour”.

Linked to this initiative was the contribution of a relatively unknown person, Washington Okumu, a private diplomatic figure from Kenya and a devout Christian, who had come in his personal capacity to give assistance.⁸⁷ Perhaps Okumu, backed by Cassidy, acted behind the scenes, meeting with Buthelezi, Zuma and Schutte, either separately or jointly in a bid to win the IFP’s heart. Within the next two days, an agreement was announced and signed in Pretoria by de Klerk, Mandela and Buthelezi in the presence of Okumu.⁸⁸ The rally had turned out to be a point of “conversion” for Buthelezi and the IFP. Apparently, the news of the breakthrough was widely celebrated and the NCLG claimed a portion of the “victory”. The fact that Cassidy incorporated the NCLG in the initiative might suggest that it was seen as a key player in finding a solution to the crisis. It seems that although Cassidy was not a member of the NCLG,⁸⁹ he had a high regard for its input at this point. Possibly, Cassidy simply co-opted the NCLG into an initiative that had been planned ahead with Okumu, local political party leaders and other church leaders: “The ‘Peace Rally’ on the 17th April will be attended by a wide range of church leaders and political party representatives.”⁹⁰ To further substantiate an earlier observation that AE was close to the IFP, after the elections, in which the IFP won the position of premier in KwaZulu-Natal, Cassidy was invited to conduct a short prayer service at the inaugural meeting of the Provincial Legislature and Cabinet.⁹¹ This seems to be a clear sign that, despite having toiled as peace brokers for many years, the NCLG had not impressed the IFP in its mediation role.

Striving towards peace at community level

⁸⁵ Nuttall, same interview.

⁸⁶ Kearney, same interview.

⁸⁷ Michael Nuttall, “Mediation efforts in turbulent times”, *Natalia* 30, (December 2000), 29.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ DN/DR/B/17.15.3.10, Minutes of NCLG meeting, 14 February 1994.

⁹⁰ DN/DR/B/17.15.3.20, Minutes of NCLG meeting, 23 March 1994.

⁹¹ DN/DR/B/17.15.3.54, Minutes of NCLG meeting, 24 August 1994.

Reaching out to grassroots communities regardless of religious affiliation was a key strategy used by members of the NCLG between 1992 and 1994. It was an open secret that church followers also participated in political violence. Initiatives spearheaded by the NCLG, including those discussed here, were meant to heal the wounds of people who were grieving the loss of loved ones, and to offer hope for peace. A “Christmas Peace Service” was thus facilitated by the NCLG and held on 13 December 1992. Buses were offered to all people who wished to travel from the four major regions of Natal to Westridge Park Tennis Stadium, Durban. In his sermon, Bishop Nuttall invoked the spirit of *ubuntu* as the basis for community life and called upon people to embrace peace and destroy weapons.⁹² This was not the first time that such a call had been heard. Mandela, for instance, made a similar plea at the Kings Park Stadium after his release from prison in 1990, only to meet a negative response.⁹³ Weapons including spears and sticks carried mainly by the Zulu people were often used to attack and kill but were defended by Buthelezi as “cultural weapons”. An audience of over six thousand people, mainly Zulu-speaking, heard a message of amity. However, critics later argued that more could have been done to make the liturgy friendlier to blacks.⁹⁴ Similarly, public gatherings like the “Jesus Peace Rally” mentioned above provided a rare opportunity to send messages of peace. The NCLG used Christian language as a tool to convince ordinary people, including party loyalists, to shun political violence, as this would help to reduce the tension.

Subsequently, and in a bid to intensify the spreading of messages of conciliation, members of the NCLG organised and conducted services at various regional centres including Pietermaritzburg, Estcourt, Ladysmith, Durban and the South Coastal areas. Diakonia supported the initiative by issuing and distributing special publications under the theme “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God”, and “Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.”⁹⁵ The “peace brokers” declared 24 April 1994 a “Day of Prayer” for a peaceful election.⁹⁶ In this regard efforts were made through the media to encourage many people, especially from the community of faith, to devote themselves to prayer. An extract from the “Special Prayer for Elections” reads as follows:

O God of justice, righteousness and peace we long to put
behind us all the pain and division of apartheid, all the violence

⁹² DN/DR/B/17.15.2.116, Bishop Michael Nuttall’s Sermon, Natal Peace Service, 13 December 1992.

⁹³ BHL, Vic Hanna, “Acclaim for Mandela speech”, *Daily News*, 26 February 1990, 1.

⁹⁴ DN/DR/B/17.15.2.122, Minutes of NCLG meeting, 20 January 1993.

⁹⁵ DN/DR/B/17.15.2.114, The Diakonia Community Newsletter, December 1992.

⁹⁶ DN/DR/B/17.15.3.1, Minutes of NCLG meeting, 11 January 1994.

that ravages our communities. We long to be a new united people. And so we ask you to bless our elections as a crucial step in establishing a society more in keeping with your will. Help us to ensure that they are free, fair and peaceful.⁹⁷

The church leaders' appeal through this prayer reflected disillusionment and yet expressed hope. They were hopeful that divine intervention might bring renewal of life to the people of South Africa in general and the province of KwaZulu-Natal in particular. An assessment of the impact of such initiatives would be a daunting task, but in general the elections were held peacefully.⁹⁸ While the impact of this initiative can be held to question, members of the NCLG, such as Bishop Nuttall, expressed optimism and faith that God works through prayer – something that is beyond scientific proof.⁹⁹

Conclusion

This article has attempted to show that while politicians were engaged in a battle for turf in KwaZulu-Natal, the NCLG persisted with peace efforts meant to save the lives of ordinary people. I have argued that there were a number of factors that worked against the NCLG's peace-brokering initiatives to resolve the political conflict between the ANC and the IFP. The lack of clearly laid down tasks and steps to achieve intended goals might have contributed to their slow progress. The article concludes that the engagement in political mediation by the church leaders proved to be a futile exercise while the parties involved in political violence all had vested interests. Apparently, the main weakness on the part of the NCLG was that there was naivety about the reality that mediation and prophetic witness were incompatible roles. I have also argued that the preconceived political thoughts and preferences of the church leaders interfered to a large extent with the objectives of the mediation process. Political alignment or sympathies evidently featured among the church leaders, with the ANC flavour in Natal and the IFP in KwaZulu, and this was evidently one of the major drawbacks.

However, some observers correctly noted that despite limited resources such as funding, time and a shortage of skills, the NCLG's willingness to explore all avenues to end brutalities and destruction of property was a sign of goodwill.¹⁰⁰ Despite the group's limitations, the church leaders still enjoyed a degree of respectability and credibility as

⁹⁷ DN/DR/B/17.15.3.15, NCLG Prayer for Elections (not dated).

⁹⁸ Nuttall, same interview. See also Kearny, same interview.

⁹⁹ Nuttall, same interview.

¹⁰⁰ Joan Kerchhoff interviewed by author in Pietermaritzburg, 22 August 2008. See also Mkhize, same interview; and Aitchison, same interview.

known shepherds of their flocks, and they had a vision of life beyond party politics. The article also argues that the NCLG's meeting with President de Klerk contributed to tranquillity by attracting the attention of the state and the rest of the world to the political killings in the province of Natal and KwaZulu. From a theological angle, there are clear indications that the church leaders, including Cassidy, worked tirelessly behind the scenes to draw the IFP into the general election. The mediation by a person from elsewhere, and one from abroad in this case, shows that conflict resolution does not always follow local logic and is not a theoretical "one-size-fits-all" model. Despite their limitations, the seeds of political tolerance in KwaZulu-Natal may well have been planted by these "brokers of peace".¹⁰¹

Finally, this experience is a lesson of immense value to church leaders elsewhere, especially in my home country, Zimbabwe, in the last decade. It is possible that the church leaders in Zimbabwe could be mediators between the Zimbabwe National African Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) and the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) formations. While the mediation exercise appears to have enormous challenges, history may judge the church leaders in Zimbabwe for not taking initiatives to seek to achieve peace and political tolerance for the benefit of ordinary people.

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